

POUND'S QUANTITIES AND "ABSOLUTE RHYTHM"

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No one has ever attacked the problem of translating "melopoeia" as seriously as Ezra Pound. Standing behind this seriousness, of course, is Pound's faith in "absolute rhythm," in the inherent emotional qualities of word sounds—a notion not limited to rhythm but encompassing the whole aesthetic of sound. Pound's belief in "absolute rhythm" is well known, but not, I think, its full intensity and literalness. It may be re-examined with benefit, as here, in the introduction (dated 15 November 1910) to the *Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti*:

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 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.¹

In my personal experience, both in reading and conversation, the usual response to the question of Pound's metrics is a vague mutter about "quantities" and a quick change of subject (exceptions as noted below). Certainly Pound's rhythms remain a mystery—intuited by many, widely praised, scarcely explained. His use of quantity is self-proclaimed; but this may be glibly called upon to explain too much, or else to discourage the non-classical reader from further inquiry. Actually, any such quantitative patterns demonstrable in Pound's verse are governed by no system, and, once recognized, must still be referred to the concept of "absolute rhythm." Pound's *vers* really is *libre*. The quantities and other sonic elements, while carefully attuned to each other, are left on principle to shape themselves irregularly, asymmetrically.

Pound's absolute rhythm is novel only in its extreme literalness. Some correspondence between word sound and emotion is assumed in every metrical theory. Coleridge remarked that "every passion has its proper pulse";² R. G. Collingwood has argued philosophically that no sentence may be written which does not convey an emotional burden.³ Coleridge, using the word "pulse," is thinking in terms of traditional metres (though his perception led him to the innovations of "Christabel"). Pound extends the correspondence to include the full range of word sound, not only recurring rhythmic patterns but the asymmetrical durations called and systematized by

the Greeks as quantities, and usually ignored in English. Collingwood's argument applies equally to poetry or to the abstractest of prose, or for that matter, to the prose of the most sullen undergraduate; the sentence exists as fact but always with some inarticulate emotion involved with it. Pound would agree, but with the further complication that the poet must work backwards from the pre-existent emotion to the particular combination of words and word sounds and cadences which may embody the emotion. This is just as true in original composition as in translation. The emotions are the raw material, the subject matter, which may not be falsified by rhythmic ineptitude any more than the doctrine of a holy sonnet may be altered for the sake of the rhyme scheme. Pound refuses to acquiesce in emotions that conveniently fit his rhythmic vocabulary. Emotion is "precise," and it corresponds precisely to some abstract aural formation in any language, or in music, or in language and music together, but in each case it is unique.

Pound's belief in rhythm as the embodiment of some hitherto disembodied emotion seems actually to be an extension, or perhaps a demythologizing of Yeats's notions about rhythm as one of the symbolic forms: "All sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of their long energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions, or, as I prefer to think, call down among us certain disembodied powers, whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions." Yeats sees the function of the artist as the creation of ever new symbolic forms, "because an emotion does not exist, or does not become perceptible or active among us, till it has found its expression, in colour or in sound or in form, or in all of these, and because no two modulations or arrangements of these evoke the same emotion."⁴ In Yeats's work, this insistence on the absolute equivalence of rhythm to emotion led him, in connection with the actress Florence Farr, to experiments with recitation to the psaltery (a lyre-like instrument), in an attempt to defeat the distortions of conventional musical setting. "What was the good of writing a love-song," he asked, "if the singer pronounced love 'lo-o-o-o-o-ve.' or even if he said 'love,' but did not give it its exact place and weight in the rhythm?"⁵ The psaltery settings reproduced in Yeats's essay show non-mensural musical notation, and the word rhythms marked by scansion in longs and shorts to reproduce Yeats's "chanting" delivery. Pound's settings of the words of Villon in his opera *Le Testament* take a different approach, as seen below, but the problem is identical: to provide a musical setting for words that does not distort any element—stress, quantity, whatever—of the sacrosanct verbal rhythm.

