11-1-1973

Ezra Pound and Guido Cavalcanti: a Study of Conscious: Design in Pound's Poetry

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EZRA POUND AND GUIDO CAVALCANTI
A STUDY OF
CONSCIOUS DESIGN IN POUND'S POETRY

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

November 1973

MASTER OF ARTS (1973)
(English)

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Ezra Pound and Guido Cavalcanti: a Study of Conscious Design in Pound's Poetry.

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NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 104

ABSTRACT

Criticism of Pound has necessarily to take account of the great variety of influences on Pound's work, and, indeed, of his peripheral interests, for in the latter is also evidence of his general 'orientation'. The critic has to determine what has been Pound's conscious design and what is its precise relation to his practise as a poet.

In general, though, the critic begins with Pound; that is, he sees these influences and interests through Pound, or rather, he sees them in terms of what Pound ultimately makes of them. But in order to see them as Pound himself saw them, as he first perceived that in them which stimulated him in one way or another and which thus contributed significantly to his development, we must take the process a stage further back and begin with the influence itself. Such has been my intention in this thesis. I have isolated one especially significant influence, Guido Cavalcanti, whose interest for Pound includes both his technical mastery and his 'metaphysical' orientation, and who provides a constant model of excellence, in order to determine first of all what is the nature of that excellence and then to measure it against Pound's appreciation and emulation. It is my hope that this will provide a new way of seeing Pound. The critic who begins with Pound has

necessarily to take certain things for granted; he must see things, as it were, on Pound's terms. But this is to remain at one remove from the creative process in which the object of his criticism is born. The creative artist, in the act of creating, has no 'terms' (unless he be a dogmatist, and Pound sometimes lapses in this way); he has only an as yet ungrasped reality to penetrate and embody in words, or granite, or whatever is his medium. My intention has been to approach closer to this process, by assuming that it is at least in part a conscious process. Not that the emphasis of the thesis is 'psychological'. Its emphasis is rather on art, or on the effort that goes into art. I have had perforce to limit myself strictly to Cavalcanti and to Pound's dealings with him, but I have tried to imply and suggest a larger view of Pound's work. Indeed, as I hope to demonstrate, Pound's dealings with Cavalcanti are germane to his whole poetic endeavour.

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INTRODUCTION

Why Cavalcanti? Pound's multiple enthusiasms, ranging from serious, sustained research to the merest dabbling, embrace a score of writers, artists, and thinkers all of whom, to a greater or lesser degree, left imprints upon his art. Some are obviously more important than others, Confucius and Cavalcanti among them, but what is the justification for concentrating upon one influence rather than attempting to disentangle the man, Pound, from them all?

In fact, I am not interested solely in the matter of influence. Pound invites comparison between himself and Cavalcanti, and therefore my intention is to make an essentially comparative study, though one that is also a study of influence. I would, if pressed upon the point, contend that Cavalcanti may very well be the most important single determining factor in Pound's poetic development. But a statement such as this tends to call to mind simply the process all artists must go through, that of learning the ins and outs of their art, rather than the more important process of fulfilling the goals of that art. Cavalcanti does more than provide Pound with a technical exemplum, he provides the raison d'être of poetry, a justification of art in the goals of art.

"The study called 'comparative literature' was invented in Germany but has seldom if ever aspired to the study of 'comparative values in letters'."[1] The statement is Pound's and has a considerable bearing on the problem before us. In any comparative study of the 'timeless' values asserted by two poets and embodied in their work, we must never lose sight of the specifics of culture and the divergences inherent in time and space. Comparing two poets belonging to widely differing cultures is not a practical impossibility. Excellence in one period and culture relates to that in another as single notes relate in a chord, and this may serve as a model for making such a comparison.

Pound's interest in the art of the Middle Ages, though a uniquely ardent passion in him, is part of a general phenomenon in modernist literature. T.S.Eliot and, to a lesser extent, W.B.Yeats share it, especially with regard to Dante. Late Victorian Pre-Raphaelitism supplied much of Pound's initial impetus, but relatively early in his career - certainly by the 1912 translations of Cavalcanti - the whole character of his enthusiasm has changed from an echo of what had been the beginnings of fin-de-siècle decadence to a radical and aggressive stand against decadence. For the modernists medieval art is firm in outline, without sentimentality, without the unpleasant egotism of Romantic soul-

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[1]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 192.

searching. It may be that the very incoherence, even 'senselessness' of the modern world, with its scepticism and increasing nihilism, produced in some artists a desire for the stability and teleological direction of the medieval cosmos. The medieval artist appeared as the analyst and synthesiser of unity, and this was taken to be the true function of art.

In Pound's case this is not the only ground for a fascination with things medieval. There is also a certain temperamental sympathy that permits him to penetrate the essentially living in that age. As T.S.Eliot puts it:

> One of Pound's most indubitable claims to genuine originality is, I believe, his revivification of the Provençal and the early Italian poetry. . . . He has grasped certain things in Provence and Italy which are permanent in human nature. He is much more modern, in my opinion, when he deals with Italy and Provence, than when he deals with modern life. His Bertran de Born is much more living than his Mr. Hetacomb Styrax.[2]

It is necessary that we keep this point in mind, that we do not think of Pound as an antiquarian, and that we note the justification, if Eliot is right, for the research of comparative values; but with the following qualification: while Pound is able to perceive the essentially living he is not always able to turn it into good modern poetry. In his translations, at any rate, a certain amount of dead wood remains.

The truth of the matter, as I hope to demonstrate,

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[2]Eliot, Ezra Pound: Selected Poems, Introduction, p. 11.

is that Pound could not fully emulate Cavalcanti until he had left his model behind. And this is the truth not only because it corresponds to a general law, but also because, given divergent cultures, Pound's solution could not be the same as Guido's, though the problem certainly could be, and was, somewhat similar.

This study, like any other, must touch at times on subjects that deserve separate studies in their own right. Most important of these is the nature of translation and its relation to original composition. Such a matter is obviously of the utmost relevance to Pound, but only tangential to my main purpose, and the most I can hope for is that there be some kind of coherence regarding it implicit in scattered hints. I should say here that Pound's own view of translation, while justly stressing its closeness to original writing in application and craft, does not seem to take proper account of the need for authenticity in any writing that is to endure. Yet it is precisely the authentic in Cavalcanti that stimulates Pound. He serves a long apprenticeship, all the time searching for his own authentic voice, being often diverted down sidetracks of intriguing, sometimes startlingly 'original' <u>personae</u>, but with something always missing, a brilliant exterior with no real core. Authenticity comes when the master is surpassed. The pupil must excell his teacher, otherwise both pupil and teacher have failed. A certain kind of art is conceivable which stresses diver-

sity, the multiplicity of possibilities, and that in a necessarily fragmentary way; but such an art is not Pound's goal. If it were, he would not be drawn into the art of Guido, with its strenuous effort to unify intense, secular experience. Behind Pound's dilettante but not idle posing we sense Pound's own perception that the multiplicity of possibilities is only testimony of the difficulty of attaining unity and cohesion. And the fact that he is somewhat 'choosy' also, adopting only those modes that correspond to his specific scheme of values, points to the same conclusion. Yet while he could translate Guido, and learn a great deal about poetry in the process, he could not 'translate' into his own life and work Guido's effort to unify. This is not to say that the translations themselves are unimportant. As evidence of technical advance and increasing clarity of focus on the real problem they are highly important. Moreover, that technical advance is not independent of the pursuit of authenticity. Obviously Pound has an authentic, not to say singular personality from the beginning. And to bring over that authenticity into art involves the solution of technical and cultural problems.

In the professional opinion of William Carlos Williams, a one-time close friend of Pound's, Pound 'steps beyond measure', that is, advances technically to a point where it is no longer a matter of technique, but of poetry:

It is beside the question to my mind to speak of

Pound's versification as carefully and accurately measured - beyond all comparison -

Perhaps it is and if so, what of it?

That has nothing in it of value to recommend it. It is deeper than that. His excellence is that of the maker, not the measurer - I say he is a poet. This is in effect to have stepped beyond measure. . .

[Pound's verse] partakes of a quality which makes the metre, the movement peculiar - unmeasurable (without a prior change of mind)-

It is that which is the evidence of invention. Pound's line is the movement of his thought, his concept of the whole -[3]

This is well said, but overlooks a further dimension of the problem. "Pound's line" may indeed be 'authentic' and to this extent he is a poet, but what of several lines in combination? Is there also unity? It is notable that Pound responds primarily to the single line in Guido, and he is, in a sense, correct to do so, for authenticity cannot exist in the whole unless it exist first in the part. But the single line is no more than a part and its authenticity is to this extent partial, powerfully suggestive, of course, but nevertheless only a potentiality, a possibility of Art. And perhaps this is the very reason that Pound's response is to the single line in Guido - he finds in it the possibility of his own, as yet unrealized art.

But we must be yet more discriminating. I have said that Pound perceives also the goal of art in Guido, and this goal is unity. When he responds to the single line he does so as a potential artist. But as a critic, or rather as a

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[3]W.C.Williams, Selected Essays, p. 108.

man, he must respond to the whole, for, if part of a unity, the single line cannot be isolated - it is defined and modified in the whole. When he does what William Carlos Williams says he does Pound is a potential poet. He is a true artist only when, in his own authentic way and on different terms, he achieves what Cavalcanti achieves.

I cannot, in this Introduction, give an abstract of what I mean by "unity" or "the goal of art". For this reason I devote my first chapter exclusively to Cavalcanti, where these things (let us hope) may be made apparent. It is necessary to get into focus precisely what it is that stimulates Pound to emulation. The second chapter deals with Pound's criticism of Guido. Not only is this criticism a fair indication of his response, it is also intimately bound up with the effort to make poetry, for to Pound, as to Eliot, the creative process is in part a critical process. The third chapter is concerned with the translations, with the extent to which Pound develops his art in and through them, but more especially with their adequacy as assaults on the citadel of Art (as he has come to understand art in his dealings with Guido). There remains the Conclusion, which attempts to suggest briefly the relation of all the foregoing to the larger design of Pound's work. An answer to the question of unity outlined in this Introduction must await that Conclusion, for there alone can I, like Pound, leave Cavalcanti behind.

The first chapter, dealing with Cavalcanti, is divided into three sub-sections corresponding roughly to the three phases of Guido's development. Because the chapter is exclusively Cavalcanti it is only fair to point out in advance and in general terms the substance of these sub-sections, so that the reader be prepared for connections that will, hopefully, be later made with Pound. The first sub-section attempts to specify the relation of Guido's poetry to music (through a comparison with Dante) and to suggest the way in which the formal, technical achievement parallels and reflects a corresponding psychological achievement. Implicit in these themes is an attempt to get into initial focus the way in which the parts of the poem relate formally to the whole, and the dependence of this on the unity of the mind that fashions it. The second is concerned with the scientific basis of Guido's thought and needs no further comment. The third sub-section deals with the later poems, with the intensification of Guido's effort to unify his experience as his art becomes more fully and more deeply personal. Contained in this is an attempt to define lyricism as a certain kind of affirmation of value.

The formal design of subsequent chapters needs no such preamble. While it is to a certain extent necessary in dealing with two different poets to use two different sets of terms, enough similarity should remain to facilitate the making of connections. What I have said already, together

with the first chapter, will, I hope, provide the necessary perspective for the ensuing discussion of Pound.

GUIDO CAVALCANTI

Historical evidence concerning the chronological sequence of Cavalcanti's poems is in short supply. An ordering of the poems based on an ideal notion of the poet's development rather than fact, however, has found general acceptance among editors and commentators. As Antonio Enzo Quaglio puts it, the fifty-two poems are:

> . . . disposto oggi secondo un ordine evolutivo del tutto ideale (mancando gli elementi per un raggruppamento cronologico), che rispecchia cioè verisimilmente lo svolgimento poetico, da una fase di riecheggiamento scolastico alla scoperta delle nuove note dolenti, dall' insorgenza dei più originali motivi ai componimenti dall' esilio. . . ai sonetti di corrispondenza (dei quali pure alcuni appartengono al primo esercizio lirico: così quelli indirizzatti a Guittone, Dante, Guido Orlandi). Al centro, la grande canzone filosofica, che quasi sparte i sonetti, riflessivi e sentimentali, dalle ballate, popolareggianti e fantastiche.[1]

In the following discussion I shall assume the correctness of this ordering, distinguishing for the most part simply between early and late poems, and treating the Canzone d'Amore as standing approximately between these two phases.

The personality of the poet was the subject of rumour and legend in his own lifetime and after. As a thinker he was unconventional. Pound remarks that in Canto x of the Inferno the poet's father, Cavalcante dei Cavalcanti, appears to be expecting his son to join him there with the other

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[1]Quaglio, Lo stilnovo, p.89.

epicurean heretics.[2] The comment is witty and a little unfair to Dante, but it is corroborated by Boccaccio who, in Novella Nona of Giornata Sesta of the Decameron, refers to the same opinion as supposedly current in Guido's own lifetime: "E per cio che egli alquanto tenea della opinione degli Epicurii, si diceva tra la gente volgare che queste sue speculazioni eran solo in cercare se trovar si potesse che Iddio non fosse."[3] In June 1300, in an attempt to restore peace to their troubled city, the Florentine Priors ordered Cavalcanti's exile to Sarzana. As a leader of the White Guelphs Guido was volatile in the matter of politics and had not been free, by any means, from violent personal quarrels. Among the altruistic Priors was Dante, Guido's old friend, who no doubt had a hand in his relatively early recall. But exile resulted in fever and in August 1300 Cavalcanti died. These facts, and the tone of much of his verse, point to the general correctness of the picture of a man haughty and disdainful, solitary and deep-thinking. So the early biographers would have him, and we may take that much on trust.

It is customary to refer to Cavalcanti as one of the poets of the so-called dolce stil nuovo, but the label may be more a convenience to anthologists than a genuinely valuable tool of literary history or criticism. The phrase

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[2]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 158.

[3]Boccaccio, Decameron, A cura di C. Segre, p. 402.

itself originates in Dante and it would be useful to have the passage before us. Dante is speaking with the Sicilian poet Bonagiunta da Lucca:

> 'Ma di' s'io veggio qui colui che fuore
> Trasse le nuove rime, cominciando:
> Donne, ch'avete intelletto d'Amore.'
> Ed io a lui: 'Io mi son un che, quando
> Amor mi spira, noto, ed a quel modo
> Che ditta dentro, vo significando.'
> 'O frate, issa veggio,' disse, 'il nodo
> Che il Notaro, e Guittone, e me ritenne
> Di qua dal dolce stil nuovo ch'i' odo.'[4]

There is no universal agreement as to just what the characteristics of this 'sweet new style' are, and, though it is beyond my purpose to go into the question fully, it is necessary to rehearse the main differences of opinion and pinpoint the central area of disagreement. Ultimately, it does not matter much whether or not we describe Cavalcanti as one of the stilnovisti; the poems themselves, after all, are our facts. But in so far as we cannot avoid comparing Cavalcanti with Dante, it is necessary for us to have some idea of what they may or may not have shared.

According to J.E.Shaw the poets included in the compass of the dolce stil nuovo are united by a common understanding of love, though he admits the difficulty of squaring Dante's idea of love with Guido's or with Cino's. As he defines it one is left wondering whether or not the concept is too comprehensive to warrant such special attention:

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[4]Dante, Purgatorio, xxiv, 49-57.

