

A Case for Pound's "Seafarer"

By S. J. ADAMS

Surprisingly little has been written about Pound's translation of the Old English "Seafarer." A small flurry of controversy occurred in the correspondence columns of the *Times Literary Supplement* several years ago, when Kenneth Sisam objected to some incidental praise of Pound by an anonymous reviewer, who answered the attack briefly. After further attacks and testimonials, the affair subsided, leaving an impression that Pound's translation is a very pretty poem perhaps, but impossibly full of errors and nothing resembling the original.¹ Scholars in the meantime have tended to dismiss

¹See Kenneth Sisam, "Mr. Pound and the *Seafarer*," *Times Literary Supplement*, No. 2734 (25 June 1954), p. 409; James R. Sutherland, "Mr. Pound and the *Seafarer*" (9 July 1954), p. 447; Lord Harmsworth, "Mr. Pound and the *Seafarer*" (16 July 1954), p. 457; Philip Herzbrun, "Mr. Pound and the *Seafarer*" (20 August 1954), p. 529; F. L. Lucas, "Translation" (10 September 1954), p. 573.

Pound's poem, while Pound's admirers have continued to admire it—on the sly. Sisam's criticism of Pound, however, ticking off as it does a list of howlers, never raises the possibility that Pound knew what he was doing, that his blunders are deliberate effects, and that the effects have something to do with the power of Pound's verse. It is an old story with Pound, whose "Homage to Sextus Propertius" was viciously attacked by classical scholars. But the "Seafarer" is a different kind of poem from the "Homage": it is a true translation, not a paraphrase or an imitation, so that Pound's detractors are on solid ground. The relationship of Pound's poem to the original is complex (though not so complex as in the "Homage"), so that many factors must enter into a fair evaluation.

Truly, the scholar who possesses the original poem is in an awkward position, faced with two poems remarkably alike but different; his approach inevitably suffers from a psychological interference—something like hearing a new interpretation of a familiar song. He may prefer a bland Modern English substitute, that reminds him of the original, to a fully recreated poem. The scholar too will have his own understanding of the poem; Pound's, following a line of scholarship now in disfavor, will almost certainly differ. The reader without Old English, on the other hand, may find Pound's poem magnificent (to one who disagrees I have little to say), but he may be troubled by rumours of Pound's blunders. The question can only be settled by a line-by-line comparison of the two poems, with a mind alert to possible reasons for whatever divergences do exist—for it will be found that their number has been exaggerated. A simple check-list of Pound's "errors" is most misleading. But, before such a comparison is possible, some other points must be kept in mind.

Pound first published his "Seafarer" in the *New Age* of November 30, 1911. Except for a brief "philological note" it formed without comment the first of a series of twelve articles under the title "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris," which were said to illustrate a "new method" in scholarship. These articles consisted of translations from various medieval literatures (Pound piecing together and resurrecting poems from the dead) with commentaries on methods and purposes. Pound, more interested in Provençal and Tuscan poetry, has little to say about the "Seafarer"; but he lets it stand at the head of his series to represent the native Anglo-Saxon elements in English ready to mingle with Latin and Christian importations from the south. Pound in these articles perhaps arrogates to himself more scholarship than he possessed; but it should be remembered that he had respectable credentials and an M.A. (rarer then than now) in Romance Philology. His "new method" of scholarship is a deliberate reaction against the German philological tradition in which he was trained: he explains it as the method of the "luminous detail," the single relevant fact that crystallizes all the facts comprising the *Zeitgeist* more efficiently than the catalog-of-details method that he opposed. Like Pater before him, Pound took for his model Jacob Burckhardt's *Civilization of the Renaissance*. "The Seafarer," then, he offers as the "luminous detail" capturing the essence of pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon England. Such a method has less to do with scholarship, perhaps, than with imagism, which was the next step in Pound's development, and the method is sufficiently displayed in the *Cantos*, which combine both old and new in a veritable Germanic card-file of luminous details.

Thus the "Seafarer" has closer ties with Poundian imagism than first appears. The realism of the seafaring details in the original have impressed most of its readers (and they need not be less realistic even if we do accept the more recent allegorizing interpretations). And Old English poetry, like imagism, is a poetry of nouns. This is apparent even in the metric, which characteristically stresses nouns rather than verbs. The kennings, too, are strikingly reminiscent of the juxtaposed pictures, the "verb-nouns," that Pound was soon to discover in Fenollosa's notes on Chinese poetry. Only by this can we comprehend Pound's story in the *ABC of Reading*:

I once got a man to start translating the "Seafarer" into Chinese. It came out almost directly into Chinese verse, with two solid ideograms in each half-line. Apart from the "Seafarer" I know no other European poems of the period that you can hang up with the "Exile's Letter" of Li Po, displaying the West on a par with the Orient.²

"The Seafarer" also relates to imagist theory in the same way as the Japanese Noh—it is a longer work dominated by a single large, symbolically weighty image that holds together all the surrounding detail.