Pound's view of traditional metrical verse insists likewise on the absoluteness of absolute rhythm. Rather than reduce all the variations of; say, dactylic hexameter to a single paradigm, he begins with the variations. "So called dactylic hexameter does NOT start from ONE type of verse," he argues in his "Treatise on Metre." "There are, mathematically, sixty-four basic forms of it; of which twenty or thirty were probably found to be of most general use, and several of which would probably have been stunts or rarities." But even this "does not take account of shifting caesura or any of the various shadings."⁶ Pound, then, argues a view of metrical verse insistently empirical rather than theoretical. The sound of the line comes first, and all of its

intricacies, whether or not any system of scansion could diagram them. Donald Davie has recently made this point in a chapter on rhythms in the *Cantos* in his introductory book on Pound for the Fontana Modern Masters series; and to support it he offers a sensitive rhythmic analysis of the "Libretto" section of Canto 81, which plays variations on a well-known lyric of Ben Jonson's. Pound's verses are free, while Jonson's are metrical: "but *are* they?" Davie asks:

If Jonson's poem is carefully and intelligently spoken, do we *hear* any one line repeating any other? There *is* repetition in fact, and the symmetry between the three strophes is Jonson's, not his printer's; but the repetition is 'with variations,' with variations so audacious and inventive that a twentieth-century ear is baffled by them, and few modern readers of Jonson can, when challenged, scan his poem.⁷

Pound's adaptation, then, as Davie demonstrates, develops not the metric paradigm, which unites all poems in the same metre, but the peculiar variations that separate Jonson's poem, and Jonson's emotions, from all others.

But even the scansion that Davie offers, he admits, leaves out important rhythmic principles of Jonson's lyric, most notably the principle of quantity. "Pound would say," says Davie, "that traditional prosody is as helpless before this dimension of Jonson's 'metrical' verse as before the supposedly 'non-metrical' verse of the *Cantos*; and Pound would be right."⁸ The question, as will appear, is not whether a quantitative metric is possible in English. Pound's imitation of sapphic metre in "Apparuit" will be examined below, but he recognized the limited success of his effort and never repeated it. The English language, as John Thompson has suggested, contains quantities, but quantity "is not in English a distinctive feature. It is not recognized by the users of the language as an essential signal in the system." Stress, on the other hand, "serves to distinguish not only 'words' as when we say *convért* or *cónvert*; it serves to form the larger units of speech—phrases, clauses, and sentences—and to distinguish noun from adjective, subject from verb."⁹ Quantity, then, must normally remain a free variable in the verse line, like assonance, alliteration, relative stress—ever present, but not regulated into a pattern. But before examining the more complex issue of quantity any further, it is necessary to establish Pound's notion of "absolute rhythm" more firmly.

II

Pound's 1910 statement about "absolute rhythm" can only be understood through its expression in several modes of activity. I would like to set four exhibits side by side.¹⁰

To begin, we may take the "diagrammatic translations" from Arnaut Daniel. To Pound, Arnaut's emotions are objectified in the sounds of his verse, trapped within the closed system of Provençal phonemes. Specifically Provençal emotions, they do not exist in English. No translation can convey the poem but must point the reader back to the original:

No vueill s'assemble
 mos cors ab autr' amor
 Si qu'eu jail m'emble
 ni volva cap aillor;
 Non ai paor
 que ja cel de Pontremble
 N'aia gensor
 di lieis ni que la semble.
 [I'd ne'er entangle
 my heart with other fere,
 Although I mangle
 my joy by staying here
 I have no fear
 that ever at Pontrangle
 You'll find her peer
 or one that's worth a wrangle.]

Priorities go to the shifting caesurae, which produce a "sea-chantey swing"; to the "thumping and iterate foot-beat" accumulating through many stanzas, swamping every refinement of diction; and to the actual rhyme sounds ("autr' amor," "other fere") preserved as exactly as possible.¹¹ This example from Arnaut's "Can chai la fueilla," admittedly extreme, reminds us of the seemingly absurd verbal contortions Pound is willing to execute in order to approximate sound.

Beside the above selection we may set some passages from "The Seafarer," as Pound exactly did himself in his earliest extensive critical statement "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris," a series in the periodical *The New Age* (Dec. 1911-Feb. 1912). His point was, he said, to establish a certain element in native English "which has transmuted the various qualities of poetry which have drifted up from the south";¹² and he means not just the alliterative stress-metric but the whole complex of Anglo-Saxon emotions objectified in the poem, vowels, consonants—as Hugh Kenner puts it, "in the gestures of tongue and expulsions of breath that mimed, about A.D. 850, the emotions of exile."¹³ Ignoring lexical inaccuracies, both real and alleged, we see that Pound intends more than a dictionary equivalent, more even than an artistic re-creation in another language. He aims at impossibility, delivering sound and cadence intact, and at times he succeeds uncannily:

hrim hrusan band, haegl feoll on eorthan. . . .
 [Frost froze the land, hail fell on earth then. . . .]

Melopoeia is not translated, "save perhaps by divine accident, and for half a line at a time."¹⁴ It happens often enough to confirm his intentions:

Dagas sind gewitene,
 ealle anmedlan eorthan rices. . . .
 [Days little durable,
 And all arrogance of earthen riches. . . .]