> Genuine experience of love is taken for granted, included in the understanding of it. . . . The superior nature of love also goes without saying: it is not necessary to assert, as the older poets often did, and among the later ones Guido Orlandi, that the love they are writing of is not carnal. And the poet's understanding of love implies, besides genuine experience, a reverent appreciation of the dignity of the subject, serious consideration of it nourished by learning, and a corresponding cultivation of the art of poetry with which to treat it. Poets who have these qualifications are writing according to the inspiration of Amore.[5]

On the other hand, the idea of the dolce stil nuovo may embody an aesthetic concept. It may mean the "combination of genuine feeling and direct expression in verse, of any kind of love."[6] Such, at any rate, is Shaw's version of Rossi's interpretation. Shaw objects to the emphasis this places on inspiration which, he says, though Dante himself uses the word "spira", is not medieval and does not take into account the importance Dante elsewhere accords to learning and the rhetorical construction of canzoni. But the idea of direct expression does not necessarily involve a 'modern' (by which, it appears, Shaw means 'romantic'), notion of inspiration. Nor does it contradict the idea of deliberate construction, and it is, just as much as an insistence on a common understanding of love, a positive theoretical alternative to the conventions and ornamentation of the love poetry that both Dante and Cavalcanti rejected.

A note in the Foster and Boyde edition of Dante's

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[5]Shaw, Cavalcanti's Theory of Love, p. 141.

[6]Shaw, p. 129.

lyric poetry, referring to Dante's stylistic development up to the central canzone of La Vita Nuova, "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'Amore", adequately describes the stylistic ambience of the dolce stil nuovo: "Many of the ornatus found in the earliest poems are increasingly rejected. . . . The style has become simpler, lighter, purer, more aristocratic, more graceful, more musical: one still cannot better Dante's own comprehensive epithet - dolce."[7] It must be admitted that Guido is Dante's equal in the rejection of 'ornatus'. His reply "Vedeste, al mio parere, onne valore," to Dante's "A ciascun' alma presa e cor gentil," already shows the main virtues of "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'Amore," (it is certainly a few years earlier), the same tonal purity (almost a transparency) based in flexibility and unpretentiousness of thought. But here the umbrella category of the dolce stil nuovo, considered stylistically, reaches the limit of its utility, and we must look rather to the differences between Cavalcanti and Dante. If we look closer at Dante's words in "Donne ch'avete" we detect a certain restraint in their music, due no doubt to the deference with which they treat their subject. If we think of their rhythm as a line in drawing we would describe it as subtle, but not bold:

> Ed io non vo' parlar si altamente,
> Ch'io divenissi per temenza vile;

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[7] Dante's Lyric Poetry, eds. K.Foster and P.Boyde, II,71.

Ma tratterò del suo stato gentile
A rispetto di lei leggeramente,
Donne e donzelle amorose, con vui,
Che non è cosa da parlarne altrui.[8] (9-14)

As a high point of convention (a convention, nevertheless, very largely Dante's own) this is very fine, and I do not wish to suggest that Dante is too careful, but the victory is made by excluding sensuality and passion. Guido is less circumspect in his praise. It is not that his stroke is any surer than Dante's, but it is sure intuitively:

Avete 'n voi li fiori e la verdura
e cio che luce od è bello a vedere;
risplende più che sol vostra figura,
chi voi non vede mai non può valere.[9] (1-4)

While this is part of an early sonnet and the imagery still seems a little gratuitous, in the later poems Guido's strong awareness of actuality gives a sharp and distinct outline to a full and energetic personal involvement in immediate events. His development was thus away from Dante and away from what are taken to be the conventional refinements of the dolce stil nuovo, (though if we mean by dolce stil nuovo simply fidelity to material, or to 'inspiration', it applies just as much to the later poems). The very feel of the lines

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[8] Dante, Vita Nuova, XIX, Canzone Prima.

[9] I Rimatori del Dolce Stil Novo, A cura di G.R. Ceriello, p. 46. All subsequent quotations from Cavalcanti in this chapter are from this edition, except quotations from the Canzone d'amore, which are taken from the text given by Shaw.

quoted suggests this development.[10]

I have used the term "music" in relation to Dante's poetry. Many of Cavalcanti's poems were set to music, though none of this has come down to us. An article by John Stevens entitled "Dante and Music" is extremely useful in assessing what are likely to have been its nature and its relation to the poetry, for Dante certainly, and to some extent for his contemporaries, though here again it will be necessary to distinguish Cavalcanti.[11]

Of the essential nature of medieval music in Italy Stevens says:

> Music, for Dante and his contemporaries, was first and foremost melody; and they used the word armonia in quite unharmonic senses. I do not mean simply that the part-music, the polyphony, they knew had primarily a melodic interest, though this is true enough, but that when Dante thinks of music, he thinks of a single line of sound - elaborate in structure, maybe, and elaborated with ornament beyond the bounds of our innocent expectation - but still in essence a single melody.[12]

The importance attached to the single melodic line explains in part the close relationship between poetry and music

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[10] Quaglio comes to approximately the same conclusion in a different way. Referring to the lines quoted he says: "Il rifiuto, nella lode, dell' analogia guinizelliana [with the sun] e del suo misticismo scritturale, conferma negativamente le dispositizioni native della lirica cavalcantiana ad un canto fervido e diretto." Lo stilnovo, p. 91, n.

[11] J.E.Stevens, "Dante and Music", Italian Studies, XXIII (1968), 1-18.

[12] "Dante and Music", p. 11.

stressed by Dante:

> We have been used, for centuries, to conceptual relationships between words and music in the song - the word-painting of the Elizabethan madrigal; the stylised declamations of seventeenth-century recitative; the emotional commentary of the Schubertian Lied; the imaginative rhetoric of a song-cycle by Britten. We need, I think, to discard all this and the assumptions about song-writing which lie behind it. Dante, I believe, felt the music of poetry and the music of music to be much closer akin as constructs in sound than we do. Or, to put it another way, he was infinitely more sensitive than we are to the physical affinity of the two arts; they are both arts of 'good measurement' in sound.[13]

What, then, is the difference between the music of Dante's lyric poetry and that of Cavalcanti's? When Matelda turns to Dante in the Earthly Paradise, singing, she draws so near, he says, "che il dolce suono veniva a me co' suoi intendimenti," (lit: that the sweet sound came to me with its meanings).[14] The distinction between music and meaning is central to Dante's theory of poetry. The beauty of the verbal object is purely musical, for music is latent in words. Foster and Boyde suggest this distinction in their Introduction to the lyric poetry: "The general drift, without doubt, of Dante's scattered allusions to the art of poetry is towards identifying its specific element with music, taking this term in the special sense that it has in this context - the art of treating words as items in an

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[13]"Dante and Music", pp. 12-13.

[14]Dante, Purgatorio, xxviii, 59-60.

aural harmony."[15] The music is, as it were, independent of the sense.

In Cavalcanti's verse music and meaning are less distinct and therefore the beauty of the verbal object is not purely musical, though that is not to say that his lines, strophes, and complete poems are less carefully constructed musically than Dante's. In his poetry, if a line has armonia, it also defines the 'harmony' of the mind whose thought it contains. That is to say, if a poem is essentially dramatic, if it is specifying an event or combination of events, mental or physical, and not merely presenting an idea plus ornament, to use Auerbach's distinction,[16] then every line, every cadence, must reflect in its rhythm and syntax the uniqueness of the dramatic situation, which comprises both the uniqueness of the individual and of the circumstances he is in. The whole personality and the pressure of events must be felt in the structure of every rhythmical and syntactical unit, units that must themselves coincide so as to partake of the uniqueness. The dramatic structure becomes a lyrical structure when this same identity of form and content becomes an affirmation of value, regardless of whether

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[15] Dante's Lyric Poetry, I, xvii.

[16] Auerbach, Dante, pp. 33-34. It should be noted that Auerbach makes this distinction in order to distinguish Dante's early poetry from that of Guinizelli and Cavalcanti. I am adapting it to my own ends.

the situation be euphoric or melancholic, an actual specification of the possible fullness of experience, of the harmony that can exist between the person and the world.

An example of this is the ballata "In un boschetto trovai pastorella". It is a 'light' poem, but its qualities I find to be intimately connected with the qualities, I mean the psychological qualities, of Guido's 'more serious' work. There is no significant difference in the language other than that necessarily involved in the comparative ease with which joy is achieved. It is direct, therefore tense, tight, and workable, rhythmically sharp, without great elastic sweeps and surges:

> In un boschetto trovai pastorella
> piu che la stella - bella al mio parere. (1-2)

Inversions, we note, are permissible but not compulsory. They do not shock when they come and feel equal in naturalness with the 'right-way-up'. It is not just a question of sound or music. To invert without exhibitionism as to state directly without embarrassment needs good mental health, which is not necessarily peace of mind.

The ballata continues:

> Cavelli avea biondetti e riciutelli
> e gli occhi pien d'amor, cera rosata;
> con sua verghetta pasturav' agnelli:
> e, scalza, di rugiada era bagnata;
> cantava come fosse 'nnamorata;
> er' adornata - di tutto piacere. (3-8)

In this strophe the end-word of lines 3,5,6, and 7, assonates with another in the same line, the position of which helps

to shape the thought out of the perception. This is no trick. Thought is life and thought is language and 'dressing-up' perception (musically) is part of the production of pleasure by recalling pleasure. We are not to understand this as 'modern' subjectivity. The empirical is equally there, all the more convincingly for the thought defines and makes available the fact with unencumbered skill. The strophe is a list; we move rapidly from attribute to attribute, but no attribute is treated skimpily; each is fully realized and rich. The poet's technique is to establish his perceptions with quick clarity; he obviously perceives well; but his main presence in the poem is energetic - the energy described by the rhythm as a pencil line can describe a movement. Hence he is able to participate actively in a scene the most important aspect of which is its capacity for consummation and 'completeness'.

If the music of poetry is to have this close a relation to the state of being and the situation of the poet, it obviously requires a considerable freedom. The syllabic measure of Italian verse allows just such a freedom, especially as the Italian language has a great range of syllable length and a relatively dominant stress. In reading Cavalcanti one cannot fail to be aware of the control the poet has over the pace of his verse, how he is able to make it register the finest shades of feeling. His rhythm never becomes a stylization, nor is it ever an appendage.

This in itself involves a considerable discipline, but the verse-forms with which Cavalcanti worked imposed an even greater rigour. As an exigency of song the ballata, like the canzone, is the repetition of a formal pattern. In Guido's best work the pattern never impinges, the various thoughts and the equivalent metrical variation (the two are closely tied) are bounded by it but never restricted. This is perhaps better illustrated with an analogy. The roof-bosses of medieval cathedrals have a shape that is given, functional, a perfect 'container'. But the craftsman created not something to fill it, he created something that became it totally. While neo-classic 'suits' the frame and baroque strains at the girdle, gothic defines itself, it is, as Blake said, "living form". Dictates of the abstract form demanded subtle and intricate workmanship if the basic 'shape', roof-boss or strophe, were to be transformed into a unique form, unique yet contained in the larger design. The parts are thrown into prominence, they become the outer form precisely because no metaphysical distinction is made between art and life, (the cathedral is part of the real world), and no visible air-lock is needed between the two.

We can see this combination, or fusion, of inner and outer, specific and ideal forms in this passage from "Quando di morte mi conven trar vita":

> Come m'invita lo meo cor d'amare?
> Lasso! ch'è pien di doglia
> e da sospir sì d'ogni parte priso,

che quasi sol merzé non pò chiamare,
e di vertù lo spoglia
l'affanno che m'ha già quasi conquiso. (5-10)

This is not a mere description of anguish; it has all the immediacy of anguish itself. But for all its immediacy there is no loss of control, no sense of a disordered mind. Thus the formal, technical achievement parallels and reflects the psychological achievement. The rhythmical completeness of the lines as a group expresses far more than random electro-chemical activity in the brain. It expresses that electro-chemical activity in the context of a complete personality. In reading these lines, in other words, we are not merely subjected to a set of stimuli that produce in us a sympathetic echo of someone else's bad time. That would involve the dissolution of our own personalities (only for the period of reading, of course) as much as of the poet's. Random, chaotic experience is without value. Personality requires formal structures to contain experience, however intensely uplifting or distressing the experience may be. We evaluate personalities, and even cultures, on the adequacy of these structures, on their flexibility, inclusiveness, and integration. In reading these lines we feel the poet's personality containing his experience, we feel it in the way the lines become a unity, rhythmically and syntactically. It is in this sense that Cavalcanti's music is a fundamental part of his meaning. And while all this could conceivably be contained in the idea of 'direct expression', and thus

in the concept of the dolce stil nuovo, it is obvious that direct expression in Cavalcanti's poetry is quite different from what it is in Dante's. At no point in his career, after all, did Dante attempt to express the composite passionate, sensual, and intellectual experience that is Guido's constant theme.

To repeat myself, if a line of Cavalcanti's poetry is harmonious, it also defines the harmony of the mind whose thought it contains. Guido was explicitly aware of this himself; at least he was aware that the quality of experience, which he embodies in a line of poetry, depends on the health of the mind. This is indicated by the final three lines of an early sonnet:

> Non fu sì alta già la mente nostra,
> e non si pose in noi tanta salute,
> che propriamente n'aviam canoscenza.

(i.e., of the lady.) In his later poetry Cavalcanti discards the rhetorical device of negative statement, but the idea that experience (canoscenza) depends on salute is central throughout. The sonnet, as it will figure large in the discussion of Pound, is worth quoting in its entirety:

> Chi è questa che vien, ch'ogn'om la mira,
> che fa tremar di chiaritate l'âre
> e mena seco Amor, sì che parlare
> null'omo pote, ma ciascun' sospira?
> O Deo, che sembra quando li occhi gira,
> dical' Amor, ch'i nol savria contare:
> cotanto d'umiltà donna mi pare
> ch'ogn'altra ver' di lei i' la chiam' ira.
> Non si poria contar la sua piagenza,
> ch'a lei s'inchin' ogni gentil vertute,
> e la beltate per sua dea la mostra.

Non fu sì alta già la mente nostra
e non si pose in noi tanta salute,
che propriamente n'aviam canoscenza.

The religious, even mystical tone is immediately striking. Cavalcanti distinguishes implicitly between stato, or essence, and manera, or effective power. Here his emphasis, and this is typical, is on the lady's effective power ("ch'a lei s'inchin' ogni gentil vertute"), though the word "canoscenza" seems to imply knowledge of her essence. But she does not take on a religious significance because of any supernatural elevation of either of these two concepts. She takes on a religious significance because Guido's attention is really turned inward on his, and all men's, capacity to know, which he chooses to characterise, at this stage of his development, by the religious term "salute". Nevertheless, even in this early poem, the religious content appears as a metaphor, perhaps even fanciful, rather than a serious spiritual statement. Quaglio makes a related point:

> La donna che scende tra gli uomini è pur sempre una presenza ineffabile: donde, nell' ultima terzina, la teorizzazione del dramma gnoseologico. Ma sin dalla luminosa apparizione dei primi versi si avvertono lo sgomento sbigotitto e la carica di tremore che volgono i dati cortesi in una sorta di mistica naturalistica. E qui il Cavalcanti procede all' analisi scientifica del suo mondo passionale.[17]

As Guido developed he turned away from any rhetorical statement of the relationship between stato, manera, and salute, because that had acted as a bar to analysis, and this kind of

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[17]Quaglio, p. 91, n.

religiosity disappeared. In the later poems the dependence of experience on salute becomes not merely the intuitive centre, but an intellectual problem in its own right.