The appearance of the "Seafarer" at the head of the *New Age* articles points up another of Pound's purposes there, to show that translation is itself an act of criticism. The translator must not merely bring over the semantic meaning of his text, he must first determine the text itself and then try to recreate its indefinable poetic qualities within the conditions of another language. With a doubtful text, the translator must make editorial decisions for the reader. When matters of interpretation or nuance are doubtful, the translator must choose, while the reader of the original may suspend judgment. And when the original is remarkable for some one quality in particular, its sound for example, the translator is artful insofar as he captures it, even while sacrificing other more ordinary accuracies. Generally in translating Old English poetry there are two special problems: to create a diction in which the kennings and double nouns seem natural, and to find an equivalent for a metric non-existent in Modern English.

Pound's solution for the diction of his poem has drawn criticism: "Mr. Pound's 'Seafarer' is about as contemporary as Butcher and Lang's 'Odyssey.'"³ His diction is a vaguely archaic pastiche resembling no idiom ever spoken. Archaic language has been all but excluded from verse now for the past half century, and we commonly expect translations to pretend that they are poems written yesterday: for this Pound himself is partly responsible. But in 1911 not even Pound had shed the diction of Rossetti and the Nineties, and no contemporary poetic idiom was available. Contemporaneity had not yet emerged as a criterion. The archaic pastiche, with its "—eth" verbs and syntactic inversions, would have been more difficult to make convincing a few years later, but in 1911 it simply represented the first Georgian Anthology (1912) pushed to an extreme. This in itself would not save Pound's

²*ABC of Reading* (New York, 1960), p. 51. The basic line in Chinese verse contains four ideograms, corresponding, Pound implies, to the four measures in Old English.

³James R. Sutherland, "Mr. Pound and the *Seafarer*," *Times Literary Supplement*, No. 2736 (9 July 1954), p. 447.

poem—it does not save William Morris's *Beowulf* or Gilbert Murray's *Euripides*—but Pound's diction proves itself capable of expressiveness, and I for one would not trade the passage beginning "Lordly men are to earth o'ergiven" for anything else in poetry. Pound, though, would not have made his seafarer speak like a contemporary in any circumstances. For one thing, Old English translates so readily into cognates and derivatives which tend to have a more archaic feeling than other types of words; yet Old English is comfortably translated so, while Latin poetry is insufferable in a Latinate vocabulary—a convincing demonstration that we still feel Old English as the root of the language. For another thing, Anglo-Saxon culture itself, like Provençal, has a remote and archaic feeling,⁴ while the culture of Latin poetry is closer to ours, decadent, urban, urbane. Accordingly, Pound's improvisations on Propertius are thoroughly modern, while his versions of Old English and Provençal are archaic, and those of Cavalcanti deliberately recall the idiom of Wyatt. Truly, to render "Ne biþ him to hearpan hyge, ne to hring-pege" in contemporary idiom is just as artificial a convention as Pound's archaism. Not that the archaism accurately represents the diction of the original, but the Old English does have a formality about it which could not be represented in colloquial language. Such formality is as foreign to our sensibilities and our speech now as it was natural to the Anglo-Saxon, and Pound's peculiar diction is only an attempt, successful on the whole, to convey this feeling of nobility and easy formality. Pound's artificial speech, not denying the centuries of distance, creates a double awareness of the poem in time, as it was and as it appears now.

The translator having dropped the pretense of contemporary diction, the alien constructions of Old English, the kennings, the double nouns, all fit naturally into a field of diction already remote in feeling. But this raises a further question: how metaphorical are the metaphors? The verb *wrecan* in the first line of the "Seafarer," for example—it means "to express," literally "to ex-press," to push out, and it is thus related metaphorically to the exile theme of the poem; but is the metaphor really felt, or has it been lost through overuse at the beginnings of poems? Some of the kennings, too, are doubtful. Is *hwæles ebel* (l. 60) really felt as "whale's home," or is it just another word for the sea, or is it more comparable to "scaly herd" for "fish" in a more recent poetic convention? A novice to the language is at a more serious disadvantage here than anywhere, with no developed sense of the precise metaphorical weight of such expressions. Yet, as Professor Stanley has emphasized, the scholars themselves are often at a loss with such a small body of poetry extant.⁵ Pound, like most translators, assumes that such expressions ("song's truth," or "breast-cares") are truly metaphorical.