Where sound cannot be echoed, Pound imitates cadence:

Maeg ic be me selfum soth-giedd wrecan,
 sithas secgan, hu ic geswinc-dagum
 earfoth-hwile oft throwode. . . .

[May I for my own self song's truth reckon,
Journey's jargon, how I in harsh days
Hardship endured oft.]

Pound's success in "The Seafarer" is due partly to the large proportion of Anglo-Saxon cognates in modern English; but where these do not exist, Pound often invents false cognates by a species of bilingual pun. *Eorþan rices*, for instance, does not mean "earthen riches" but "kingdoms of the earth"; *wrecan* does not mean "reckon" but "express." In the lines,

Dryhtnes dreamas thonne this deade lif
laene on lande . . .

[My lord deems to me this dead life
On loan and on land,]

laene means not "on loan" but "brief." In each case, however, Pound sacrifices lexical for melopoetic accuracy, while loosely paraphrasing for meaning. A life "on loan" is plausibly a "brief life"; "to reckon" is colloquially "to express"; and "earthen riches" comes closer to the feeling of the original, Kenner observes, than either "kingdoms" or "realms," which suggest political units too sumptuous for the period.¹⁵ It is not proper to defend this practice on grounds of accuracy, but rather to understand that without it Pound could not have created the metric and word music of his poem. Characteristically, Pound does not attempt to follow the laws of Anglo-Saxon prosody in modern English but imitates cadence and sound line by line; as a result he manages to capture the most salient feature of Anglo-Saxon rhythm, missed by every other translator, namely, the heavy initial stress followed by weak syllables. Both in "The Seafarer" and in the "diagrammatic translations" of Arnaut Daniel, Pound insisted on the claim of melopoeia. Rhythm and sound are absolute correlatives to feeling, independent of both meaning and language.

Beside these two translations can stand one of a different sort: Pound's musical setting of Villon in his "opera" *Le Testament de François Villon*. This work, an astonishing *tour de force* for a musical amateur, resulted from Pound's persuasion that no composer of the modern age was setting fine verse with proper attention to the niceties of prosody. His solution looks like this:



These opening bars cannot suggest the variety of Pound's music in *Le Testament*, but they do indicate the direction of his effort. Everything is subordinated to the delivery of Villon's verse. The essentially monophonic line is supported by minimal instrumentation mainly at unison and octave. Staging is conceived as rigidly stylized, with masks, so as not to distract from the text. The melodies are defiantly irregular, written in a complex notation hardly matched until the advent of Milton Babbitt (Pound had help with it from George Antheil). The competent composer, Pound believed, writes his rhythms exactly, not approximately; he does not expect the performer to do his work for him. ("When Ysayë played a bad piece of music," said Pound, "he played a great deal that the composer never thought of.")¹⁶ Furthermore, these micro-rhythms are contained within an unchanging tempo, a dynamic rhythm-sweep, which Pound sometimes called the "great bass":

The tempo of every masterwork is definitely governed; and not only the general tempo of the whole work, but the variations in speed, the tempo of individual passages, the time interval between particular notes and chords.¹⁷

All this strictness serves to capture the precise inflections, nuances, durations, stresses, of lines of verse in a precise, unalterable (and scarcely readable) notation. As before, the emotion is objectified in a rhythm that is absolute.

One final exhibit may be set beside these others. In 1920, during the gestation of *Le Testament*, Pound took an interest in a scientific instrument called the phonoscope, invented by Jean-Pierre Rousselot, which throws an additional side-light on the theory of absolute rhythm. Only two arts, said Pound, "spoken poetry and unwritten music, are composed without any material basis, nor do they ever become 'materialized.'" ¹⁸ Abbe Rousselot's instrument provided Pound's nearest approach to a materialization of these rhythmic arts, which are incomprehensible in any less exact notation:

Every one has been annoyed by the difficulty of indicating the *exact* tone and rhythm with which one's verse is to be read. One questions the locus of degrees, *sic*: at what point is it more expeditious to learn musical notation and to set one's words to, or print them with the current musical notation, rather than printing them hind-side-to and topsy-turvy on the page. And musical notation? Has been of all man's inventions the slowest to develop, and people have tried various devices from our very unsatisfactory own, to the circular bars of the Arabs, divided, like unjust mince-pies, from centre to circumference. . . .