The Canzone d'Amore

At the centre of Guido's work is the highly-wrought and extremely compressed scientific tractate in verse "Donna me prega". J.E.Shaw's lengthy analysis of this difficult poem is coherent and convincing, except in one or two minor details, but his assumption that the poem defines a permanent philosophical standpoint of the poet is, I think, wrong. That must remain, for the moment, an unproven assertion. At any rate, the later poems will not open their full meaning to us unless we have some knowledge of this canzone.[18]

Shaw provides us with his own summary of his interpretation of the poem:

> Cavalcanti's love is sensitive and not rational, as we are told in the third stanza (1-3), but it is both intellectual and sensual: not that it is a union of two different kinds of love, but because the sensitive soul of the lover has both inner and outer faculties, and the inner faculties are intellectual in that they are pervaded by the intellect. It has a first and a second perfection, and the second perfection is its complete actuality. To use a familiar Peripatetic illustration; the sword that has been fashioned by a smith is a weapon with a sharp point, it is an actual sword; but this is only its first perfection, which is a potentiality in relation to its second perfection. The second perfection is when the sword is used in battle, when its sharp point is actually piercing, and this second perfection is its complete actuality. So this love is actualised in its first

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[18]Because of the poem's obscurity I have reproduced Shaw's translation in full in an appendix.

perfection as an intellectual cherishing of an image of ideal feminine beauty created by the phantasy and lodged in the memory; its second perfection is when it moves with the appetites of sense to the conquest of a living woman who has been recognised as similar to the ideal image in the memory. It is, then, a passion of sense which has nevertheless not ceased to be intellectual, and this is its complete actuality.[19]

In its first stage love "non ha diletto ma considerанza" (II,13) - "has not pleasure but reflection". Shaw says: "The reason why love has no 'diletto' is that 'no pote largir simiglianza', that is, Love can confer on the ideal image none of that affinity with the lover that is necessary for sensual satisfaction. . . . It is similarity, says Boethius according to St. Albert, that accounts for the attraction that one thing has for another."[20] But Boethius was speaking of <u>caritas</u>, Cavalcanti of <u>amor</u>. Cavalcanti refers to the idea of 'similarity' in the ballata "Quando di morte mi conven trar vita":

Amor, che nasce di simil piacere.

Here "simil" does not mean similarity in our sense of the term, not approximate likeness, but <u>identity</u>, the same thing in different things. Perhaps that is what Boethius meant also, but nevertheless it is necessary to stress that Guido's <u>amor</u> is not the love that binds the universe together. The word "piacere" suggests that the "simiglianza" Guido has in mind is specific to amorous situations.

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[19]Shaw, p. 11.

[20]Shaw, p. 48.

"Piacere" refers to both the effect of one persón on another and to an internal quality of mind or spirit. This surely corresponds to our own experience; in the crudest terms, if someone pleases us we judge them to be pleasing. For love to occur in its second perfection an identity must be felt between these internal qualities. But I do not want to suggest that "simiglianza" in the Canzone d'Amore implies all this; the formulation "simil piacere" probably came later. Yet it is noteworthy that the line "Amor, che nasce di simil piacere" does not seem to require any reference to the ideal image in order to make it meaningful. In fact, one of the themes of the later poems is, as I hope to demonstrate, a questioning of the ideal image, not as to whether it exists, but as to whether or not it is inhibiting.

Love in its second perfection, as a sensual appetite, is the result of a compound influence of Venus and Mars, though Guido only finds it necessary to specify Mars:

> D'una scuritate
> la qual da Marte vene e fa demora
> elli è creato. (II,3-5)

Shaw quotes from the De Anima of Albertus Magnus: "Unde dicit Plato animam in sphaera Saturni accipere memoriam longam, et in sphaera Jovis accipere ratiocinationem probabilium sive opinionum, in sphaera Martis irascibilem. . . et in sphaera Veneris concupiscibilitatem."[21] Without going

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[21] Shaw, p. 32.

into the finer points of medieval astrology it follows that love, as a combination of the 'shadows' of Venus and Mars, is a union of the passive, appreciative concupiscibilis and the "fighting, enterprising appetite" irascibilis, not anger but eagerness, involving vigorous energy. Such love has unpleasant consequences and is, thankfully, short-lived. Moreover, as Shaw says, it is not an aid to virtue:

> Like Guinizelli and Dante, Cavalcanti feels the need of defining the relation between fine sexual love and rational love directed to the Perfect Good, but his conclusion is very different from theirs: Love, he says, is not rational, not concerned with the well-being of the soul; it is sometimes the short-sighted comrade of vice, and the destroyer of all reasonable life in the lover.[22]

Cavalcanti is perfectly frank. The love that is the subject of most of his poems is without sentimentality, without mystery, an intense activity in the faculties of the composite body-and-soul, bringing into its activity all the potential dynamism of medieval psychology.

The Later Poems

I have said that Cavalcanti's rhythms act as a register of the poet's personality. In a very important sense his art is a personal art, though such a statement is not fully significant until it is applied to the later poems. By 'personal' I mean not only that it deals with the personal life, but also that it becomes part of it, itself a natural

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[22]Shaw, p. 51.

or vital process. Verse is, of course, an artificial form, but by combining the natural functions of speech with the intensity of song, Guido achieves a verse-form that *feels* natural and becomes, as it were, an integral part of the processes of living. There is no retreat into stylization: it is a completely honest art.

The personal basis of Cavalcanti's art can be seen most clearly in the ballata "Perch'i' non spero di tornar giammai", written in exile, presumably, shortly before the poet's death from fever. It is conceived as an extended *envoi* or *congedo*:

> Deh, ballatetta, dille sospirando,
> quando le se' presente:
> - Questa vostra servente
> vien per istar con vui,
> partita da colui
> che fu servo d'amore -. (31-36)

In the context of painful resignation and death the 'life' conventionally attributed to the song becomes a potent image of the vulnerability of that which is most important in human life, of the disciplined gentleness of courtesy and the care with which that is worked for:

> Tu porterai novelle di sospiri
> piene di doglia e di molta paura;
> ma guarda che persona non ti miri
> che sia nemica di gentil natura. (7-10)

The song receives the affections of the poet for his lady not as a substitute for her and not out of excessive deference, but in the way that a man might take trouble selecting a present for his wife. It is as close as that to normal

behavioural patterns. Thus a natural perspective is maintained in extreme circumstances, (the alternative would be something like hysteria), it prevents the courtesy 'going cold' and eschews self-pity. Guido's respect for his lady is, in fact, full of warmth and affirms the fineness of life:

> Voi troverete una donna piacente
> di sì dolce intelletto,
> che vi sarà diletto
> davanti starle ognora.
> Anima, e tu l'adora
> sempre nel su' valore. (41-46)

Though the poet's immediate experience is of death and destruction, life is firmly perceived. Its potential 'fineness' is in no way abstract, but depends on a sense of powerful energy, a sense of nature as a vital force caught in the brutality of death:

> Tu senti, ballatetta, che la morte
> mi stringe sì che vita m'abbandona,
> e senti come'l cor si sbatte forte
> per quel che ciascun' spirito ragiona. (17-20)

He is not passive; he does not 'abandon himself' to death. Indeed the remaining impression is one of activity. The body is broken, the mind destroyed, the small, tearful voice grows weak, but none of these, not even the trembling soul, is Guido. None of these is Guido because he is so secure in intention, so concerned with his song and its health.

It is significant that the word-order is based very largely in natural speech. The words themselves are basically simple:

Tu porterai novelle di sospiri. (7)

se tu mi vuo servire
mena l'anima teco. (23-24)

Voi troverete una donna piacente. (41)

Such language is fully adequate, for the poem depends on the personal stance of the poet and on his capacity not to skimp the issues. It needs no ornament.

This ballata, because of the circumstances of its composition, is a special case. What of the other ballate dealing more directly with the torment and suffering of love? Are not these, with their language of wounds and death, more conventional than truly personal? To the modern reader such a line as "Ella mi fère sì quando la sguardo" (She wounds me so when I look at her) from "Li occhi di quella gentil foresetta", does indeed appear as a mere conventional statement. But we must realize that the term "fère" is technical rather than emotive. It has behind it a great deal of medieval science.[23] True, the technical term is based on an emotive term, but the end result of this fusion of functions is the precisé expression of the forces of passion involved, and that without any melodrama or self-pity. In this way the personal basis of Cavalcanti's art merges with his scientific turn of mind without the least diminution done to either. It is much the same with the constantly recurring term "morte".

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[23]cf. Voi, che per li occhi mi passaste al core
e destaste la mente che dormìa.

Cavalcanti defines this in the Canzone d'Amore:

> Di sua potenza segue spesso morte,
> se forte la vertù fosse impedita
> la quale aita la contraria via:
> non perché oppost'a naturale sia,
> ma quanto che da buon perfetto tort'è
> per sorte, non pò dire om ch'aggia vita,
> che stabilta non ha segnoria:
> a simil pò valer quand'om l'oblia. (LII,7-14)

In Shaw's translation: "Its [Love's] power often results in death, if the virtue that supports the opposite way should be much hampered: not because it is opposed to nature, but in as far as it is a man's fate to be turned away from the perfect good, to that extent he cannot claim to be alive, since he has no steady control over himself, and the result may be much the same when he forgets it." "Morte" also appears to refer to the inevitable disturbance in the spiritus naturalis, which governs physiological processes, when love enters its second perfection.

There is a further reason for rejecting the description of Guido's love poetry as conventional. If we look closely at a fairly typical passage dealing with the torments of love, we will see the extent to which he has recourse to parts of verbs, especially in rhyme-words, in order to achieve an exact statement of the movements of passion:

> Come m'invita lo meo cor d'amare?
> Lasso! ch'è pien di doglia
> e da sospir sì d'ogni parte priso,
> che quasi sol merzé non pò chiamare,
> e di vertù lo spoglia
> l'affanno che m'ha già quasi conquiso. (4-9)

Because the emphasis is not on nouns standing for states of

being the words never become emblems of the emotions and the poetic statement stands out in originality and genuine personal content.

The extent to which Guido, in his later work, went beyond the purely philosophical position of "Donna me prega" can be determined by analysis of the ballata "Era in pensier d'amor quand' io trovai", a poem I shall deal with at some length as it combines most of the elements I have described so far in a complex unity:

Era in pensier d'amor quand'io trovai
due foresette nòve;
l'una cantava: 'e' piove
gioco d'amor in nui.'

Era la vista lor tanto soave
e tanto queta cortese ed umile
ch'i' dissi lor: 'Vo' portate la chiave
di ciascuna vertù alta e gentile.
Deh! foresette, no m'abbiate a vile
per lo colpo ch'io porto:
questo cor mi fu morto,
poi che 'n Tolosa fui.'

Elle con gli occhi lor si volser tanto
che vider come'l cor era ferito
e come un spiritel nato di pianto
era per mezzo de lo colpo uscito.
Poi che mi vider così sbigottito,
disse l'una che rise:
'Guarda come conquise
forza d'amor costui!'

L'altra pietosa, piena di merzede,
fatta di gioco, in figura d'Amore,
disse: 'Il tuo colpo, che nel cor si vede,
fu tratto d'occhi di troppo valore,
che dentro vi lasciaro uno splendore
ch'i' nol posso mirare;
dimmi se ricordare
di quegli occhi ti pui.'

Alla dura questione e paurosa

la qual mi fece questa foresetta,
i' dissi: 'E' mi ricorda che 'n Tolosa
donna m'apparve accordellata istretta,
la quale Amor chiamava la Mandetta:
giunse sì presta e forte
che 'n fin dentro, a la morte,
mi colpîr gli occhi sui.'

Molto cortesemente mi rispose
quella che di me prima aveva riso;
disse: 'La donna che nel cor ti pose
co' la forza d'Amor tutto 'l su' viso,
dentro per li occhi ti mirò sì fiso,
ch'Amor fece apparire.
Se t'è greve 'l soffrire
raccomandati a lui.'

Vanne a Tolosa, ballatetta mia,
ed entra quetamente a la Dorata:
ed ivi chiama che, per cortesia
d'alcuna bella donna, sia menata
dinanzi a quella di cui t'ho pregata;
e s'ella ti riceve,
dille con voce leve:
per merzé vegno a vui.

The sense of 'fullness', of 'completeness', in the ballata "In un boschetto trovai pastorella" evolves naturally in the narrative; that is to say, Guido is not <u>over explicit</u>. The opening of "Era in pensier d'amor" recalls that poem in some respects:

Era in pensier d'amor quand' io trovai
due foresette nòve;
l'una cantava: 'e' piove
gioco d'amor in nui.' (1-4)

But here the dramatic situation is far less straightforward, and Guido contrasts the rhythm and syntax of the girl's song with his own prosaic presentation of the scene, which is simple, direct, and factual. The song itself is about high-intensity emotion and is worth comparing with similar,

roughly contemporary passages. This is Petrarch:

> Da' be'rami scendea
> (dolce ne la memoria)
> una pioggia di fior sovra 'l suo grembo;
> ed ella si sedea
> umile in tanta gloria,
> coverta già de l'amoroso nembo.[24]

And this is Dante:

> così dentro una nuvola di fiori,
> che dalle mani angeliche saliva
> e ricadeva in giù dentro e di fuori
> sopra candido vel cinta d'oliva
> donna m'apparve, sotto verde manto,
> vestita di color di fiamma viva.[25]

Guido is neither as explicit as Dante nor as luxurious as Petrarch, but the main difference is that he does not aim to realize fully a complete and beatific experience. His words in the song are more suggestive, particularly in the way their flexible rhythm conveys the sense of a natural disposition of the 'foresette' towards enjoyment. He does not aim to 'fill out' the scene. He is, as a participant, to some degree alienated; but not with the alienation of Petrarch for whom the image becomes a purely mental structure. Guido remains in contact with the power of experience to renew or redirect the interior being. The words "e' piove gioco d'amor in nui" convey the 'otherness' of the girls' lives, which so much freshens his existence, or, he knows, should, that his love for Mandetta seems more, not less problematic.

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[24]Petrarch, "Chiare, fresche e dolci acque", 40-45.

[25]Dante, Purgatorio, xxx, 28-33.

One of the 'foresette' is described as "fatta di gioco, in figura d'Amore". "Fatta di gioco" has an obvious literal reality ("fatta gioiosa"); there is no sense of overstatement however much the cicumstances might excuse that. While the idea "e' piove gioco d'amor in nui" has a sense of the fulfillment of the interior being, "fatta di gioco" locates the very same "gioco" physically. It is much the same structure as in "In un boschetto":

> cantava come fosse 'nnamorata;
> er' adornata - di tutto piacere. (7-8)

Harmony between interior and exterior existences is an important part of Guido's perception of the 'foresette'. Moreover, their alertness, their sense of fun, the extent to which they can participate personally in Guido's personal concerns, all derive from this nucleus of the poem in which the perceptual, the psychological, and the physical merge into a composite, intuitive experience that seems to defy the normal analytical patterns of a reflective or philosophically-based love poetry.