Pound's solution for the metric problem, unlike that for his diction, has been widely admired, and it is one of the best reasons for studying his "Seafarer." There is, or at least before Pound there was, no viable equivalent for the four-stress alliterative line; the translator must either use a metric al-

⁴See *The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York, 1950), p. 179: "We are just getting back to a Roman state of civilization, or in reach of it; whereas the Provençal feeling is archaic, we are ages away from it."

⁵E. G. Stanley, "Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Penitent's Prayer*," *Anglia*, 73 (1955), pp. 413-66.

ready familiar (blank verse? fourteeners?) or else invent a form on the pattern of the original. Pound's solution has won praise from his detractors: "The rhythm, as always with Mr. Pound, is memorable—but what else?"⁶ T. S. Eliot, in his first published book, had high praise for the "Seafarer's" metric:

It is not a slight achievement to have brought to life alliterative verse: perhaps the "Seafarer" is the only successful piece of alliterative verse ever written in modern English; alliterative verse which is not merely a clever *tour de force*, but which suggests the possibility of a new development in this form.⁷

Years later, Eliot discerned the "Seafarer's" "beneficent influence upon the work of some of the more interesting younger poets today,"⁸ and indeed himself brought Pound's innovations to fruition in the stress-metric of the *Four Quartets*.

Pound has always assumed that accurate translation includes an accurate equivalent for the sound and movement of the original, *if* the aural value is in some way remarkable. He had in these early days developed a mystique about word-rhythm, a belief in every rhythm as a unique *Ding an sich*: "I believe in an 'absolute rhythm,' a rhythm, that is, in poetry which corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed."⁹ This belief stands behind some of the practices in his "Seafarer" translation just as it stands behind the *vers libre* of imagism. Pound's interest in the "Seafarer" for its sound-value is suggested by its position next to the *cansos* of Arnaut Daniel in the *New Age* articles. Many times Pound sacrifices semantic meaning for a sound-effect. But it is amazing to see how Pound is able to reproduce the cadence and sound of so many lines with uncanny accuracy:

hrim hrusan band, hægl feoll on eorþan
Frost froze the land, hail fell on earth then

Obviously this sort of thing is not possible very often, but the frequency of Pound's successes suggests the direction of his effort.

While Pound attempts to reproduce the sound of the original line, sometimes slavishly, he does not, like some translators (Kemp Malone), make his metric conform to the rules of Anglo-Saxon prosody. Most of Pound's lines alliterate, but not all, and some on patterns impossible in Old English ("Journey's jargon, how I in harsh days . . ."). A few stand as quasi-Virgilian half-lines. Pound most of the time tries to approximate the stress-pattern and the number of syllables found in the original, since variation in the number of slack syllables in the "drop" is the major resource for variety in a stress-metric. Pound's lines are tighter or looser, slower or faster, in accordance with the original; his divergences, though, are consistently in the direction of tightening the line, probably because in the new metre too many light syl-

⁶James R. Sutherland, *loc. cit.*

⁷"Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry," pub. anonymously in 1917; rpt. in John Hollander, ed., *Modern Poetry: Essays in Criticism* (New York, 1968), pp. 44-45.

⁸*The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933; London, 1964), p. 38.

⁹"Prolegomena," *Poetry Review*, 1 (1912), p. 73.

lables would create ambiguities about where the stress should fall. This results in a less free-flowing movement, a more gnomic quality than the original. In addition, Pound tends to break up longer sentences into shorter units, so that his style is somewhat more disjointed than some more recent critics might like.¹⁰

Pound's most important metric practice, however, is a fairly simple one, yet it has been missed by every other translator I have seen. Old English verse rhythms are predominantly falling, and a majority of the lines drop away from a strong initial stress, presumably marked by the harp. Individual words, too, are regularly stressed on the first syllable (except for a few common prefixes). Consequently, Old English lines are marked as well by feminine endings, and individual words tend more toward feminine patterns than in Modern English (partly because of the inflections). This rhythmic phenomenon is perhaps a reason why the elegiac mood came so naturally to the Anglo-Saxon poet. But although falling rhythms are slightly unnatural in modern English verse, which is basically iambic, Pound takes great pains to preserve the falling patterns of the original. A glance at the beginnings of his lines will show how many have a strong initial stress—even more, in fact, than the original, as if to prove the point. I have looked too for single words with rising rhythm, but Pound seems to have avoided them entirely (again except for prefixes). And not surprisingly, Pound has taken equal care to make his line-endings overwhelmingly feminine. No other translation reproduces the falling rhythms of Old English poetry so successfully. Even Michael Alexander, who has studied Pound's "Seafarer," writes his own version with rising rhythms and masculine line-endings.