Rousselot, then, has scientifically demonstrated the crudity of conventional rhythmic notations. The phonoscope is especially valuable, of course, for determining quantities:

And this little machine with its two fine horn-point recording needles, and the scrolls for registering the *belles vibrations* offers a very interesting field of research for professors of phonetics, and, I think, considerable support, for those simple discriminations which the better poets have made, without being able to support them by so much more than "feel" or "intuition." For example the "laws" of Greek prosody do not correspond with an English reality. No one has succeeded in writing satisfactory English quantitative verse . . . though, on the other hand, no English poet has seriously tried to write quantitative verse without by this effort improving his cadence.¹⁹

Rousselot's invention apparently pointed toward a new, scientific way to determine a prosody for *vers libre*.

III

These exhibits confirm Pound's interest in absolute rhythm as a quality peculiar and distinctive in every work, whatever the medium, that can be called rhythmical at all. When we return to Pound's statements on "absolute rhythm," however—this time in a somewhat different wording—we find a very odd, irrational sequence of association:

I believe that every emotion and every phase of emotion has some toneless phrase, some rhythm-phrase to express it.

(This belief leads to *vers libre* and to experiments in quantitative verse.)²⁰

The leap from "absolute rhythm" to *vers libre* is certainly understandable. But why necessarily to experiments in quantity? Here, I think, there is no logical connection: there is simply a glimpse into Pound's individual preoccupations. The enemy of absolute rhythm is not conventional English metric, or any particular system of metric, but simply habit. Any rhythmic system, being worked too long, exhausts itself; the poet will turn elsewhere. "I still think," Pound wrote to Mary Barnard, "the best *mechanism* for breaking up the stiffness and literary idiom is a different metre, the god damned iambic magnetizes certain verbal sequences."²¹ Any habitual rhythm, like so much English iambic, falsifies emotion not only through rhythm but through diction as well. Quantitative verse is just one mechanism to stimulate the rhythmic imagination and dislodge habitual locutions—a convenient and fruitful one, to be sure, but only one among many.

The poet laureate Robert Bridges, near the beginning of Pound's career, had once more raised the spectre of English quantities that had long haunted classically minded English poets by issuing a set of avowedly experimental verses; but where Bridges began his experiments with a system of rules for determining quantities, Pound, committed to absolute rhythm, rejected this approach just as he rejected any prosodic system. "As regarding rhythm" he said, the imagists were "to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of a metronome."²² Prosodies are a petrification of habit. Even the Greeks had no rigid rules for quantity:

As to the tradition of *vers libre*: Jannaris in his study of the Melic poets comes to the conclusion that they composed to the feel of the thing, to the cadence, as have all good poets since. He is not inclined to believe that they were much influenced by discussions held in Alexandria some centuries after their deaths.²³

He suspected that laws of quantity were imposed on Latin by grammarians, and that indigenous Italic stress rhythms did not re-emerge until the *Pervigilium Veneris*.²⁴ Quantitative metric is improper in English not because impossible or inappropriate, but because any metric tends toward habit and therefore habituated emotion:

I think the desire of *vers libre* is due to the sense of quantity reasserting itself

after years of starvation. But I doubt if we can take over, for English, the rules of quantity laid down for Greek and Latin, mostly by Latin grammarians.

I think one should write vers libre only when one "must," that is to say, only when the "thing" builds up a rhythm more beautiful than that of set metres, or more real, more a part of the emotion of the "thing," more germane, intimate, interpretative than the measure of regular accentual verse; a rhythm which discontents one with set iambic or set anapestic.

... I think progress lies rather in an attempt to approximate classical quantitative metres (NOT to copy them) than in a carelessness regarding such things.²⁵

Quantity, witness Rousselot, is an objective fact in English; but Pound does not intend a system built on phonoscopic durations.

In attending to "absolute rhythm," the reader must hear all the contributory factors, quantities included. Traditional metric postulates two elements to be compared: the metrical paradigm, and the actual sound that enters the reader's ear. Pound is interested only in the objective sound; a paradigm may remain in potential, but only in the reader's imagination. T. S. Eliot once wrote that "the ghost of some simple metre should lurk behind the arras in even the 'freest' verse; to advance menacingly as we doze, and withdraw as we rouse."²⁶ The conceptual paradigm still stands. While Pound criticized Eliot for writing "as if all metres were measured by accent,"²⁷ his own use of quantity in free verse, where he uses it, works much the same way: the paradigm is alert in the reader's mind, his ear full of Greek and Latin metres so that he may recognize bits and fragments as they emerge. But Pound explicitly rejected Eliot's explanation as incomplete, not only because it ignores quantity, but because it demands the ghostly paradigm throughout the verse.