The narrative design of the poem functions in the same way; that is, it seems to block the conventional reflective or analytical patterns, and one of the ways in which it does this is by allowing no sense of a <u>self-contained</u> drama. Each stanza begins with a descriptive appraisal or reappraisal and ends with <u>speech</u>; in the majority of stanzas the third line begins 'she said' or 'I said', and the

delicately counterpointed conversation becomes the centre of meaning; at least the situation brings about speech invariably, which determines the meaning in so far as each speech gives the poem a fresh direction and a new twist to the interplay of personalities, thus avoiding the subjection of the experience to a simplified structure.

The moments of greatest emotional intensity for Cavalcanti come when the dialogue seems most naturalistic:

> Guarda come conquise
> forza d'amor costui! (19-20)
>
> dimmi se ricordare
> di quegli occhi ti pui. (27-28)
>
> E' mi ricorda che 'n Tolosa. (31)

Such 'naturalism' (which never undercuts the lyricism) in no way contradicts the essential courtesy of the scene, but it does qualify it. Firstly, courtesy is difficult for Guido to maintain:

> Deh, foresette, no m'abbiate a vile. (9)

Secondly, in these country girls, it is very largely freed from class-associations and gains greatly in flexibility and spontaneity. It is certainly strange to describe 'foresette' as Guido does with:

> Era la vista lor tanto soave
> e tanto queta cortese ed umile. (5-6)

The terms are offered at first as adequate, but they clearly miss much of the experience, so that when we look back at them it seems as if the poet is attempting to get to the

essence of the girls' presence but, semi-consciously, finding each word in turn inadequate.

Cavalcanti's theory of love, as it is contained in the Canzone d'Amore, is, I believe, an adequate explanation of the origins of sensual appreciation and sensual energy, but it does not take account of all the factors involved in love. This is reflected in Guido's meeting with the two 'foresette'. Their sympathy is generated by their understanding, which is both subtle intellectually and highly personal. But compare this situation with the Vita Nuova, after Beatrice's death, where the obvious sympathy of a woman at her window reduces Dante to tears and provokes the question Can this be love?[26] Guido's view of things is less egotistical. His 'foresette' gain substance of their own from the open-endedness of the form and the deliberate avoidance of any suggestion of 'complete' experience. The intrusion of their reality at an interpersonal level disturbs Guido's inward meditation on love, so that it appears that such meditation is a bar to fresh experience, inhibiting and debilitating, especially when it is meditation on an image. Amorous experience must be interpersonal, a fact that Guido's theory does not admit. Of course, the poet is sensitive to those things that disturb his meditation; it is this fact that makes the experience so important and so difficult.

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[26]Dante, Vita Nuova, XXXIV-XXXIX.

A significant factor is the poet's self-image. His lack of gallantry and boldness is characterised by the word "vile", which with "sbigottito" carries the sense of something low, almost cringing. Compared with "Perch'i' non spero di tornar giammai" there is no displacement here between the projected self-image and the strength and assurance of the mind that holds it. But Guido steers a narrow line between this and the complacent paranoia, I mean the mild paranoia that seeks to indulge in sympathy, which suggests itself as so easy an option when the one girl laughs:

L'altra pietosa, piena di merzede, (21)

but which is defeated in the following line by the 'realism' of more sensual concerns:

fatta di gioco, in figura d'Amore. (22)

When the concept of fear as conveyed by "vile" and "sbigottito" becomes "la dura questione e paurosa"(29), all sense of lowness vanishes. The interaction between Guido's personality, which is dominated by the past, and the present situation has reached a point of crisis in which the original problems of self-image seem to become naive. "Paurosa" connotes a new kind of reality, one that is specifically personal and inward.

Where does this fear come from? Is it that Guido must visualize his lady's eyes once again? Or has he noticed the undertones of the girl's penetrating question? According to the Canzone d'Amore love resides "In quella parte dove

sta memora".(II,1) "Ricordare" implies a simpler view of the mind than "memora", but they are related and this reference recalls the theory of love in which the ideal image exists in potentiality in the organising memory.[27] Cavalcanti's 'fear' arises in the conflict between the ideal and the reality of the person not as particular but as personally relating to him. As I have said the theory explains both sensual energy and appreciation, but is inadequate to explain the interaction of minds. This is implied. It stands in tense relation to the movement of the poem which blocks analytical patterns with immediate experience.

It is not that the theory is wrong and certainly not that a 'platonic' relationship would be any answer. Guido remains fully aware of the power and urgency of sensual experience. He answers:

> E' mi ricorda che 'n Tolosa
> donna m'apparve accordellata istretta,
> la quale Amor chiamava la Mandetta:
> giunse sì presta e forte
> che 'n fin dentro,a la morte,
> mi colpîr gli occhi sui. (31-36)

The points of fact in the first three lines, (Tolosa, accordellata istretta, la Mandetta,) their reticent, tactful rhythm, make these lines a sharp contrast with the verbial[28]

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[27]See pp. 25-28 above.

[28]"Verbial" is not in the O.E.D. By analogy with "adverbial" I hope to suggest a quality of verbs specifically. "Verbal" would include too much.

and metaphorical energies of the last three. They avoid entirely the 'religious' feeling of more youthful poems, and this sets the concept "m'apparve" into a more directly analogous relation with the opening "io trovai", which refers to the 'foresette'. "M'apparve" is still deferential, but in a way that is becoming neutralised. "Giunse" takes up the idea, and qualified by "presta" and "forte", it refers to physical effects that are a long way from the vision of the early sonnet "Chi è questa che vien". "Morte" and "colpir" are metaphorical, but refer fairly directly to sensual deficiency. The sudden change of tone:

> La quale Amor chiamava la Mandetta:
> giunse sì presta e forte. . ,

points to the poet's two-part consciousness; stillness and 'completeness' become turbulence. "M'apparve", similarly, is rooted in stasis, (so God would 'appear' to the blessed soul), "giunse" in becoming.

A great deal is implied in "Era in pensier d'amor" which militates to some extent against the subtle discriminations of medieval science. But this does not mean that Cavalcanti went beyond the boundaries of the culture that fed him. It means rather that the personal basis of his art permitted the entry into the lyrical perspective of experiences that could not be easily contained in the formulated structures of medieval culture, but which nevertheless were part of medieval culture in a broader, more dynamic sense.

Much of his poetry deals with the disharmony of the enamoured mind, but this implies, and must be seen in the context of an ideal of salute, of mental harmony, which would permit an identification of experience with joy, the "gioco" that we have seen comprises all the modes of experience. His work as a whole is the affirmation of this value and the tragic awareness of its apparent unattainability. Yet, paradoxically, he does attain it. The musical dimension of experience, what Pound calls the emotion that surrounds the thought, everywhere breathes just such an inner harmony.

POUND'S CRITICISM OF CAVALCANTI

Three separate pieces of prose constitute the body of Pound's criticism of Cavalcanti - the chapter "Lingua Toscana" from The Spirit of Romance (1910), the Introduction to his translations of the sonnets and ballate (also 1910), and the essay Cavalcanti (published in 1934 in Make It New, but dated 1910-1931). Of these the first is a survey of Tuscan poetry from St. Francis of Assisi to Dante. Guido is there almost incidentally, with little more than a hint of his significance for Pound. The aim of The Spirit of Romance is to instruct, its ambition to instruct painlessly, according to the author (p.8), but in comparison with later work its pedagogy is diffuse and diluted. Pound intends to stir the reader's interest in the medieval world, and is content to provide to this end a series of examples in Rossetti-esque translation. Guido does not figure large, and it seems reasonable to suppose that "Lingua Toscana" was composed before the total immersion in his poems that Pound describes in his Introduction to the translations. That Introduction, though it contains much that with some variation of terminology reappears later and can be said to be 'Pound's view', is yet not by any means Pound's final critical position vis-a-vis Cavalcanti. The later essay is the fullest, most mature account of Guido's significance,

but we must not, because of this, be content to examine that piece in isolation, especially as it deals in large part with a single poem. The three pieces are, in an important sense, complementary; beneath the surface divergencies there is a considerable interpenetration.

A notably 'Poundian' idea in The Spirit of Romance, in the chapter "Psychology and Troubadours", concerns the conception of art: "The interpretive function is the highest honor of the arts, and because it is so we find that a sort of hyper-scientific precision is the touchstone and assay of the artist's power, of his honor, his authenticity. Constantly he must distinguish between the shades and degrees of the ineffable."[1] Behind the moral-and-aesthetic injunction lies Pound's sense of the Artist as Personality, so that he is able to write: "The accurate artist seems to leave not only his greater self, but beside it, upon the films of his art some living print of the circumvolving man, his taste, his temper and his foible."[2] But the aesthetic is not anthropocentric; it is based in the perception of man's kinship with the vital universe, the interpenetration of micro- and macrocosms. In Pound's view, with the increase of humanism, "man. . . forgets the whole and the flowing."[3] The person-

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[1]Pound, Spirit of Romance, p. 87.

[2]Pound, Spirit of Romance, p. 88.

[3]Pound, Spirit of Romance, p. 93.

ality of the artist is, in fact, contained and defined in his perception of the 'whole and the flowing'.

The explicit references to Cavalcanti in "Lingua Toscana", though, do not seem to draw into themselves any part of such an aesthetic framework. As an example, the following: "Dante himself never wrote more poignantly, or with greater intensity than Cavalcanti. The single line is, it is true, an insufficient test of a man's art, but it is a perfect test of his natural vigor, and of his poetic nature."[4] The notions of 'poignancy' and 'intensity' are not especially incisive. They seem to refer, somewhat half-heartedly, to two aspects of Guido's art in which he can be said to be 'Dante's equal', which is where the true weight of the critical judgement lies. Very much the same kind of comparative evaluation is made in the Introduction: "If [Guido] is not among the major prophets, he at least has his place in the canon, in the second book of The Arts, with Sappho and Theocritus; with all those who have sung, not all the modes of life, but some of them, unsurpassedly; those who in their chosen or fated field have bowed to no one."[5] The praise is the greater for its restraint, but underlying it is a conventional map of literature. The major prophets, among whom is obviously Dante, are supreme

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[4]Pound, Spirit of Romance, p. 110.

[5]Pound, Sonnets and Ballate, p. xii.

in so far as they are comprehensive. In other words, Pound has not yet arrived at the position in which the artist who asserts a certain set of values, however 'specialised' he may be in other ways, is seen as the true hero.

Pound pursues the comparison with Dante, on the level of hypothesised personalities: "A spirit more imperious and less subtle than Dante, more passionate, less likely to give ear to sophistries. . . . His individuality is unquestionable."[6] In 1929 he inserted an important footnote, after the word "subtle": "I retract this expression. The rest of the sentence stands." It reflects an adjustment of the comparative evaluation. In 1929 Pound is far less willing to pay lip-service to the convention of Dante's superiority. In the later essay the tone has changed; references to Dante have a certain astringency; it is asserted that Cavalcanti is "much more modern than his young friend Dante Alighieri, qui était diablement dans les idées reçues."[7]

Turning to the sentence already quoted - "The single line is, it is true, an insufficient test of a man's art, but it is a perfect test of his natural vigor, and of his poetic nature" - two questions are immediately striking. First, does this imply that Pound's response to Guido is,

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[6]Pound, Spirit of Romance, p. 110.

[7]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 149.

at this stage at least, predominantly a response to the single line? And second, is it in fact true, in terms of the developed Poundian aesthetic, that the single line is an insufficient test of a man's art? A passage from the Introduction is particularly relevant here; it is Pound's credo as to the possible extent of meaning of the line of poetry:

> As for the verse itself: I believe in an ultimate and absolute rhythm as I believe in an absolute symbol or metaphor. The perception of the intellect is given in the word, that of the emotions in the cadence. It is only, then, in the perfect rhythm joined to the perfect word that the two-fold vision can be recorded. I would liken Guido's cadence to nothing less powerful than line in Blake's drawing.
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> In painting, the color is always finite. It may match the color of the infinite spheres, but it is in a way confined within the frame and its appearance is modified by the colors about it. The line is unbounded, it marks the passage of a force, it continues beyond the frame.
>
> Rodin's belief that energy is beauty holds thus far, namely, that all our ideas of beauty of line are in some way connected with our ideas of swiftness or easy power of motion, and we consider ugly those lines which connote unwieldy slowness in moving.
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> Rhythm is perhaps the most primal of all things known to us. It is basic in poetry and music mutually, their melodies depending on a variation of tone quality and of pitch respectively, as is commonly said, but if we look more closely we will see that music is, by further analysis, pure rhythm; rhythm and nothing else, for the variation in pitch is the variation in rhythms of the individual notes, and harmony the blending of these varied rhythms. When we know more of overtones we will see that the tempo of every masterpiece is absolute, and is exactly set by some further law of rhythmic accord. Whence it should be possible to show that any given rhythm implies about it a complete musical form - fugue, sonata, I cannot say what form, but a form, perfect, complete. Ergo, the rhythm set in a line of poetry connotes its symphony, which, had we but a little more skill, we could score for orchestra. Sequitur, or rather inest: the rhythm of any poetic line corresponds to emotion.
>
> It is the poet's business that this correspondance

be exact, i.e., that it be the emotion that surrounds the thought expressed.[8]

"The rhythm set in a line of poetry connotes its symphony," and that rhythm depends on the word in the sense that it must describe the emotion that corresponds to the thought. Much as there is to get hold of in this passage, the essential is thus surely in the sentence: "The perception of the intellect is given in the word, that of the emotions in the cadence." The 1913 essay The Serious Artist indicates the full extent of the idea. Pound first defines the necessary clarity that marks good prose:

> Also there are various kinds of clarity. There is the clarity of the request: Send me four pounds of ten-penny nails. And there is the syntactical simplicity of the request: Buy me the kind of Rembrandt I like. This last is an utter cryptogram. It presupposes a more complex and intimate understanding of the speaker than most of us ever acquire of anyone. . .
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> It is the almost constant labour of the prose artist to translate this latter kind of clarity into the former; to say 'Send me the kind of Rembrandt I like' in the terms of 'Send me four pounds of ten-penny nails.[9]

Poetry must be as accurate, as clear as prose; that, at any rate, is half the formula. As Pound defines the two-fold art: "Poetry is a centaur. The thinking word-arranging, clarifying faculty must move and leap with the energising, sentient, musical faculties."[10] Pound's evaluation of

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[8]Pound, Sonnets and Ballate, pp. xxi-xxii.

[9]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 50.

[10]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 52.

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Cavalcanti depends upon this idea of poetry more than upon anything else. His response is a response to the single line, because if an art is exact and authentic it can be seen to be so in the single line. Guido's scientific method, his transformation of emotive terms into exact technical terms, his avoidance of 'rhetoric' and 'Petrarchan fustian', a theme that Pound pursues doggedly, is seen to combine precisely with the rhythm "which implies the man",[11] (i.e., which conveys with complete authenticity some part of the emotional life, a part that suggests the whole.)