One curious result of this insistence on falling rhythms is the presence in Pound's translation of the double foot known in classical prosody as the adonic, -vv— a mark of both the hexameter line and the Sapphic stanza. This pattern is a Poundian fingerprint, and it does have an intrinsically satisfying conclusive feeling about it. Adonics do appear in Old English, but these result from the basic falling rhythm, and they of course have nothing to do with the quantitative foot; but their presence in the "Seafarer" is an interesting comment on the metric, which Pound used on only one other occasion—his translation from the Nekuia passage of the *Odyssey* in Canto I. This is Pound's oblique way of calling attention to similarities between Homeric and Old English poetry. (He clinches the matter by coining the adjective "dreory," recalled probably from the "Wanderer," lines 17 and 83). The adonic pattern occurs at certain crucial points in Pound's translation, notably in the half-lines, and their effect will be noted in the commentary below.

Pound uses one device in his translations which has often been misrepresented as ignorance or carelessness, and this is the bilingual pun. An example is the translation of *wrecan* as "reckon." Pound's rationale for this practice is connected with his effort to approximate sound-effects, even at the expense of semantic meaning. Nearly always, though, the meaning Pound

¹⁰See Kemp Malone, "Plurilinear Units in Old English Poetry," *Review of English Studies*, 19 (1943), pp. 201-4; R. F. Leslie, "Analysis of Stylistic Devices and Effects in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," and S. B. Greenfield, "Syntactic Analysis and Old English Poetry," both in Martin Stevens and Jerome Mandel, eds., *Old English Literature* (Lincoln, 1968), pp. 73-81 and 82-88.

substitutes is a fair paraphrase which would pass without comment were it not for the suspect pun. *Wrecan* means "to express," but the metaphorical weight is doubtful; Pound's word is another verb meaning roughly "to suppose," or even sometimes "to express," and it is a slightly overworn metaphor. Hugh Kenner takes another example, Pound's "earthen riches" for *eorþan rices*:

Eorþan rices doesn't mean "earthen riches" but "kingdoms of the earth"; "kings" in the next line enforces however an alliteration, and the available synonyms for "kingdoms," such as "realms," have the wrong connotations: "royaume" for instance implies something too settled, too sumptuous. Hence the recourse to "riches," a sort of pun on the word in the text which has a slightly wrong meaning but a completely right feeling.¹¹

The device is admittedly dangerous, and it is not really proper to defend it on grounds of accuracy. Pound's puns sometimes have little more defense than that he liked the sound. And it is no wonder that teachers of Old English raise their eyebrows, having watched so many students stumble into the same traps. But I think it is quite clear at least that Pound knew what he was doing—the device appears often enough in this and other translations, and Pound occasionally translates literally in one place and by pun in another. In nearly all cases the effect can be justified by sound, tone, or nuance.

I have stressed that translation is always a kind of interpretation, and the translator of the "Seafarer" is forced to make a number of editorial decisions. Much has happened in Old English scholarship since 1911 to date Pound's version of the poem. It is worth noting Pound's position on the two questions of interpretation that have occupied most of recent criticism. On the first of these it is enough to say that Pound agrees with Sweet and a majority of scholars that "the simplest view of the poem is that it is the monologue of an old sailor."¹² The notion that the poem is a dialogue between two sailors was first advanced by Rieger in 1869, and has recently been revived by John C. Pope.¹³

The question of Pound's de-Christianization of the "Seafarer" is a more serious matter. The difference in tone between Pound's version and the current conception of the original as a Christian lament, or even a Christian allegory, is far more drastic for this reason than for all of Pound's local blunders taken together. Yet Pound was perfectly in line with the best scholarship of his day. This must be understood, or else Pound's suppression of the Christian elements in the poem will seem arbitrary. That it was clear in his own mind what he was doing is shown in the "philological note" appended to the *New Age* printing of the poem:

The text of this poem is rather confused. I have rejected half of line 76, read "Angles" for angels in line 78, and stopped translating before the

¹¹Ezra Pound, *The Translations of Ezra Pound*, with an introduction by Hugh Kenner (New York, 1954), p. 11.

¹²Henry Sweet, *An Anglo-Saxon Reader in Prose and Verse*, 7th ed. (Oxford, 1894), p. 223.