Still, Pound proclaimed the value of Greek and Latin verses as ear-training for the English poet. Encouraging Mary Barnard, an aspiring poetess, to practice with sapphics in English, Pound recommended no conventional handbook but an article in the Lavignac and Laurencie *Encyclopedie de la Musique*, "Grece: Art Greco-Romain," by Maurice Emmanuel; this is a scholarly tract more than a hundred pages long which scans Greek quantities with modern musical notation. "I don't know how much real use it wd. be," wrote Pound to Mary Barnard,

but I know nothing else of any use. I have never worked on it or with it, but it contains intelligent remarks. What they call solfege, or savoir divider une note, is the job. Whether text-book is any more use than a text-book on tennis or trapeze-work, I doubt. . . .

There aren't any *rules*. Thing is to cut a shape in time. Sounds that stop the flow, and durations either of syllables, or implied between them, "forced onto the voice" of the reader by the nature of the "verse." (E.G., my Mauberley.) Only stick to sapphics, till you can send me good ones.²⁸

However much Pound valued troubadour poetry for its interrelation with music, he made no case for Provençal quantities; that element must be supplied by study of Greek. So Pound rarely commends the troubadours without adding the name of at least one Greek poet. In *The ABC of Reading*, he explains, "the Bion is put with the troubadours for the sake of contrast, and in order to prevent the reader from thinking that one set or a half-dozen sets of melodic devices constituted the whole of that subject."²⁹ "I prize the

Greek more for the movement of the words, rhythm, than anything else."³⁰ "I have never read half a page of Homer without finding melodic invention, I mean melodic invention that I didn't already know."³¹ And to Mary Barnard he wrote, "if you really learn to write proper quantitative sapphics in the Amurikan langwidge I shall love and adore you all the days of my life" (adding, however, "provided you don't fill'em with trype").³²

Latin is useful for those without Greek; Pound thought its melopoeia inferior, but at the same time he defended Latin poets against "a certain snobbery dating back to the Renaissance," which has "unduly boosted the Greek authors at the expense of Ovid, Propertius and Catullus."³³ Greek is too wholly melopoeic, hence untranslatable; the poets were, apart from Homer, "rather Swinburnian";³⁴ and English translators should never attempt "to keep every adjective, when obviously many adjectives in the original have only melodic value."³⁵ The Latin of Andreas Divus, then, is the best approach to Homer, "even singable"; and Catullus's two poems in sapphics prove that "he is the only man who has ever mastered the lady's metre," and that he was perhaps "in some ways a better writer than Sappho, not for melopoeia, but for economy of words."³⁶

Pound's one poem in the sapphic stanza, "Apparuit," was first printed together with "The Return" in the *English Review* for June 1912, just when Pound was working toward the principles of imagism and free verse. Given the paradigm, "Apparuit" scans smoothly, with perhaps one serious snag. I have marked all quantities, but only those stresses that do not coincide, for, despite the assertion of Harvey Gross, Pound is careful *not* to make each long syllable also a stressed syllable.³⁷ My scansion looks rather odd because the rhythms of Pound's poem, which seem to me unique in English, strain against typographic limitations even more than is usual. The markings account for four variables. Quantity and stress, and slack, thus: "Crimson." A long quantity without stress is marked with an *accent grave*: "glámōrous sún." A short syllable with stress counterpointed against it is shown by italics: "*d*élicately." A correct reading of the poem will probably demand some practice:

Golden rose the house, in the portal I saw
 thee, a marvel, carven in subtle stuff, a
 portent. Life died down in the lamp and flickered,
 caught at the wonder.

5 Crimson, frosty with dew, the roses bend where
 thou afar, moving in the glamorous sun,
 drinkst in life of earth, of the air, the tissue
 golden about thee.

Green the ways, the breath of the fields is thine there,
 10 open lies the land, yet the steely going
 darkly hast thou dared and the dreaded aether
 parted before thee.

Swift at courage thou in the shell of gold, cast-
 ing a-loose the cloak of the body, camest
 15 straight, then shone thine oriel and the stunned light
 faded about thee.

Half the graven shoulder, the throat aflash with
 strands of light inwoven about it, loveli-
 est of all things, frail *alabaster*, ah me!
 20 swift in departing.

Clothed in goldish weft, *delicately* perfect,
 gone as wind! The cloth of the magical hands!
 Thou a slight thing, thou in *access* of cunning
 dar'dst to assume this?