So the assertion in "Lingua Toscana" concerning the single line is a mere half-truth. There, what Pound claims to perceive in the single line is natural vigor and poetic nature, concepts apparently outside of and other than the accurate discrimination in which 'art' consists. We have here an implication of health, which is kept for the moment more or less physiological, because it excludes the artistic intellect. But the artistic intellect is subject to an equivalent range of possible health and infirmity, as Pound owns in the later essay Cavalcanti. The Tuscan, he says, "declines after a time to limit reception to his solar plexus. . . . It is more than the simple athleticism of the mens sana in corpore sano. The conception of the body as perfect instrument of the increasing intelligence

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[11]Pound, Sonnets and Ballate, p. xxiii.

pervades."[12] Health, as a physio-aesthetic value, underlies part of the lengthy passage quoted from the Introduction; it is implied in the phrase "swiftness or easy power of motion". By the later essay it is a fundamental tenet of Pound's thought, it is the value asserted, not dogmatically, by those artists now considered most important, and it is opposed to the "more or less masochistic and hell-breeding belief" that the body is evil, and to the "invention of hells for one's enemies," both of which phrases make one think, uncomfortably, of Dante, whether with justice or not. That is not to say that it is no longer considered necessary that the artist distinguish constantly "between the shades and the degrees of the ineffable". But it is to say that such a formulation, along with other formulations in The Spirit of Romance, reflects a lack of coordination and unification in Pound's thought. Because any one perception involves an especial thought, and any one thought a particular emotion, health cannot be a quality of the sensual or the intellectual or the emotional, but only of all three in unison.

Therefore it would be incorrect to object that the correspondance of word and cadence, thought and emotion, is a quality of all good poetry. Very few poets, in fact, make the grade, for the test is rigorous. There is, of

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[12]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 152.

course, a way in which thought can correspond with emotion when neither the thought nor the emotion is very exact. There is, for instance, a sort of propriety in the combining of the words of "Land of Hope and Glory" with Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance". That is not what Pound is concerned with. He responds primarily to the precision of Guido's words, through which he perceives that the artist is fellow of the scientist, not the advertising agent. All the rest follows. And let it be said that while there is an element of eclecticism in his enthusiasm for Guido, there is no sense in which it can be said that he is acting as a kind of literary pawn-broker. In his own statement he emphasises the vital aspects of that enthusiasm:

> My pawing over the ancients and semi-ancients has been one struggle to find out what has been done, once for all, better than it can ever be done again, and to find out what remains for us to do, and plenty does remain, for if we still feel the same emotions as those which launched the thousand ships, it is certain that we come on these feelings differently, through different nuances, by different intellectual gradations. Each age has its own abounding gifts yet only some ages transmute them into matter of duration. No good poetry is written in a manner twenty years old, for to write in such a manner shows conclusively that the writer thinks from books, convention and cliché, and not from life, yet a man feeling the divorce of life and his art may naturally try to resurrect some forgotten mode if he finds in that mode some leaven, or if he thinks he sees in it some element lacking in contemporary art which might unite that art again to its sustenance, life.
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> In the art of Daniel and Cavalcanti, I have seen that precision which I miss in the Victorians, that explicit rendering, be it of external nature, or of emotion.[13]

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[13]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 11.

In the process of lopping off the dead wood of the Victorian 'heritage' Cavalcanti stands as a means to 'life'. His precision is primary; the rest follows. And his precision is not a mere technical accomplishment, it is a fundamental part of the values he asserts as a lyrical poet, and which constitute his claim upon us. But in a certain sense and despite our having seen that precision involves all the modes of experience in relation to a concept of health, it would not be the whole truth of Pound's response to Guido if we were to rest content with the idea of precision. We must ask, precision in relation to what?

For Pound, Guido is the supreme practitioner of Tuscan poetry, and that in spite of his "unquestionable" individuality. By "Tuscan poetry" is meant a poetry involving a certain assertion of value, which did not exist before the Tuscan poets and has not existed since, but which is related to other sectors of medieval art, what Pound calls the "'medieval clean line' as distinct from the medieval niggle".[14] The section "Medievalism" of the essay Cavalcanti is in large part an attempt to define this value:

> The Tuscan demands harmony in something more than the plastic. He declines to limit his aesthetic to the impact of light on the eye. It would be misleading to reduce his aesthetic to terms of music, or to distort the analysis of it by analogies to the art of sonority. Man shares plastic with the statue, sound does not require a human being to produce it. The bird, the phonograph sing. There is the residue of perception,

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[14]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 150.

perception of something which requires a human being to produce it. Which may even require a certain individual to produce it. This really complicates the aesthetic. You deal with an interactive force: the virtù in short.[15]

Embodied in this is Pound's break with the aesthetic theories of the late Victorian period, a break foreshadowed in the chapter "Psychology and Troubadours" from The Spirit of Romance, but there without a full realisation of its consequences. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the break. True, in the Introduction to his translations he had referred the reader to the preface to Pater's Renaissance, for an explanation of the meaning of virtù. But this only serves to demonstrate how far he has moved, by the essay, away from Pater, who had written:

> The aesthetic critic, then, regards all the objects with which he has to deal, all works of art, and the fairer forms of nature and human life, as powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations, each of a more or less peculiar or unique kind. This influence he feels, and wishes to explain, by analysing and reducing it to its elements. To him, the picture, the landscape, the engaging personality in life or in a book, La Gioconda, the hills of Carrara, Pico of Mirandola, are valuable for their virtues, as we say, in speaking of a herb, a wine, a gem; for the property each has of affecting one with a special, a unique impression of pleasure.[16]

There are hints here, suggestions of some of Pound's ideas. Pater includes 'real life' in his theory, but it is real life considered as an object and valuable in its pleasure-producing qualities. Pound does not mean by virtù a mere

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[15]Pound, Literary Essays, pp. 151-52.

[16]Pater, The Renaissance, p. 28.

property, of a mere object, sensible to a mere aesthete. He means an "interactive force", the dynamic relation between man and the vital universe, and the aesthetic based on it is not a self-contained, exteriorised realm to be observed, at leisure, but a mode of being in the world, of interpreting it and discovering its values. It is in this way that Pound's idea of the aesthetic includes, by implication, the psychological and the ethical.

After all, is not the idea of precision, considered in isolation, somewhat static? The word gives the thought and the cadence gives the emotion, precisely, but they are 'given', that is, fixed. Of course, they must not slither, or wobble; they must be fixed so as to be seen, and that without too much visible exertion. But when we talk of the 'shape' of a thought we should not imagine a shape, as it were, at rest, but a movement; and the 'shape' of the movement is nothing less than its unity, the correspondence of one phase to another, the implication of the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end. This is something other than precision, the dynamic world that the precision acts on and in, the what of the how.

It is not, then, a matter of a single quality of a single medieval poet to be studied and emulated in the effort to be rid of the spongy Victorian poetic upholstery. At least it is more than just that. Pound finds in the medieval Weltanschauung a "'harmony in the sentience' or harmony of

the sentient, where the thought has its demarcation, the substance its virtù, where stupid men have not reduced all 'energy' to unbounded undistinguished abstraction."[17] He goes on:

> For the modern scientist energy has no borders, it is a shapeless 'mass' of force; even his capacity to differentiate it to a degree never dreamed by the ancients has not led him to think of its shape or even its loci. The rose that his magnet makes in the iron filings, does not lead him to think of the force in botanic terms, or wish to visualise that force as floral and extant (ex stare).
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> A medieval 'natural philosopher' would find this modern world full of enchantments, not only the light in the electric bulb, but the thought of the current hidden in air and in wire would give him a mind full of forms, 'Fuor di color' or having their hyper-colors. The medieval philosopher would probably have been unable to think the electric world, and not think of it as a world of forms.[18]

Between the écriture automatique of André Breton and the formalism of Victor Shklovsky there is an apparently unbridgable divide; the modern mind is fond of such polarisation, as between id and super-ego. What has energy to do with form? For Pound, all energy has form and all form is a boundary of energy. Each is inconceivable without the other. Thus poetry must combine the perception of the emotions with the perception of the intellect, music with exactitude, song with speech, not because poetry is then most pleasing, aesthetically, at leisure, but because only then is poetry true to its sustenance, life.

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[17]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 154.

[18]Pound, Literary Essays, pp. 154-55.

In all this Pound is a just critic of Cavalcanti. I have referred to the correspondence of music and meaning, the way in which the formal technical achievement parallels and reflects the psychological achievement, in Guido's verses. We have seen, also, that Cavalcanti has his own conception of health, first employing the word salute to indicate it and later analysing its relation to the immediacy and integration of experience, asserting as its essential value the harmony that can exist between the person and the world. We need not labour to tie this and Pound's view together; the points of contact are fully apparent. It is more important to note what Pound does not say. He does not, first of all, anywhere refer to Cavalcanti's development as a poet. His main concern is with the Canzone d'Amore which, untypical as it is, he does not take time to distinguish from either the later ballate or the earlier sonnets. He does hint at some kind of distinction by saying that the ballata is "an art-form more emotional and more emotive than the form of the Italian canzone."[19] But he does not anywhere find important the fact that Guido's employment of that form reflects an increasing and fuller personal orientation of the poetry, and this despite Pound's bias towards personal art. He rests content with the implication of the man in the rhythm, and we might think that, for a poet concerned to

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[19]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 191.

develop his art, this is fair enough. But because of it he fails to respond to the effort Guido makes to unify his experience, (and thus to unify his world). And if Guido had to make such an effort, how much more should Pound have had to make in this infinitely more fragmented and dislocated world? It may be that the problem is too complex, in the modern world, to solve at a personal level. Nevertheless, we cannot escape the feeling that Pound, for all his sensitivity to the problem, is rather too sure of himself, of his own capacity to work the scattered fragments into the foundations of 'civilisation'. One can go on qualifying each statement and each qualification. Some kind of assertiveness was necessary, even aggression. . . But this is only evidence of the compexity of the problem, and the more complex the problem, the more demands are made on the messiah.

THE TRANSLATIONS

Pound distinguishes, not between 'literal' and 'free' translations, but between "interpretive" translation and "the other sort".[1] While the latter, he says, "falls simply in the domain of original writing, or, if it does not it must be censured according to equal standards," the former is an attempt to guide the reader into the alien modes of thought and feeling of the original, to signpost some, but not all (for that would be impossible) of its effects. Interpretive translation is not original composition, but it converges with it in so far as there is essential similarity in the hard work that goes into both. As Pound says in A Retrospect: "As for 'adaptations'; one finds that all the old masters of painting recommend to their pupils that they begin by copying masterwork, and proceed to their own composition."[2] He also says, elsewhere in that essay: "Translation is likewise good training, if you find that your original matter 'wobbles' when you try to rewrite it. The meaning of the poem to be translated cannot 'wobble'."[3] The function of interpretive translation

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[1]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 200.

[2]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 10.

[3]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 7.

as apprenticeship does not in the least contradict its function as pedagogy. The interpretive aspect is contained in the initial effort to grasp the material, and only after this is achieved can the translator devote himself to its expression. Pound has chosen the word "interpretive" with care; it does not mean 'translation as interpretation', a kind of semi-dogmatic assertion of the meaning of the poem in different terms, but translation as feeling one's way into those parts of the original that one's own language can be made to contain. Strictly speaking, the pedagogical function is secondary to this, and the early translations of Cavalcanti are less attempts to popularise a recondite author than examples of Pound consciously extending the range of his art. In this sense the 1912 volume The Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti is more akin to Personae (1910) than The Spirit of Romance (1910).

The process must not be thought to be primarily intuitive. On the contrary, it imposes a considerable critical and scholarly discipline. For this reason Pound's critical pronouncements are of some importance, though that is not, in itself, to say that his translations do them justice or, indeed, vice-versa. But translation is unthinkable without the critical process. Hugh Kenner misplaces the emphasis when he writes: "A good translation seems like a miracle because one who can read the original can, so to speak, see the poem before the poet writes it, and marvel

at the success of his wrestle to subdue his own language to the vision."[4] The process, it is true, is conscious at all levels, but it is a consciousness of sounds and meanings. The vision cannot, in reality, be extracted and isolated from the words. Nor is this to quibble, for it involves the question of whether translation be inevitably approximation. Pound, devotee of precision, would hardly have entered the ring at all if it were so. Precision is a quality of a certain use of words; only then can it be repeated in other words. If we admit that the same vision, strictly speaking, can never be recorded in different words, it follows from Kenner's view that the translated vision will be only approximately the same as the original. But with the same admission we may say that a translation can reproduce the precise meaning of the original <u>in some of its aspects</u>, those that the translator's language can be made to contain, provided that the translator's consciousness be primarily of sounds and meanings, (i.e., those parts of the poem that can be, in a certain sense, disengaged from the whole.) There is no fundamental philosophical conflict here; it is purely a matter of emphasis; but I am labouring the point in order to stress that we must not look for a 'complete' and 'miraculous' correspondence between translation and original, but a worked-for and consciously understood exten-

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[4] <u>The Translations of Ezra Pound</u>, ed, H. Kenner, p. 10.

sion of the translating language to embrace some new modes of thought and feeling.

That Pound responded to the exigency of scholarly and critical deliberation is indubitable. That he has not always been accorded the credit for this is likewise undeniable. Donald Davie's account seems exceptional for its relative generosity:

> Some of Pound's incautious defenders may have confused scholarship, and especially literary scholarship, with dry-as-dust pedantry; Pound himself, in his fiercest polemics against pedantry and the inertia of institutionalised learning, has always honored true scholarship and has been excited by the romance as well as the dignity of the life of learning. Every one of his translations is in intention a scholarly translation; and if it is true that his scholarship has not always kept pace with his zeal and enthusiasm, this is because he has not observed a rule that the scholar may groan under even as he is governed by it - the rule of specialization. Pound has been interested in too many things, in particular intoo many languages, for his learning to be adequate in all of them. But he has conspicuously refused to take the position that his expertise as a poet absolves him, in translating, from the scruples and resposibilities of the scholar. By a mournful paradox the scholars would have treated him less harshly if, with the arrogance of a Bohemian, he had thought that his talents as a poet permitted him to bypass the need for a scholar's accuracy.[5]

Scholarship, understood thus, is even more necessary to the artist who would extend the scope and range of his art than to the pedagogue. The process would otherwise be no more than indiscriminate appropriation, a rag-bag of 'influences' swallowed whole and undigested, 'modified' to suit the appropriator, the moment encountered provoking a rash "I

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[5]Davie, Ezra Pound, p. 40.

can use this", without sincerity, without consciousness of the need to grow. The extraordinary range - and obscurity - of Pound's interests, whatever else it is, is certainly not evidence of such a malaise.

Pound's mature judgement of his early translations of the sonnets and ballate is stern and without false modesty. Nevertheless, they were included, in revised form, of course, but the revisions were not extensive, in his edition of Cavalcanti's Rime, published in Genoa in 1932. This does not imply satisfaction with them. They are left as they are, Pound says, for "I am further removed from the years 1910-12 than from the original Italian. There is simply no use my trying to mix the two periods."[6] Unlike Yeats, whose development as a poet was prolonged and profound, but who could return to the poems of his youth and change them radically in revision, Pound seems to imply that, for him, the gap between 1932 and 1912 is so great as to be unbridgable, that the poems of his youth are lost to him in middle age, though not valueless because of that, and that this is partly because he has a fixed point of reference, the original, with which to measure the change. Why did he not retranslate? Because of an increased humility before the original? He seems to imply as much in the final section, "Guido's Relations", of the essay Cavalcanti:

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[6]Guido Cavalcanti: Rime, ed. E.Pound, p. 36, n.