¹³John C. Pope, "Dramatic Voices in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*," in Stevens and Mandel, pp. 163-97.

passage about the soul and the longer lines beginning, "Mickle is the fear of the Almighty," and ending in a dignified but platitudinous prayer to the Deity: "World's elder, eminent creator, in all ages, amen." There are many conjectures as to how the text came into its present form. It seems most likely that a fragment of the original poem, clear through about the first thirty lines, and thereafter increasingly illegible, fell into the hands of a monk with literary ambitions, who filled in the gaps with his own guesses and "improvements." The groundwork may have been a longer narrative poem, but the "lyric," as I have accepted it, divides fairly well into "The Trials of the Sea," its lure and the Lament for Age.¹⁴

Pound in fact translates only 99 lines of the 124 in the manuscript, but his views on the disintegration of the text were by no means extreme. Sweet comments on the conclusion that "it is evident that a majority of these verses could not have formed part of the original poem," and he, like Ettmüller, prints only 102 lines, relegating the rest to the notes. Professor Sieper in 1915 accepted only lines 1-58 as "original." And R. C. Boer, taking the most extreme position, argued that both "Wanderer" and "Seafarer" are compilations taken from three distinct original poems, one of them a dialogue, together with interpolated material. Even W. W. Lawrence, attacking Boer's thesis, assumed that the original "Seafarer" ended with line 102.¹⁵ This kind of criticism arose from assumptions that we no longer share: that the Anglo-Saxon poet held the same ideals of "unity" as a nineteenth-century professor, and that all the "non-Christian" poems in Old English represent the "pagan side" of the culture. Pound's purpose in including the "Seafarer" in his *New Age* series was, as I said, to represent the native, pagan Anglo-Saxon stock ready to receive influences from the south; he had by 1911, furthermore, developed his personal anti-Christian prejudices. Accordingly, and with the full sanction of scholarship, Pound attempted to recreate in his translation the original *Ur*-"Seafarer" systematically stripped of its Christian references.

The only just criticism of Pound's translation is a line-by-line comparison of the whole with the original. The procedure is somewhat repetitious and mechanical, but its benefits accrue to the understanding of both poems. I have consulted all of the pre-1911 editions of the "Seafarer" but one (R. P. Wülcker's, 1882, was unavailable) hoping—without reward—to find textual clues to some of Pound's oddities.¹⁶ I have compared four other translations of the poem; the citations from these in my notes may serve as reminders that Pound is not alone in taking liberties, and that often he creates beauty where others fail. None of these versions approaches Pound's in poetic merit, but they are not on a level. R. K. Gordon's literal prose rendition makes no pretensions to elegance. Kemp Malone's is the best of the verse translations; faithful and readable, it conveys one aspect of the Old English

¹⁴"I Gather the Limbs of Osiris," I, *New Age*, 10 (30 November 1911), p. 107.

¹⁵Early scholarship is summarized in G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, eds., *The Exeter Book* (London, 1936), pp. xxxvii-xxxix.

¹⁶Benjamin Thorpe, *Codex Exoniensis* (London, 1842); Ludwig Ettmüller, *Engla and Seaxna Scopas and Boceras* (Leipzig, 1850); C. M. W. Grein, *Bibliothek du angelsächsischen Poesie* (1857); M. Rieger, "Der Seefahrer als Dialog Hergestellt," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 1 (1869), 334-39; Friedrich Kluge, *Angelsächsisches Lesebuch* (Halle, 1888); Henry Sweet, *An Anglo-Saxon Reader* (7th ed., Oxford, 1894).

line, its patterns of alliteration, more definitely than Pound's. Charles W. Kennedy's verse, on the other hand, is poor—rhythmically monotonous, full of clichés and pseudo-romantic diction; it concludes, moreover, with line 65. Michael Alexander's version is readable but overly ingenious; he never slips away as far as Pound, but he maintains a consistently greater distance.¹⁷ In these notes I have marked with asterisk all those lines which stray from the text farther than ordinary license allows: there are nine of these altogether. For the rest, I hope it will become apparent how truly faithful Pound is, both to letter and spirit. The real justification is the excellence of Pound's poetry, and the interest in this magnificent poem which Pound has stimulated.

COMMENTARY

Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan
May I for my own self song's truth reckon,¹⁸

1: I have discussed the pun on *wrecan*. Alexander's version, oddly, is nearer to Pound than to the original: "The tale I frame shall be found to tally." One could quibble that "song's truth" reverses the force of *soðgied*, "true song." Kennedy omits the notion entirely: "I sing a song of my sea-adventure." Pound captures the cadence perfectly, running through the on-line to the heavily stressed off-line.

sipas secgan, hu ic geswincdagum
Journey's jargon, how I in harsh days

2: "Jargon," forced by alliteration, is perhaps too ornate for *secgan*, but it is no worse than Kennedy's "the strain of peril," or Malone's "say my farings." Alexander omits the notion of "journey" altogether. Again, Pound's cadence is a good replica.

earfoðhwile oft þrowade,
Hardship endured oft.

3: The first of Pound's half-lines, an adonic, translates an exceptionally short line in the original.

bitre breostceare gebiden hæbbe,
gecunnad in ceole cearselda fela,
Bitter breast-cares have I abided,
Known on my keel many a care's hold,

¹⁷Michael Alexander, *The Earliest English Poems* (Harmondsworth, 1966); R. K. Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London, 1926); Charles W. Kennedy, *An Anthology of Old English Poetry* (New York, 1960); Kemp Malone, *Ten Old English Poems* (Baltimore, 1941). For another favorable comparison of Pound's translations with others, see Vilas Sarang, "Pound's Seafarer," *Concerning Poetry*, 6, ii (1973), 5-11.