I have serious difficulty only in line five, where "with," though long by position, is not convincing, and "dew" can in no way be made to sound as short in my ear, even without stress. It is apparent that Pound's practice follows that of Sappho and Catullus rather than Horace: "Try writing Sapphics," he wrote to Mary Barnard, "and not persistently using a spondee like that blighter Horace, for the second foot."³⁸ Here I have scanned seven trochees in this position, and others could be admitted. Pound also uses free enjambement, preserving the sense discovered in Sappho and Catullus (but not Horace) that the rhythmic unit is not the line but the entire stanza. Furthermore, as I have said, Pound writes quantities definite enough to conflict with stress, creating tension and variety. "Remember," he told Miss Barnard, "the SWAT must strain against the duration now and again, to maintain the tension. Can't have rocking horse Sapphics any more than tu TUM iambs."³⁹

On pressing the analysis closer, however, questions arise. Line 5, for instance, scans much more smoothly thus:

Crimson, frosty with dew, the roses bend where. . .

But such a substitution is unprecedented, contradicting the very principles of classical scansion, which do not allow the feet to be shuffled about so: the change marks all the difference between the sapphic line and the hendecasyllabic. Pound's rhythm would, nonetheless, strike an English ear as satisfying, were it not for the nagging rules. This is the error, perhaps, that implanted in Edward Marsh a lasting suspicion of Pound's "artistic seriousness."⁴⁰ There seems no reason why Pound should not have revised. His attitude toward prosodic rules we have seen. Perhaps he left the anomaly deliberately as a trap for the inflexible pedant, and as a signal that his "English sapphics" must not be taken without a grain of salt. Pound arrived at his long and short values, it appears, purely by ear and intuition. He rejects systems for determining English quantity. He accepts the evidence of Rousselot's phonoscope and suggests to Mary Barnard that she stop by the *College de France* phonetics department on her way to Greece,⁴¹ but the

nearest he approaches any conclusive test of quantity is when he advises Mary Barnard to try singing:

"I am rich" is as near as "rich am I," the *long* vowel makes the syllable long, and a syllable that is open and easily sung long fits a long space, perhaps better than a short vowel with heavy consonant load. . . .⁴²

There is no use looking in English for consistency:

Given the phonoscope one finds definitely a reason why one cannot *hear* the *th* in a phrase like *in the wind*, as a "long." It isn't long. Whatever the Greeks may have done, one does not *hear* the beginning consonants of a word as musically part of the syllable of the last vowel in the word preceding; neither does the phonoscope so record them.⁴³

Furthermore, Pound, like most other English quantifiers, allows stress in many cases to substitute for quantity. Thus in line 2, "subtle" is a trochee only by virtue of stress, while the first syllable is quite distinctly short in quantity and the second long; elsewhere it could have acted as a stress counterpointed against the prosodic scheme, and the ear understands it as a trochee only because it knows that a trochee must fall in that position. Pound's syllables may be long either by nature, or by position, or by stress; but sometimes a stressed syllable is insisted on as short and counterpointed. Pound's principles are thus arbitrary and contradictory. Compare, in line 10, "open" and "yet," where the short syllables could have served as long by position, with the lovely effect in line 6, "glamorous sun," where the double consonant wins out over both short quantity and lack of stress. Compare "flickered" in line 3, or "cunning" in line 22, where stress alone makes the short syllable long, with "frail alabaster," where the stressed syllable remains short. This is not to say that Pound's sapphics are failures, but that they are an illusion—a skillfully designed illusion. The pleasure they give is that of discovering that words unexpectedly fit to a well-known music; but the music must be present in the mind to begin with, or it cannot be heard at all. Pound understood the illusory nature of his quantities, I think, because he made it the subject of the poem first printed beside "Apparuit," "The Return."

The classicist D. S. Carne-Ross has advanced a sensitive description of Pound's metrical practice, analyzing "The Return" and a few passages from the *Cantos*. The rhythm of these verses, he finds, is based on a number of well-defined rhythmic fragments which reappear freely and are linked together by irregular free matter:

The more strictly lyrical sections of the *Cantos* are based on a set of recurrent metrical cola—the adonic and other short dactylo-trochaic units—irregularly combined and linked by groups of "free" syllables (roughly comparable to the linking *incipitia* of Pindar's dactylo-epitrites). If we can imagine a Greek choric ode not governed by the principle of *responson* and allowing a great number of free, linking units, the effect would not be dissimilar. The "lyrics" of the *Cantos* are quite unlike anything else in English and I believe it could be demonstrated that they represent a creative adaptation of Greek lyric.⁴⁴

Carne-Ross finds the principle of free combination of rhythmic fragments described in the *Notes sur la Technique Poétique* (1912) of Duhamel and Vildrac, which Pound recommended enthusiastically;⁴⁵ and he notes precedents in Pindar and the choric odes of Greek drama. The fragments that

inform the rhythm of "The Return" are based on the sapphic stanza:

- See, they return; ah, see the tentative
 Movements, and the slow feet,
 The trouble in the pace and the uncertain
 Wavering!
- 5 See, they return, one, and by one,
 With fear, as half-awakened;
 As if the snow should hesitate
 And murmur in the wind,
 and half turn back;
- 10 These were the "Wing'd-with-Awe,"
 Inviolable.
 Gods of the winged shoe!
 With them the silver hounds,
 sniffing the trace of air!
- 15 Haie! Haie!
 These were the swift to harry;
 These the keen-scented;
 These were the souls of blood.
 Slow on the leash,
 pallid the leash-men!

The sapphic stanza, says Donald Davie, exists in this poem as "a sort of phantasmal presence," or as a "musical theme which is . . . developed and elaborated not quite beyond recognition but certainly beyond analysis."⁴⁶ Carne-Ross offers the analysis, which must be studied by anyone interested in this subject, and which I can only supplement. My scansion is intuitive and not above quibble, but if it is accepted, then sapphic fragments (possible combinations of over two consecutive feet or else the distinctive concluding adonic) appear in lines 2, 4, 9, 11-14, 16, 18-20. These fragments are tentative at first, and gradually solidify into more recognizable units as the "gods of the winged shoe" emerge. The onomatopoeic rhythms of the opening lines are obvious; these relatively free lines are tied together by a swaying choriambic pattern $\cdot x x \cdot$ in lines 1 and 5, which recurs with increasing frequency to the end. At lines 12-15 the sapphic rhythms are most insistent, reaching a peak at the exclamations "Haie! Haie!" and then subsiding to the last line, which, as in the sapphic stanza, is an adonic. This crescendo-diminuendo effect mimicking the emergence and departure of the gods seems to me the chief *raison d'être* of the poem. It is worth noting that this is duplicated in the musical setting of the poem by Pound's friend Walter Morse Rummel, which Pound praised as "the best comment on that poem that has appeared."⁴⁷ "The Return," then, is a free vorticist construction out of bits of Greek rhythm. The construction has a distinct, free-standing shape all its

own. The classical metres here are rightly described as ghostly—they are the ghost, observed by Eliot, lurking behind the arras. As "quantities" they are illusory, like the quantities of "Apparuit," painstakingly conjured by the poet but necessarily projected into the lines by an aural imagination prepared in advance.

Where Pound begins with classical metres, he makes them new. Whatever the recurrent element in a particular passage, whether "quantitative" fragments, or an invented pattern of his own, or a syntactic unit, the sound of the whole must finally be understood with reference to the broad principle of "absolute rhythm." The sound of a line is as definite and as abstract a shape as a sculpture by Gaudier, and both are built out of repeated fragments freely combined. The vorticist, Pound argued, does not passively reflect impressions of nature but takes elements out of nature and with them creates new forms. Each free form "is" a unique emotion. Pound's rhythms may be analyzed by isolating the recurrent elements; but ultimately every line has its own unique, absolute shape. Such verse has its own dangers. If the rhythm becomes too rarefied, or too vague, the reader is discouraged from listening to it at all. This is what happened historically when imagism turned into "Amygism" and Pound felt obliged to return to metrical forms—to produce "Mauberley." And through the middle years of this century it has happened on a scale far larger than Pound could have imagined in his most cynical moments. Pound insisted so strenuously on the aural patterns in his free verse because he knew that the reader must engage with it rhythmically or else remain deaf altogether. Sadly, too many nowadays are content to remain deaf.

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NOTES

¹ *Translations* (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 23.

² *Biographia Literaria* (London: Bell & Sons, 1905), p. 181.

³ *The Principles of Art* (1938; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 259-68.

⁴ "The Symbolism of Poetry," *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 156-57.

⁵ "Speaking to the Psalter," *Essays and Introductions*, p. 14. Yeats's essay should be supplemented with Florence Farr's more informative pamphlet *The Art of Speaking to the Music of the Psalter* (London: Elkin Matthews, 1909).

⁶ *The ABC of Reading* (1934; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 203.

⁷ *Pound* (Suffolk, Eng.: Fontana, 1975), p. 84.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁹ *The Founding of English Metre* (London: Routledge, 1961), p. 10.