> When I 'translated' Guido eighteen years ago I did not see Guido at all. I saw that Rossetti had made a remarkable translation of the Vita Nuova, in some places improving (or at least enriching) the original; that he was indubitably the man 'sent' or 'chosen' for that particular job, and that there was something in Guido that escaped him or that was, at any rate, absent from his translations. A robustezza, a masculinity. I had a great enthusiasm (perfectly justified), but I did not clearly see exterior demarcations - Euclid inside his cube, with no premonition of Cartesian axes.
>
> My perception was not obfuscated by Guido's Italian, difficult as it then was for me to read. I was obfuscated by the Victorian language.
>
> If I hadn't been, I very possibly couldn't have done the job at all. I should have seen the too great multiplicity of problems contained in the one problem before me.[7]

Pound implies that he now sees the full extent of the problem. It is not, by any means, that he cannot achieve a language equal in precision with Guido's. He needs just such a language with which to 'see' the problem. This is what is meant when he says: "Neither can anyone learn English, one can only learn a series of Englishes. Rossetti made his own language. I hadn't in 1910 made a language, I don't mean a language to use, but even a language to think in."[8] So if, by implication, Pound now has the language to think in and with which to perceive the multiplicity of problems, surely he can, with that language, articulate his perceptions; he could, if he wanted, retranslate. This conclusion is borne out by the fact that he is, in this essay, presenting his translation of "Donna me prega", later retranslated as the

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[7]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 193.

[8]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 194.

substance of Canto xxxvi. In other words, it is not so much that he is too humble, around 1928 or so, to translate Guido, as that his interest is directed almost exclusively on the Canzone d'Amore. Examination of the reasons for this, and its implications, must be for the time being deferred.

In any analysis of Pound's early translations of Guido's sonnets and ballate the important question to answer is, to what extent has Pound extended the scope and range of his art? This does not mean that we must look for perfectly achieved poems, but for indications, here and there, of not-yet-quite assimilated, but fresh and positive modes of thought and feeling. Pound's own judgement that his "early versions are bogged in Dante Gabriel and in Algernon"[9] is true up to a point, but he is, quite naturally, concerned to point out his development since those versions, and to some extent he exaggerates. It is true that Rossetti and Swinburne are basic influences, but looking closer we can see Pound striving to use their vocabulary and their rhythms in a new way.

Here it is worth noting that Pound has a strong tendency to think in terms of models of linguistic expression, particularly literary models. He was, he says, obfuscated by the "Victorian" language, by which he means the language of the later Victorian poets. He sees poetry this

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[9]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 194.

way:"Keats, out of Elizabethans, Swinburne out of a larger set of Elizabethans and a mixed bag (Greeks, und so weiter), Rossetti out of Sheets, Kelly, and Co. plus early Italians. . ."[10] William Carlos Williams comments: "Pound does very definitely intend a modern speech - but wishes to save the exellences (well-worked-out forms) of the old, so leans to it overmuch."[11] The point is interesting in so far as it indicates an essential difference between Williams's method and Pound's. For Williams the true poetic language is created out of the working language, speech that is used day by day, organised to reflect the structure of experience. For Pound it is not so. One cannot intuit the structure of experience and then set about making an adequate language; one's language is intimately bound up with the experience from the beginning. Not, of course, to the extent that growth becomes an impossibility. But certainly to the extent that one must develop one's language first, by probing the language of other men, before one can 'grow'.

Moreover, Pound has a special relation to the Victorian influences on his early career. As Donald Davie points out:

> Pound's reaching back over a poetic generation to echo directly some Victorian poets must have seemed a symptom of provincialism, something possible to an American, but not

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[10]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 194.

[11]Williams, Selected Essays, p. 107.

> to a British poet. And Pound himself was thoroughly aware of this possibility and of himself as indelibly American. Though it is British voices which sound, he knows that they sound differently in his American ear, and that just for that reason they may be fruitful for him as they could not be for his British contemporaries.[12]

I claim the point as corroboration of what I have said already, that Pound is, especially under the pressure of translating a distant poet, trying to use, for instance, Rossetti-isms in a new way. There is, however, one further point to make before proceeding to an examination of the translations themselves. When Pound says, "Where both Rossetti and I went off the rails was in taking an English sonnet as the equivalent of a sonnet in Italian,"[13] he puts his finger on an essential aspect of his 'failure'. The sonnet-form imposed on him the iambic measure he was later to reject as the crudest, most limited of rhythmical crutches. The equal line length and the necessity of 'carrying over' the thought line to line did not permit him to establish the single line as the poetic unit, and thus to set about breaking it up into its component parts for reorganisation in novel ways. For this reason I propose to attend more especially to the ballate, as those parts of the experiment which bore most fruit, though Pound does make some interesting advances in some of the sonnets.

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[12]Davie, p. 21.

[13]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 194.

I have suggested that Pound did not fully respond to, or did not see fit to include in his criticism, Guido's later encompassment of a fully personal art, dealing directly with the problem of the relation of immediate experience to 'health'. This, with the terms modified, is Pound's own theme, and the fact that he does not enlist Guido's support is obviously significant, though we are not yet in a position to comprehend that significance. The evidence of this orientation in Guido is, perhaps more than in any other poem, in the ballata "Era in pensier d'amor quand' io trovai". I give Pound's translation in full because it is characteristic of the way his attempt to extend the range of his art (his art alone, one might say,) permits him to avoid encounter with the real problem. That problem, of harmonising diverse experience, was later to impose itself upon him as THE PROBLEM of the modern world, so it does not greatly matter that his involvement with Guido at this stage is not absolutely 'serious':

> Being in thought of love I came upon
> Two damsels strange
> Who sang 'The rains
> Of love are falling, falling within us.'
>
> So quiet in their modest courtesies
> Their aspect coming softly on my vision
> Made me reply, 'Surely ye hold the keys
> O' the virtues noble, high, without omission.
> Ah, little maids, hold me not in derision,
> For the wound I bear within me
> And this heart o' mine ha' slain me.
> I was in Toulouse lately.'
>
> And then toward me they so turned their eyes

That they could see my wounded heart's ill ease
And how a little spirit born of sighs
Had issued forth from out the cicatrice.
Perceiving so the depth of my distress,
She who was smiling, said,
'Love's joy hath vanquished
This man. Behold how greatly!'

Then she who had first mocked me, in better part
Gave me all courtesy in her replies.
She said,'That Lady, who upon thine heart
Cut her full image, clear, by Love's device,
Hath looked so fixedly in through thine eyes
That she's made love appear there;
If thou great pain or fear bear
Recommend thee unto him!'

Then the other piteous, full of misericorde,
Fashioned for pleasure in love's fashioning:
'His heart's apparent wound, I give my word,
Was got from eyes whose power's an o'er great
thing,
Which eyes have left in his a glittering
That mine cannot endure.
Tell me, hast thou a sure
Memory of those eyes?'

To her dread question, with such fears attended,
'Maid o' the wood,' I said, 'my memories render
Tolosa and the dusk and these things blended:
A lady in a corded bodice, slender
- Mandetta is the name Love's spirits lend her -
A lightening swift to fall,
And naught within recall
Save, Death! My wounds! Her eyes!'

(Envoi)
Speed Ballatet' unto Tolosa city
And go in softly 'neath the golden roof
And there cry out, 'Will courtesy or pity
Of any most fair lady put to proof,
Lead me to her with whom is my behoof?'
Then if thou get <u>her</u> choice
Say, with a lowered voice,
'It is <u>thy</u> grace I seek here.'

In the first version of this translation, that which appeared in the American edition of <u>The Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti</u>, the song of the 'damsels' is "The joyous

rains / Of love descend within us", which is a little closer to the original than "The rains / Of love are falling, falling within us". Moreover, "The joyous rains / Of love descend within us" seems to capture some of the flexibility of "E' piove / Gioco d'Amore in nui". But the revision forces on the reader more of a pause after the word "rains", and slows down the final line, which is altogether less iambic. If it does not, therefore, reveal to us Guido's perception of the 'foresette', it does demonstrate Pound's increasing control over the pace and modulation of his verse. Or perhaps "control" is the wrong word; it demonstrates rather a tendency to experimentation with effects of metric, which is already opposed to the characteristic 'music' of Victorian verse.

The final three lines are the most successful:

> Then if thou get her choice
> Say, with a lowered voice,
> It is thy grace I seek here.

Successful, that is to say, in so far as the italics register something of the sharp accent of Guido's rhythms:

> E s'ella ti riceve,
> Dille con voce leve:
> Per mercé vegno a vui.[14]

Pound is not straining at the language, either through oddities or archaisms, in order to make his point; it has

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[14]Quotations of Cavalcanti in this chapter are from the text given by Pound in The Translations of Ezra Pound.

all the feel of natural speech, but in heightened rhythms. His version is as compact as the original, with nothing redundant.

Pound's Italian text, as is often the case, is quite unreliable. Apart from minor details of punctuation etc., his third stanza, beginning intranslation "Then she who had first mocked me", should, in fact, be the fifth, immediately preceding the Envoi, the other stanzas remaining in the same order. Because of this the poem assumes a direction it should not have, towards a climax which seems only to justify the 'self-involvement' which the poet is actually at pains to locate as a problem in relation to the immediacy of events. The mistake is interesting in so far as it provides Pound with an excuse for his focus on the personality of the poet, not as Guido himself focusses, but as on a mask, a persona to be adopted and to which events are subsidiary. That this is the nature of his involvement with the poem is demonstrated by his somewhat 'free' translation of Guido's

> Giunse sì presta e forte
> Che 'nfin dentro alla morte
> Mi colpîr gli occhi sui,

into

> A lightening swift to fall,
> And naught within recall
> Save, Death! My wounds! Her eyes!

There is, certainly, a distinct fervour in the original, but it is a fervour in the control of the poet as participant as well as as poet. This is not the case in Pound's

version which is heavily dramatic, melodramatic even, intended to suggest intensity of feeling but coming too close to breakdown, a feeble echo of Piere Vidal Old. Pound seems to conceive the persona not as conventionally 'refined', but with a certain unsubtle, even 'rough' masculinity:

And this heart o' mine ha' slain me,

with a "glittering" eye reminiscent of The Ancient Mariner. But this is the consequence of a valid attempt to individualise the speaking voice, which is in itself an attempt to revitalise the Victorian mode. And if the poem is badly damaged by the ever-so-slight suggestion of 'merry England', apart from other more obvious infelicities, it has a brisk vitality which, I assert, Rossetti et al. had not the means to deliver.

Pound's extension of the range of his art through translation is important in itself, but it is also important in so far as it leads Pound into a direct confrontation with the real problem. Ultimately[1] the art cannot be separated from the artist, the artist from the man, nor the man from the culture, and it goes without saying that a failure in the culture or the man will be reflected in the art. Pound could not, for a long time, make his art as unified and complete as Guido's, but for the moment let us leave the question of why and concentrate on his effort to do so.

I have stressed, and Pound himself has stressed, the exact correspondence of Guido's rhythms to his thoughts; in

this is the true individuality of the speaking voice. How far, then, does Pound, at any point, achieve an equivalent exactness? The opening of Ballata XII is a good example:

> If all my life be but some deathly moving,
> Joy dragged from heaviness;
> Seeing my deep distress
> How doth Love's spirit call me unto loving?

There is nothing excessive in the rhythm of this; that is, there is nothing in it that exists for its own sake, ornamentally. The thought contained in the four lines is unified by the rhythm, so that Pound need not labour its unity syntactically. In fact, his third line seems to begin a fresh direction, but the four lines do not, because of this, fall into two halves. In this he is completely faithful to the original:

> Quando di morte mi convien trar vita,
> E di gravezza gioia,
> Come di tanta noia,
> Lo spirito d'Amore d'amar m'invita?

Perhaps a 'closer' (by which I do not mean more faithful) translation than Pound's would be:

> Since to draw life from death behoves me,
> And joy from heaviness,
> How in so great stress
> Does the spirit of love to love invite me?

But in this, my own version, I have disastrously relaxed and simplified the rhythms. The test is simple - rearrange the layout:

> Since to draw life from death behoves me,
> and joy from heaviness; how in so great stress
> does the spirit of love to love invite me?

It works in this case because the "how" 'starts up' the rhythm again, whereas in Pound's version "seeing" starts up nothing, but 'picks up', an already existing rhythm which, by virtue of that fact, underlies the whole thought. And I use up too much energy in that "how", so that the final line 'rides out' the ebbing rhythm and misses the stress on "to" that the thought desperately needs. Pound expends no excess energy at all in his third line, so that his fourth takes all the weight in the right places, and one of the reasons for this is his placing of the word "dragged" in the second line (translating "trar" from Cavalcanti's first), for it is this that takes the rhythmical weight off "seeing". My apologies to the reader for this garbled account of a subtle process. But our technical vocabulary has nothing in it to make for greater clarity. In fact, being based on the supposition that rhythm is as it were 'detachable', it would do the process even rougher justice, a process that recreates in Pound's version all that which Cavalcanti achieves with the word "amar", which in my 'closer' translation "to love" I dissipate.

It is important to note, also, that Pound has made a good translation. The word "moving", for instance, is not a 'commentary'; that is, one does not need the original in order to see just what Pound means. When Pound picks a word especially to direct the reader's attention to something he would like the reader to notice about rather than in the

original, he fails. As, for example, in the very next line of this ballata:

How summon up my heart for dalliance?

It is impossible for the reader not to feel he is being coerced, that the word "dalliance" is being used in any other than a dogmatic fashion (being not of the 'living language'). And this is a reasonable response, or Pound seems to want to direct the reader to some aspect of the medieval world that he, Pound, feels is related to his starting point in the original, in this case a repetition of "amare". Where this occurs the rhythm also fails, for rhythm can never be independent of the thought or the passion, and where they do not 'live', nor will it. Pedagogy has superceded the interpretive extension of language, and one does not, after all, anticipate precision of rhythmical balance in a set of lecture notes.

It is clear that in these early sonnets and ballate we are dealing with extremely isolated successes of translation. I have said that while Pound is influenced by Rossetti, he is yet trying to make something new of that influence. What better way to determine the substance of such a claim than by a comparison of one of Rossetti's translations with one of Pound's? For this purpose I choose the ballata (XI in Pound's sequence) "Perch'i' non spero di tornar gia mai", written in exile at Sarzana, for in it is perhaps the most authentically individual speaking voice in Cavalcanti, with

all the 'poignancy' and 'intensity' that Pound refers to in The Spirit of Romance.

Rossetti's version, considered as a poem in its own right, is a polished, much more 'finished' piece than Pound's, but that on a different level to the original, as the very first line demonstrates:

Because I think not ever to return.

According to T.S.Eliot every word in a line of poetry must be set to work. Eliot himself has translated this line as the opening of his Ash Wednesday:

Because I do not hope to turn again.

His intention, it is true, is not the same and the line assumes connotations it does not have in the original, but how much more specific weight it carries, for every word registers an exact meaning which seems heightened in the context of the line as a whole. Rossetti's line is like an automobile engine idling when it is in need of tuning; the parts, that is, are not doing as much as they should. "I think not ever" offends our sense of 'natural' word-order, (by which I mean not only normal speech patterns but also genuine poetic language), and consequently the words do not seem to contain or bear anything; they are, as it were, inefficient. Pound's version of the line, on the other hand, has more substance and weight, perhaps because the words recall actual speech:

Because no hope is left me, Ballatetta.

Yet something is still missing; the solemnity (in the sense of the term given in the O.E.D. - "Observance of ceremony or special formality on important occasions."), the sententiousness that Eliot has managed to capture and which gives to his line a kind of aura, a suggestiveness - the 'connotation of the symphony' perhaps?

Rossetti's rhythmical structure is easily demonstrated:

> Because I think not ever to return,
> Ballad, to Tuscany, -
> Go therefore thou for me
> Straight to my lady's face,
> Who, of her noble grace,
> Shall show thee courtesy.