¹⁸Text of the original from I. L. Gordon, *The Seafarer* (London, 1960).

4-5: In 4, Pound preserves cognates; "abided" is a trifle poetical for *gebiden*. *Cear-selda* is awkward and has been disputed; "care's hold" is no odder than the original, and links with the ship images. Malone gives "care-seats"; Gordon, "many sorrowful abodes on ships." No one translates *selda* as "comrades," which is also possible. Pound's rhythm is still very close.

atol yþa gewealc þær mec oft bigeat
nearo nihtwaco æt nacan stefnan,

And dire sea-surge, and there I oft spent
Narrow nightwatch nigh the ship's head

6-7: Pound takes *nearo* literally, as it should be, though the meaning has been questioned (Pope glosses "anxious"). I suspect that this is a transferred epithet referring to the ship's prow: maintaining nightwatch on a narrow prow in high seas would be risky. "Hard night-watch" (both Gordon and Malone) and "bitter the watch" (Kennedy) destroy the image. Alexander's "through the narrowing night" is far-fetched. Pound takes slight liberty with *bigeat*. His cadence in both lines is close.

þonne he be clifum cnossað. Calde geþrunge
wæron mine fet, forste gebunden

While she tossed close to cliffs. Coldly afflicted,
My feet were by frost benumbed.

8-9: "Tossed close" for the unique *cnossað* is probably exact. Pound weakens *geþrunge* ("pinched") to "afflicted" and *gebunden* ("bound") to "benumbed," though "chains" in the following line picks up the latter metaphor. Alexander's "Cold then nailed my feet" imports too much from the crucifixion. The cadence is near-perfect in 8; 9 is perhaps a half-line.

caldum clommu, þær þa ceare seofedun
hat' ymb heortan; hungor innan slat

Chill its chains are; chafing sighs
Hew my heart round and hunger begot

10-11: Pound's syntactical liberties with *caldum clommu* and *seofedun* are reasonable. "Chafing," used for alliteration, is justified by *hat'*. Kennedy's "care weighed heavy upon my heart" alters the metaphor to a cliché, which the original certainly is not. Alexander's "care's sighed hot about heart" is excellently literal. Pound's "begot" is weaker than *slat*, but he needs it for his idiom, and it does preserve the feel of the line-ending; it is no worse than Alexander's "hunger fed" or Malone's "hunger broke." Line 10 is an instance of Pound's tightening light syllables.

merewerges mod. þæt se mon ne wat
Mere-weary mood. Lest man know not

12: Cognate translation is dubious here: "mere" is legitimate for a body of

water, though it is properly a small lake or pool. The original probably calls attention to itself more than "sea-weary" would imply, and at least Pound's coinage has more gravity. Alexander follows Pound's lead with "on a mere-wearied mind," likewise changing the noun to an adjective.

þe him on foldan f ægrost limpeð ,
 hu ic earmcearig iscealdne sæ
 That he on dry land lovliest liveth,
 List how I, care-wretched, on ice cold sea

13-14: *Foldan* is indeed specifically "dry land." Pound avoids the awkward impersonal construction. "List how I" is a supplied connective. In 13 the cadence is close; in 14, Pound does not mime the cadence, but he does suggest its roughness and preserves the subsidiary alliteration on *c*.

winter wunade wræccan lastum,
 winemægum bidroren,
 Weathered the winter, wretched outcast
 Deprived of my kinsmen;

15-16: "Weathered" is perhaps stronger than *wunade*, but *lastum* and *winemægum* lose their metaphorical value in Pound's equivalents. For 16, deficient in the original, Pound gives an adonic half-line.

bihongen hrimgicelum; hægl scurum fleag.
 Þær ic ne gehyrde butan hlimman sæ ,
 Hung with hard ice-flakes, where hail-scur flew,
 There I heard naught save the harsh sea

17-18: "Hard" is supplied for alliteration. "Harsh" for *hlimman* ("resounding") is inexact; Pound preserves the clustered *h*'s, however, and replaces *hlimman* with the onomatopoeic sibilance of "save the harsh sea." He suggests the rush of light syllables but reduces them slightly.

iscaldne wæg. Hwilum ylfete song
 dyde ic me to gomene, ganetes hleoþor
 ond huilpan sweg fore hleahtor werā,
 mæw singende fore medodrince.
 And ice-cold wave, at whiles the swan cries,
 Did for my games the gannet's clamour,
 Sea-fowls' loudness was for me laughter,
 The mews' singing all my mead-drink.