¹⁰ The texts that will receive close examination in this essay are from the following sources. The Arnaut Daniel text and translation appear in *Literary Essays*, pp. 118-19. Old English text for "The Seafarer" is from *Seven Old English Poems*, ed. John C. Pope (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), pp. 33-38, while Pound's version is from *Translations of Ezra Pound*, pp. 207-09. My handcopy of the opera is taken from a microfilm of the original, produced by the Library of Congress Photoduplication Service. Pound's "Apparuit" is in *Personae: The Collected Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1949), p. 68, while "The Return" is on p. 74.

- 11 *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1954), pp. 116-19.
- 12 "Guido Cavalcanti," *The New Age*, 10 (4 Dec. 1911), p. 155.
- 13 "Blood for the Ghosts," in *New Approaches to Ezra Pound*, ed. Eva Hesse (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1969), p. 33. See also my article "A Case for Pound's 'Seafarer,'" *Mosaic*, 9 (Jan. 1976), pp. 127-46.
- 14 *Essays and Introductions*, p. 5.
- 15 Introduction to *Translations*, pp. 9-10.
- 16 "Music and Brains," *The Listener*, 16 (2 Dec. 1936), p. 1068.
- 17 "Some Recent Concerts," *The New Age*, 24 (12 Dec. 1918), p. 189. More thorough discussion of these subjects may be found in my doctoral dissertation "Ezra Pound and Music" Univ. of Toronto, 1974. See also Murray Schafer, "The Developing Theories of Absolute Rhythm and Great Bass," *Paideuma*, 2 (1973), pp. 23-35, and his forthcoming edition of Pound's music and music criticism for *New Directions. Le Testament* has been recorded by Robert Hughes and the Western Opera Theatre on Fantasy 12001.
- 18 *Impact: Essays on Ignorance and the Decline of American Civilization* (Chicago: Regnery, 1960), p. 45. Pound could have added the dance.
- 19 Ezra Pound, "The Island of Paris: A Letter," *Dial*, 69 (Dec. 1920), pp. 638-39.
- 20 *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 84.
- 21 *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: Harcourt, 1950), p. 260.
- 22 *Essays and Introductions*, p. 3.
- 23 *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.
- 24 *The Spirit of Romance* (1910; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1953), p. 18.
- 25 *Essays and Introductions*, pp. 12-13.
- 26 "Reflections on *Vers Libre*," *New Statesman*, 8 (3 March 1917), pp. 518-19; rpt. in *To Criticize the Critic* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 1965).
- 27 *Essays and Introductions*, p. 421.
- 28 *Letters*, p. 386.
- 29 *The ABC of Reading*, pp. 41-42.
- 30 *Letters*, p. 91.
- 31 *The ABC of Reading*, p. 43.
- 32 *Letters*, p. 252.
- 33 *Impact*, p. 67.
- 34 *Essays and Introductions*, p. 36.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 273.
- 36 *The ABC of Reading*, pp. 47-48.
- 37 See Harvey Gross, "'The Celebrated Metric' of Ezra Pound," in *Sound and Form in Modern Poetry* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1964), p. 141. To be perfectly fair, Gross does admit one exception ("access" in line 23), and his comments on "Apparuit" are favorable; but he does not scan the poem, and surely the irregularities are more interesting than he suggests. The general tone of his essay is destructive. Contrast the articles of D. S. Carne-Ross cited below; also William McNaughton, "Ezra Pound's Metres and Rhythms," *PMLA*, 77 (1962), 136-46, and John Kwan-Terry, "The Prosodic Theories of Ezra Pound," *Papers on Language and Literature*, 9 (1973), pp. 48-64.
- 38 *Letters*, p. 252.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 262.
- 40 The story is told in Charles Norman, *Ezra Pound* (New York: Minerva, 1969), p. 82.
- 41 *Letters*, p. 259.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 261.
- 43 "The Island of Paris: A Letter," p. 639.

⁴⁴ Untitled answer to questionnaire, *Arion*, 3 (1964), pp. 34-35; see also Carne-Ross' "New Metres for Old: A Note on Pound's Metric," *Arion*, 6 (1967), pp. 216-32.

⁴⁵ *Essays and Introductions*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 34. Calvin Israel's argument that the "gods of the winged shoe" equal Pound's verses which will some day make a come-back is certainly too specific where specificity is not called for; "Imitation and Meaning in Ezra Pound's 'The Return,'" *Lock Haven Review*, No. 8 (1968), pp. 31-36.

⁴⁷ "Notice to Men of Letters," *This Quarter*, 1 (Fall 1925), p. 245; this note has escaped Donald Gallup's *Bibliography of Ezra Pound* but it is clearly Pound's. Rummel's "The Return" was published with *Songs of Ezra Pound* (London: Augener, 1913).

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