Here, it will be noticed, the final four lines can be arranged in almost any order without the slightest damage done to the 'music'. Pound's version of the passage is more subtle:

> Because no hope is left me, Ballatetta,
> Of return to Tuscany,
> Light-foot go thou some fleet way
> Unto my Lady straightway,
> And out of her courtesy
> Great honour will she do thee.

Pound's measure is still iambic and casts the feeling in a simple mould, but we get a sense from the passage of the words 'pulling against' this metre, creating a certain tension. In the last three lines of Rossetti's version the substantives are all located in the same place in the line. Not in Pound's, and because of this the rhythm does not seem to be an onward rush which the specific thought is powerless to shape, thus making possible a greater subtlety. This subtlety

consists in the feeling we get from Pound's version that there are more than just two rhythmical values that may be assigned to any given syllable. Whereas in Rossetti's lines the syllable is either stressed or unstressed, in Pound's there is the possibility of different degrees of stress, and this has not become a possibility because Pound has 'broken the pentameter' (as yet he has not), but because he is sensitive to the relative values of syllable length, the quantitative measure that is the basis of his retranslation of Sonnet VII and his first translation of the Canzone d'Amore. It is necessary now to turn to these poems and Pound's dealings with them, but first one final point concerning the early translations.

One could go on at length analysing in detail Pound's modification of his Victorian poetical education. It is not, however, simply a matter of 'adapting' or 'improving on' Rossetti. The second line of the third stanza of Ballata XI is a line that Rossetti could never have made:

I do give o'er this trembling soul's poor case.

It is a line of Herbert, or of a Holy Sonnet by Donne, but to say this is not to accuse Pound of mimicry. He has felt his way back to a poetic mode of dense but transparent language, in strong, individual rhythms. It is not the right vehicle for a translation of Cavalcanti, but that does not detract from its own specific excellence. It suggests a certain freedom from the Victorian, and while Pound seems

to have no 'voice of his own', as yet, it also demonstrates his remarkable capacity to make other people's voices his own. In this is a premonition of The Cantos and it involves us in the central problem of that poem - the problem of its unity. Does Pound take on the voices of others because he is ultimately unable to harmonise diverse experience? The retranslation of Sonnet VII and especially both translations of "Donna me prega" bear upon this question.

Pound's retranslation of Sonnet VII, "Chi è questa che vien", could not have been written before 1920 (when the 1912 version was reprinted in Umbra), and was first published, together with the first translation of the Canzone d'Amore, in 1934 in Make It New. Why did Pound light upon this particular poem for reworking? The sonnet is an early effort and, as I have said, is marred by a certain religiosity which was to disappear as Guido developed a more personal art. Pound is drawn to it because it is so manifestly 'medieval' and because it provides him with a clear instance of Guido invoking the virtù. He had fixed on this in his Introduction to the 1912 translations:

> Another line, of which Rossetti completely loses the significance is
> "E la beltate per sua Dea la mostra." (Sonnet VII, ll.)
> "Beauty displays her for her goddess." That is to say, as the spirit of God became incarnate in the Christ, so is the spirit of the eternal beauty made flesh dwelling amongst us in her. And in the line preceding,
> "Ch'a lei s'inchina ogni gentil vertute"
> means, that "she" acts as a magnet for every "gentil vertute," that is, the noble spiritual powers, the invigorating forces of life and beauty bend toward her; not

"To whom are subject all things virtuous."
The inchina implies not the homage of an object but the direction of a force.[15]

We find Pound already tampering with his translation of line 10 in the interval between the American and British editions of 1912 - "For toward her all the noble powers incline" becomes "For all the noble powers bend toward her". The vestigial implication of homage in "incline" is eradicated. Otherwise there is no improvement.

A passage from The Spirit of Romance furnishes additional, perhaps more important evidence of the nature of Pound's involvement with this poem, and while it is manifestly 'early' prose, we may take it that it embodies a 'way of seeing' that remained with Pound at least until the retranslation:

> Some mystic or other speaks of the intellect as standing in the same relation to the soul as do the senses to the mind; and beyond a certain border, surely we come to this place where the ecstacy is not a whirl or madness of the senses, but a glow arising from the exact nature of the perception. We find a similar thought in Spinoza where he says that "the intellectual love of a thing consists in the understanding of its perfections," and adds "all creatures whatsoever desire this love.[16]

The passage is a better commentary on Pound's later translation than any I could make. In the poem itself is that very glow and that desire for the love which is an under-

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[15]Pound, Sonnets and Ballate, p. xx. I note, for the sake of clarity, that Rossetti's translation of line 11 is: "While all things beauteous own her deity."

[16]Pound, Spirit of Romance, p. 91.

standing of perfection:

> Who is she that comes, makyng turn every man's eye
> And makyng the air to tremble with a bright clearenesse
> That leadeth with her Love, in such nearness
> No man may proffer of speech more than a sigh?
>
> Ah God, what she is like when her owne eye turneth, is
> Fit for Amor to speake, for I can not at all;
> Such is her modesty, I would call
> Every woman else but an useless uneasiness.
>
> No one could ever tell all of her plesauntness
> In that every high noble virtue leaneth to herward,
> So Beauty sheweth her forth as her Godhede;
>
> Never before was our mind so high led,
> Nor have we so much of heal as will afford
> That our thought may take her immediate in its embrace.[17]

All this by way of prologue to the crux of the problem; being 'another man's voice', (however hypothetical the 'man'), how valid is Pound's archaic medium? The question involves us in more questions than that of the rhythm. Donald Davie is quite right to point out that Pound had 'broken the pentameter' and that, rhythmically, the translation is based on that "dismemberment of the line from within that was noted as the distinctive rhythmical pleasure of poems in Cathay."[18] But we must determine what has been the cost of the advance. Archaisms may be coercions, dogmatisms. Can the propagator of such relics ever persuade his audience that his is, after all, a 'living language'?

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[17]This is the poem as it stands in The Translations of Ezra Pound. The version in Make It New has "cannot" in 1.6; 1.12 is "Never before so high was our mind led"; and 1.14 has "mind" for "thought".

[18]Davie, p. 107.

Pound has himself commented upon the problem:

> There is no question of giving Guido in an English contemporary to himself, the ultimate Britons were at that date unbreeched, painted in woad, and grunting in an idiom far more difficult for us to master than the Langue d'Oc of the Plantagenets or the Lingua di Si.
>
> If, however, we reach back to pre-Elizabethan English, of a period when the writers were still intent on clarity and explicitness, still preferring them to magniloquence and the thundering phrase, our trial, or mine at least, results in:
>
> [Here he offers his translation.]
>
> The objections to such a method are; the doubt as to whether one has the right to take a serious poem and turn it into a mere exercise in quaintness; the 'misrepresentation' not of the poem's antiquity, but of the proportionate feel of that antiquity, by which I mean that Guido's thirteenth-century language is to twentieth-century Italian sense much less archaic than any fourteenth-, fifteenth-, or early sixteenth-century English is for us. It is even doubtful whether my bungling version of twenty years back isn't more faithful, in the sense at least that it tried to preserve the fervour of the original. And as this fervour simply does not occur in English poetry in those centuries there is no ready-made verbal pigment for its objectification.[19]

But this is from a discussion in which Pound is concerned to demonstrate that a translator's concern with any one aspect of an original tends to exclude other, no-less-valuable aspects. This context somewhat modifies his conclusions. Moreover, his word quaintness strikes a wrong note. Quaintness is a property, for instance, of Rossetti's translation of La Vita Nuova. Or perhaps of any literal prose translation of the Morte d'Arthur. 'Quaint', according to the O.E.D., means "Unusual or uncommon in character or

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[19]Pound, Literary Essays, pp. 199-200.

appearance, but at the same time having some attractive or agreeable feature, esp., having an old-fashioned prettiness or daintiness." The term "old-fashioned" is crucial; it implies not something genuinely old but something with the appearance of being old seen in the terms of the present. In this sense Pound's poem may very well be "quaint", but it is not an "exercise in quaintness" because it strives to remove the sense that its method is old-fashioned, it strives to make the old contemporary with the new by mixing its linguistic expedients.

But what do we mean by "a living language"? A living language is not necessarily a language in everyday use, but a medium for the precise location and shaping of a thought in relation to the phases of time and the planes of space which that thought penetrates; it is, we might say, both the vehicle and substance of the mind's entelechy. And if we conclude that "Who is she that comes" is not 'of the living language', what of certain of the poems of Personae?

Let us take line 12. Out of context the reader can only stumble through it:

Never before was our mind so high led.

Yet this has supplanted a smoother version based on a more normal order (see p.81 above, n.17):

Never before so high was our mind led.

And we may take for granted the supposition that Pound rejected in the initial writing the smoothest, most normal

version of all:

Never so high before was our mind led.

It seems obvious that Pound is moving as far from smoothness as possible. But in context his final version of this line does not falter or stumble; it has rather the refined and artificial movement of a pavanne. The slightest of revisions contributes to the same effect ("can not" for "cannot"), as do the "an" before "useless", the orthographic archaisms, lengthening the syllable ("plesauntness") or suggesting the presence of an extra, muted syllable ("clearenesse"), thus slowing and as it were holding the poem back. We have to conceive the movement of the poem in a completely new way: it is no longer a headlong temporal transition from beginning to end, but a flower unfolding, the changing patterns of light refracted by a moving glass. There is no onrush and no inertia. There is no longer a material, the sense, to which an energy, the rhythm, is applied. Such a separation has become untenable. Not matter on the one hand and energy on the other, but both in a single living tissue, a leaf unfurling. I do not know of any more precise or more technical way of describing it than this. At any rate it is necessary to provide an alternative perspective to that of Donald Davie, whose tendency to see the same fact in terms of the stasis of the noun results in the judgement that this poem, and poetry so written, is undynamic and lacking in

energy.[20] True, the energy derived from man's kinship with the ox *is* missing. But that is not the only energy fundamental to human life. Through archaism Pound has freed his language from the welter of the phenomenal world and penetrated the world of hyper-phenomena, where the form and the moving are one. If we think of some seventeenth-century lyrics intended for singing, say by Waller, we will see that in them is no simple *forward* movement either. The assumption of a musical patterning has reunited Pound to a poetry unknown to the imitators of Shakespearean or Miltonic blank-verse. But in the conditions of this achievement is a fundamental weakness. The very transcendance of the welter of phenomena is a form of 'skirting round' the real issue with which art has to deal, and perhaps Pound's judgement of his poem, "a mere exercise in quaintness", reflects a half-conscious understanding of this fact.

At the same time that he was experimenting thus with a relatively simple sonnet, Pound was deeply involved with similar problems in the highly obscure *Canzone d'Amore*. His interest in this poem seems to have the same basis as his interest in Sonnet VII - the poem's *medievalism*.The essay that surrounds it is testimony of this. Moreover, in first translation his solution is the same. Therefore he comments explicitly on the "other dimension" of music:

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[20]Davie, p. 119.

The reader will not arrive at a just appreciate of the canzone unless he be aware that there are three kinds of melopoeia, that is to say, poems made to speak, to chant and to sing. This canzone, Guido's poetry in general, and the poems of medieval Provence and Tuscany in general, were all made to be sung. Relative estimates of value inside these periods must take count of the cantabile values.[21]

His disposition of the Italian text is intended to indicate visually some of these values:

I trust I have managed to print the Donna me prega in such a way that its articulations strike the eye without the need of a rhyme table. The strophe is here seen to consist of four parts, the second lobe equal to the first as required by the rules of the canzone; and the fourth happening to equal the third, which is not required by the rules as Dante explains them.[22]

And all this is not so recondite as to be unconnected with the practise of poetry in our own day:

Those writers to whom vers libre was a mere 'runnin' dahn th' road', videlicet escape, and who were impelled thereto by no inner need of, or curiosity concerning, the quantitative element in metric, having come to the end of that lurch, lurch back not into experiment with the canzone or any other unexplored form, but into the stock and trade sonnet.[23]

The possibility in music of different durations of sound is paralleled in metric by the 'quantitative element'. Exploration of this is a primary function of Pound's translation of the canzone.

In the first stanza we can see that the quantitative element has somehow been exaggerated beyond its

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[21]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 167.

[22]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 168.

[23]Pound, Literary Essays, pp. 172-73.

function in normal everyday language, made 'larger than life', made, that is, almost into music in its own right:

> Because a lady asks me, I would tell
> Of an effect that comes often and is fell
> And is so overweening: Love by name,
> E'en its deniers can now hear the truth,
> I for the nonce to them that know it call,
> Having no hope at all
> that man who is base in heart
> Can bear his part of wit
> into the light of it,
> And save they know't aright from nature's source
> I have no will to prove Love's course
> or say
> Where he takes rest; who maketh him to be;
> Or what his active virtù is, or what his force;
> Nay, nor his very essence or his mode;
> What his placation; why he is in verb,
> Or if a man have might
> To show him visible to men's sight.

Reading this we are struck by an interesting phenomenon. Here are none of the archaisms of "Who is she that comes" (excepting "for the nonce" and "nay", which nevertheless do not suggest any particular period), but the feel of the passage is altogether archaic. It cannot be fitted to any of our archetypes of style, yet the intricacies of its shape and movement imply a sensibility which is not modern.

It is extremely 'musical', almost as 'musical' as the original:

> DONNA mi priegha
> perch' i volglio dire
> D'un accidente
> che sovente
> é fero
> Ed é sí altero
> ch'é chiamato amore
>
> SICCHE chi l negha
> possa il ver sentire

Ond a 'l presente
chonoscente
chero
Perch i no spero
ch'om di basso chore

ATAL rgione portj chonoscenza
Chè senza
natural dimostramento
Non o talento
di voler provare
Laove nascie e chì lo fá criare

E QUAL è sua virtu e sua potenza
L'essenza
e poi ciaschun suo movimento
E 'l piacimento
che 'l fá dire amare
E se hom per veder lo puó mostrare.

Pound has not, naturally, been able to pattern his translation in anything like so tight and elaborate a way, but it seems to have very much the <u>same kind</u> of movement as the original. It seems to move forward not gropingly and hesitantly, but with infinite subtlety and elasticity. We might say that the stresses do not begin a <u>beat</u>. Imagine the flight of a bird, gliding, soaring, and, sometimes, beating its wings. Each form of flight somehow grows out of the last, and there is a complex unity, a kind of inevitability about the whole process. Virtuosity is barely distinguishable from the laws of aerodynamics. So Pound can climb steadily, dip, build up momentum with an effort of poetic wings, then glide and make upon the balance of the air a little ornamental flourish:

. . . Can bear his part of wit
into the light of it

> And save they know't aright from nature's source
> I have no will to prove Love's course
> or say. . .