19-22: Pound gives "the swan cries" for "cry of the swan." His full stop after *ylfete song* is given in all the early editions (Mrs. Gordon explains her punctuation in a note). The cadence throughout is quite close, but Modern English, alas, lacks an onomatopoeic equivalent for *hleahtor*.

Stormas þær stanclifu beotan, þær him stearn oncwæð
 Storms, on the stone-cliffs beaten, fell on the stern

*23: This is the first of Pound's egregious mistranslations. He mistakes *stearn* ("tern") for "stern," and hence forces *oncwæð* to mean "fell." Ordinary licence might allow for *beotan* as a participle and his ignoring the correlative *þær*. This looks like a simple misreading, but Pound may have been tempted by the imitation of sound and rationalized it by the obviously corrupt passage immediately following; on line 23, however, all early editions agree. Still, Pound's cadence here is suitably wild.

isigfeþera; ful oft þæt earn bigeal,
urigfeþra; nænig hleomæga
In icy feathers; full oft the eagle screamed
With spray on his pinion.
Not any protector

24-25: In the original, 25 contains no alliteration, and the parallelism with 24 is unstylistic. Pound avoids the parallelism and closes the passage on an adonic.

feasceaf­tig ferð frefran meahte.
May make merry man faring needy.

26. Pound loses the image (and the possible religious overtones) of *feasceaf­tig ferð*, which is, however, awkward in any case; "make merry" is rather loose for *frefran* ("comfort"). His meaning is a fair paraphrase though, and no farther off than Gordon's "could comfort the heart in its need," or Malone's "could help my hapless heart in that faring." Pound catches the over-freighted alliteration, but on a different letter.

For þon him gelyfeð lyt, se þe ah lifes wyn
This he little believes, who aye in winsome life

27: "Aye" is a pun on *ah*, which Pound may have misread as *a* ("always"); in any case, it does not disturb, except to force the participle *gebiden* in the next line to become the main verb.

gebiden in burgum, bealosipa hwon,
Abides 'mid burghers some heavy business,

*28: Gordon says "suffers few hardships in the city." I do not see how Pound arrived at his version, which may still be accepted as a loose paraphrase. Characteristically in references to the town life, Pound heightens the seafarer's contempt. Early editions agree on the text.

wlonc ond wingal, hu ic werig oft
in brimlade bidan sceolde.
Nap nihtscua, norþan sniwde,
hrim hrusan bond, hægl feol on eorþan,
Wealthy and wine-flushed, how I weary oft
Must bide above brine.
Neareth nightshade, snoweth from north,
Frost froze the land, hail fell on earth then,

29-32: *Nap* is not "neareth," but Pound is justly attracted by the alliteration and the chime with "north." He exchanges the pun on *bond* for the worn metaphor. The cadence is extremely close.

corna caldast. For þon cnyssað nu
heortan geþohtas þæt ic hean streamas

Corn of the coldest. Nathless there knocketh now
The heart's thought that I on high streams

33-34: Pound's ingenious grammatical inversion "corn of the coldest" is superior to Kennedy's "coldest of kernels" or Malone's "coldest of seeds." "Knocketh" for *cnyssað* is good. The cadence is close.

sealtyþa gelac sylf cunnige—
The salt-wavy tumult traverse alone.

35: For Pope, the metrically emphatic *sylf* is an interpretative crux which he uses to support his contention that there are two speakers. Malone, Kennedy, and Alexander all leave it untranslated. Pound's paraphrase "traverse alone" captures the rhetorical emphasis but without suiting Pope's thesis.

monað modes lust mæla gehwylce
Moaneth alway my mind's lust

36: Pound's paraphrase is inexact but reasonable. "Moaneth" is an expressive pun for *monað* ("reminds"); the cognate "lust" is sometimes idiomatic in Modern English, as in a "lust for travel." Kennedy translates limply, "never a day but my mind's desire would launch me forth."

ferð to feran, þæt ic feor heonan
elþeodigra eard gesece—

That I fare forth, that I afar hence
Seek out a foreign fastness.

37-38: Pound puns cleverly on *ferð* and suppresses the possible religious connotation. His "foreign fastness" for *elþeodigra eard* is pleasing, but of course Pound does not hint at the Christian *double entente* argued by G. V. Smithers in 1957.¹⁹ Pound's rhythm is properly emphatic here, but he misjudges perhaps in falling so heavily on the plain words "seek out," where the original falls on the bizarre *elþeodigra*; his line may be read with only three stresses.

for þon nis þæs modwlonc mon ofer eorþan,
For this there's no mood-lofty man over earth's midst,

39: Rhythm and semantics excellent. Pound rides the adjective over the caesura perfectly, a point missed by the other translators.