The figure is about as close as I am able to approach to a definition of the effect. At any rate, Pound's whole intention seems to be to capture the lyricism of the original. And this very lyricism is the thing that takes Pound's poem out of the modern world. But why? Is lyricism not modern? I mean by 'lyricism' something more than the musical organisation of language. Lyricism is always an affirmation of value in that to which it is applied, of value that cannot be treated in other terms for it transcends the ethical and the metaphysical. The green leaf is good not because it is conducive to the 'good life', it is simply good. But the value affirmed by lyricism inevitably connotes the harmony, the integration of experience. It would be more accurate to say that the green leaf is not so much 'good in itself' as good in so far as it is 'saying' something about the whole of life. In this sense lyricism is at least 'difficult' in a disjointed and highly specialised world. Moreover, lyricism cannot be independent of precision, otherwise it becomes a mere musical accompaniment. Pound's translation does very definitely fail in precision (it is more obscure than the original), and this seems to be because its language is too much moulded to a preconception; the language, that is, does not seem to be a part of the actual forming and exegesis of the experience. It is an accessory after the fact, not an

active participant, and in this sense not a living language.[24]

None of this is the case with Pound's later translation of the canzone which appears in Canto xxxvi. In fact it is quite the reverse. George Dekker points out the significance of this version in terms of The Cantos as a whole:

> Canto xxxvi is precisely in the centre of the seventy-one cantos which precede the Pisan sequence. This centrality serves to emphasise its significance as a target, both for reader and author, of refinement in expression and comprehension which Pound thinks should be aimed at. It does, as well, supply a rationale for his poetic method in The Cantos.
>
> Go, song, surely thou mayest
> Whither it please thee
> For so art thou ornate that thy reasons
> Shall be praised from thy understanders,
> With others hast thou no will to make company.
>
> 'Ornate'? This is not merely a mistranslation of Cavalcanti's 'adornato' (which on previous occasions Pound had translated rather more closely as 'fair attired' and 'adorned') but the most violently inappropriate description of his own utterly unornate translation. Cavalcanti's poem is indeed a dazzling display of rhyme, a masterpiece of its kind (according to a greater expert in these matters than Pound or Rossetti); 'ornate' is surely Pound's tribute to Cavalcanti's untouchable mastery and a confession of the inadequacy of his own ersatz. This translation of 'Donna me prega' is, then, especially a way of referring the reader of The Cantos to the original.[25]

The significance is even greater, in so far as Pound recognises more than the untouchable mastery of Cavalcanti. He recognises the apparent unattainability of true harmony in experience.

In order to suggest the impenetrability of the

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[24] My objection to the word "dalliance" earlier (p. 75 above) is the same, only the fault is there more obvious.

[25] G. Dekker, The Cantos of Ezra Pound, p. 126.

original (while persuading the reader that there is, nevertheless, a profound meaning to grasp) Pound has to produce a much closer, more exact translation. Here is its first stanza:

> A lady asks me
> I speak in season
> She seeks reason for an affect, wild often
> That is so proud he hath Love for a name
> Who denys it can hear the truth now
> Wherefore I speak to the present knowers
> Having no hope that low-hearted
> Can bring sight to such reason
> Be there not natural demonstration
> I have no will to try proof-bringing
> Or say where it hath birth
> What is its virtù and power
> Its being and every moving
> Or delight whereby 'tis called "to love"
> Or if man can show it to sight.

Despite such phrases as "where it hath birth" and "whereby 'tis called" there is not here the slightest feeling of archaism. It is unquestionably a modern idiom, the nature of which can be clearly seen in this line from the second stanza:

> Cometh from a seen form which being understood. . .

It is comprised largely of the normal word and the normal phrase lifted out of the imprecision inherent in their 'normality' by the implicit reference to a precise original. That does not mean they are in themselves precise; rather that they call to mind the need for precision because somehow their arrangement manages to suggest that there is an exact if unattainable meaning.

Therefore there is no longer any lyricism, no

expectation that the communication of beauty can seduce any but those that already know:

> Wherefore I speak to the present knowers
> Having no hope that low-hearted
> Can bring sight to such reason.

There is, perhaps, no need for lyricism, there being nothing new to impress upon the listener. This is not what Cavalcanti meant in demanding an informed audience, but "present knowers" means not those who understand love or even scholastic philosophy, but those who have perceived the obscurity, the impenetrability, and the unattainability of Cavalcanti's perception.

The first four lines of the opening stanza do seem to have a patterned rhythmical structure, if somewhat halting. The fifth and sixth lines, however, introduce what is to be the dominant effect:

> Who denys it can hear the truth now
> Wherefore I speak to the present knowers.

These are very independent units of sense, relating to each other as parts of a rational discourse, but not on account of any kind of metrical equivalence. That is not to say that the rhythm is no part of the meaning, but it is to say, and this is vital, that the correspondance of the rhythm to the meaning has become so specific, so unique, that there is apparently no possibility of tying the aura, the glow around the thought into any sort of a larger pattern. In terms of what I have said already this represents a failure of the

personality to contain experience. By a paradox Pound presents it as a containment, the only containment of certain types of experience possible in a world where legislator, scientist and artist cannot, being so specialised, meet or merge. The green leaf is good in that it 'says' something about the whole of life. If a line of lyric poetry be harmonious, it also defines the harmony of the mind whose thought it contains. Lyricism inevitably involves the harmony, the integration of human life. If there can be no spontaneous perception of the harmonious interaction of any two separate thoughts or experiences, only the hard-won and humble learning of the scholar or the tedious gropings of the natural scientist, there can be no lyricism, and a Cavalcanti will be truly 'impenetrable'.

CONCLUSION

Pound finds in Cavalcanti his model of art and of what it is to be an artist. Guido's importance is greater than that of any other single 'influence' or 'model', for while Daniel, Li Po, or Gaudier-Brzeska all in their way helped to fashion Pound's craft, they did not, nor could they supply the true goal of his métier. At a certain point the critical process, which is the foundation of the practise of art, must make an end and something else must begin, a swifter perception, a more immediate embrace, for as Pound remarks in The Serious Artist: "If Dante had not done a deal more than borrow rhymes from Arnaut Daniel and theology from Aquinas he would not be published by Dent in the year of grace 1913."[1] The goal of art, to Pound's mind, is Beauty, and it seems that Beauty is a perception of relations at a point where one's guide has departed, as Virgil departs from Dante in the Earthly Paradise. Pound finds in Cavalcanti a total personal fidelity to art, a commitment that transforms the whole man. In this is the source of that, for Pound, admirable arrogance. It is the arrogance of a man committed, in a kind of isolation, to the highest of goals. Thus while Pound does not openly discuss Guido's 'personal art', it is

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[1]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 49.

implicit in his dealings with him, his attempt to emulate as well as translate.

I have suggested that Pound failed. To recapitulate briefly, thought and energy should combine, "the thinking word-arranging, clarifying faculty must move and leap with the energizing, sentient, musical faculties,"[2] but Pound could not bring together into a unified whole the music of one translation of 'Donna me prega' and the accuracy of another. And I have suggested that this is an indication of the dilemma of the whole of modern literature.

Somewhere along the line, according to Pound, Eliot, and Yeats, a 'dissociation of sensibility' occurred in the evolution of English letters. All agree on this, even if there is some disparity between their respective consultations with Chronos. They could not, that is, agree on the date of its occurrence. For Pound it is not an exclusively literary phenomenon, but involves all other facets of the cultural and intellectual life. I have already quoted a relevant passage from the essay Cavalcanti; to rehearse it in part:

> For the modern scientist energy has no borders, it is a shapeless 'mass' of force; even his capacity to differentiate it to a degree never dreamed by the ancients has not led him to think of its shape or even its loci. The rose that his magnet makes in the iron filings, does not lead him to think of the force in botanic terms, or wish to visualize that force as floral and extant.[3]

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[2]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 52.

[3]Pound, Literary Essays, p. 154.

This is said, in 1934, with the conviction that the problem is only one of stupidity or at best lack of imagination. Canto xxxvi, however, leaves behind it a completely different sensation of the powerlessness of one man to unify. For all the optimism of Ernest Fenellosa's analogy between poetry and science, which Pound seized ardently upon, it seems that, in the end, science is necessarily too remote to meet with art. But does this ultimately mean that the artist is unable to achieve the spontaneous, lyrical perception of the harmonious interaction of any two or more separate experiences? If a thought or an experience be defined with 'scientific' precision, is that <u>necessarily</u> to isolate it from all others, or to permit a relation only at the level of abstract hypothesis? I suggested earlier that the problem may be too complex, in the modern world, to solve at a <u>personal</u> level. But is this to say that the artist cannot as it were 'step back' from his work, when the conditions are right, when a great deal of hard work has been done, and allow things to begin to make their own relations and the lyrical nature of things to reassert itself?

This is precisely what does occur in the <u>Pisan Cantos</u>, especially Canto lxxxi:

> Yet
> Ere the season died a-cold
> Borne upon a zephyr's shoulder
> I rose through the aureate sky
> <u>Lawes and Jenkyns guard thy rest</u>

Dolmetsch ever be thy guest,

Has he tempered the viol's wood
To enforce both the grave and the acute?
Has he curved us the bowl of the lute?
Lawes and Jenkyns guard thy rest
Dolmetsch ever be thy guest
Hast 'ou fashioned so airy a mood
To draw up leaf from the root?
Hast 'ou found a cloud so light
As seemed neither mist nor shade?

Then resolve me, tell me aright
If Waller sang or Dowland played.

Your eyen two wol sleye me sodenly
I may the beaute of hem nat susteyne

And for 180 years almost nothing.

Ed ascoltando al leggier mormorio
there came new subtlety of eyes into my tent,
whether of spirit or hypostasis,
but what the blindfold hides
or at carneval
nor any pair showed anger
Saw but the eyes and stance between the eyes,
colour, diastasis,
careless or unaware it had not the
whole tent's room
nor was place for the full
interpass, penetrate
casting but shade beyond the other lights
sky's clear
night's sea
green of the mountain pool
shone from the unmasked eyes in half-mask's
space.

What thou lovest well remains,
the rest is dross
What thou lov'st well shall not be reft from thee
What thou lov'st well is thy true heritage
Whose world, or mine or theirs
or is it of none?
First came the seen then thus the palpable
Elysium, though it were in the halls of hell,
What thou lovest well is thy true heritage
What thou lov'st well shall not be reft from thee

The ant's a centaur in his dragon world.

Pull down thy vanity, it is not man
Made courage, or made order, or made grace,
     Pull down thy vanity, I say pull down.
Learn of the green world what can be thy place
In scaled invention or true artistry,
Pull down thy vanity,
                    Paquin pull down!
The green casque has outdone your elegance.

"Master thyself, then others shall thee beare"
     Pull down thy vanity
Thou art a beaten dog beneath the hail,
A swollen magpie in a fitful sun,
Half black half white
Nor knowst'ou wing from tail
Pull down thy vanity
               How mean thy hates
Fostered in falsity,
               Pull down thy vanity,
Rathe to destroy, niggard in charity,
Pull down thy vanity,
               I say pull down.

But to have done instead of not doing
               this is not vanity
To have, with decency,knocked
That a Blunt should open
          To have gathered from the air a live tradition
or from a fine old eye the unconquered flame
This is not vanity.
     Here error is all in the not done,
all in the diffidence that faltered . . .

"When we know more of overtones," we will be in a better position to understand the polyphony of this passage. Pound strikes many different notes and the timbre is in each case exact and resonantly clear. In this is the precision of the intellect, or in some cases a precision beyond the intellect; "And for 180 years almost nothing", or "The ant's a centaur in his dragon world". The most modern turn of phrase stands alongside the "live tradition" of gathered antiquities, yet the idiom is unquestionably modern, for the

organisation reflects a consciousness in which the old has become contemporary. Stravinsky achieved the same thing in music, a polyphonic incorporation of the whole history of music, in so far as that history was alive in his ear. "What thou lovest well remains, the rest is dross."

Polyphony is the simultaneous and harmonious combination of a number of different melodies. Just why Pound's fragments cohere in this way I cannot say, but they form a single vision. Pound moves from a song which suggests a seventeenth-century sensibility as it would function in the twentieth-century to a gnomic finale which recalls Four Quartets. It is not a narrative or dramatic mode, the parts being simultaneous; it is a long way from the specific method of Cavalcanti, who made use of both narrative and drama. Yet it is profoundly lyrical and penetrates the permanent reality which the narrative and dramatic modes, in the modern world, seem to bypass. Donald Pearlman says:

> The paradisal vision is not suddenly thrust upon the reader like a blinding light but is circuitously, arduously and suspensefully approached. It is prepared for by the parallel development of images, feelings and insights which merge into successive stages of synthesis. These partial syntheses, difficult to maintain, are themselves occasionally subject to disintegration, but spiritual synthesis always manages to reassert itself against the pressure of the quotidian. Finally, the sensibility of the poet achieves a breakthrough into the realm of the permanent; a culminating vision is vouchsafed him that is not subject to dissolution, but, on the contrary, becomes his permanent possession and the basis of the future articulation of the poem.[4]

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[4] D. Pearlman, The Barb of Time, p. 237.

It has not been part of my intention to delve deeply into The Cantos. To record the ultimate fruition of Pound's effort in that poem is nevertheless extremely relevant, for it is not just the success of the capolavoro at issue, but of the whole poetic endeavour. To say this is not to justify Pound's dealings with Cavalcanti in translations and criticism as having great literary merit in their own right, but it is to justify his fidelity to the goal perceived there.

APPENDIX

J.E.Shaw's translation of the Canzone d'Amore

I

A lady beseeches me, and therefore I am willing to treat of an accidentthat is often fierce, and yet so majestic, which is called Love: so that those who disbelieve in it may hear the truth.

And now I require an intelligent audience, because I have no hope that people of inferior quality can muster sufficient understanding for a discussion of this kind. For I am not inclined to try, without scientific exposition, to demonstrate where it resides, and who brings it into existence, and what its virtue and its power are, and then its essence and all its movements, and the attraction that earns for it the name of loving, and whether one can show it so that it can be seen.

II

In that part where memory is it takes up its abode, formed, like the diaphanous, by light. By a darkness that comes from Mars, and stays, it is brought into existence, and has a name of sense, a habit of mind, and a desire of the heart. It is derived from form perceived and comprehended, which finds its place and dwelling in the Possible Intellect, as in a subject. In that part it is always without pain, because it is not an effect of physical quality; it shines upon itself, a permanent effect; it has not pleasure but reflection, because it can provide no kindred image.

III

It is not a virtue, but comes from the kind of perfection which is called by that name: I mean the sensitive virtue, not the rational. Its judgement is without regard for well-being, for absorbed attention takes the place of reason. Its discernment is bad in the case of a vicious man. Its power often results in death, if the virtue that supports the opposite way should be much hampered: not because it is opposed to nature, but in as far as it is a man's fate to be turned away from the Perfect Good, to that extent he cannot claim to be alive, since he has no steady control over himself, and the result may be much the same when he

forgets it.

IV

Its actual essence is when the desire becomes so great that it surpasses the norm of nature; after that it has no more dignity of repose. It moves, changing colour, alternating between laughter and weeping, and disfigures the face with fear. It does not last long. You will notice, moreover, that it is found, for the most part, in people of worth. The strange quality produces sighs, and compels a man to stare into empty space, while anger rises flashing fire (no man can imagine it without experience), and to stay still even though he is being shot at, and not to try to find in it any pleasure, or, of course, wisdom, either much or little.

V

From a kindred complexion it draws a glance that makes the charming fancy appear real, and when thus struck it cannot remain concealed. The dart is not that of shy beauties, for desire of that kind is dissipated by fear: the spirit that is wounded is also rewarded. And it cannot be recognised by sight-perception: there is no white in such an object, and, if you understand me, pure form can only be perceived by means of that which results from it. Without the colour of material objects, secluded in a dark medium, it shines faintly: from it alone comes the true reward, says one, in all sincerity, who can be trusted.

VI

My song, you may go confidently wherever you please, for I have so polished you that your speech will be praised by persons of intelligence: you have no desire to be with others.[1]

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[1]Shaw, Cavalcanti's Theory of Love, pp. 97-102.

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