¹⁹G. V. Smithers, "The Meaning of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*," *Medium Aevum*, 26 (1957), 137-53 and 28 (1959), 1-22, 99-104.

ne his gifena þæs god, ne in geogube to þæs hwæt,
Not though he be given his good, but will have in his youth greed;

*40: Pound is not alone in his confusion here. For *ne his gifena þæs god*, Mrs. Gordon offers either "generous of gifts" or "good in moral qualities," preferring the first. Pope glosses the second ("generously gifted," with question mark).²⁰ Alexander suggests "so thoroughly equipped" (or in a note, "so well endowed"). Pound is more far-fetched than any of these, but at least guess-work is called for. I do not see how he arrived at "greed" for *hwæt*, nor do I understand why he avoids the parallel syntax with line 41.

ne in his dædum to þæs deor, ne him his dryhten to þæs hold,
Nor his deed to the daring, nor his king to the faithful

41: Pound here concocts an archaism on the Old English model, but his sense at least resembles the original. He makes *dædum* singular for euphony. Pound's syntax in 40-41 is clotted, but considering the whole passage I would paraphrase, "just as the reward of giving gifts to the youth is greed, so the reward of daring and loyalty to the king is sorrow in sea-fare." Kennedy's version is perhaps the most literal: "So eager in giving, so ardent in youth, so bold in his deeds, or so dear to his lord."

þæt he a his sæfore sorge næbbe,
to hwon hine Dryhten gedon wille.

But shall have his sorrow for sea-fare
Whatever his lord will.

42-43: While literal, Pound condenses the rhythm slightly, pointing the sudden slowness after the rush of syllables before, and closes on a weighty adonic. Modern editors have taken to capitalizing *Dryhten*, which seems unnecessary; Pound's lower-case translation has enough cathedral resonance on its own.

Ne biþ him to hearpan hyge ne to hringþege—
ne to wife wyn ne to worulde hyht—
ne ymbe owiht elles nefne ymb yða gewealc;

He hath not heart for harping, nor in ring-having
Nor winsomeness to wife, nor world's delight
Nor any whit else save the wave's slash,

44-46: "Ring-having" is a nice solution. Pound's "winsomeness" puns on *wyn*, but has anyone objected? The pun "whit" on *owiht* contributes to the display of onomatopoeia in 46.

ac a hafað longunge se þe on lagu fundað.
Yet longing comes upon him to fare forth on the water.

²⁰John C. Pope, *Seven Old English Poems* (Indianapolis, 1966). I would like to add my thanks here to Constance B. Heatt for her enthusiastic instruction in Old English.

47: Pound's paraphrase stretches the meaning slightly: longing does not "come," he has it always (*a*); it is not longing "to" fare forth, but because he does fare forth. Malone says, "but ever he feels longing who fares out to sea."

Bearwas blostmum nimað, byrig fægriað,
Bosque taketh blossom, cometh beauty of berries,

*48: "Berries" is either a punning substitute for *byrig* ("towns") or a plain mistake. If deliberate, Pound is suppressing a favorable reference to town life. "Bosque" is a lovely find, and likewise the solution for the awkward *fægriað*.

wongas wlitigað, woruld onetteð;
ealle þa gemoniað modes fusne
sefan to siþe þamþe swa þenceð
on flodwegas feor gewitan.
Swylce geac monað geomran reorde;

Fields to fairness, land fares brisker,
All this admonisheth man eager of mood,
The heart turns to travel so that he then thinks
On flood-ways to be far departing.
Cuckoo calleth with gloomy crying,

49-53: "Fares brisker" for *onetteð* is acceptable (but why not "quickens," which contains the double meaning of the original?). G. V. Smithers has urged a Christian reading ("hastens toward the Judgment") which Pound of course does not hint. "Admonisheth" is a neat pun for *gemoniað*; the liberty with *þamþe* is allowable.

singeð sumeres weard, sorge beodeð
bitter' in breosthord þæt se beorn ne wat,
sefteadig secg, hwæt þa sume dreogað

He singeth summerward, bodeth sorrow,
The bitter heart's blood. Burgher knows not—
He the prosperous man—what some perform

54-56: Pound puns "summerward" for the awkward "summer's word." I do not know why he avoids the obvious "breast-ward." His "burgher" for *beorn* ("warrior") is another instance of heightened contempt for land-dwellers, but it is justified by *sefteadig*; *secg* likewise loses its military meaning.

þe þa wræclastas widost lecgað .
For þon nu min hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþerlocan,

Where wandering them widest draweth.
So that but now my heart burst from my breastlock,

57-58: "Wandering" is a bit feeble for *wræclastas*, but Pound is condensing

for the sake of the clustered *w*'s. "Breastlock" is a nice coinage, a pun on *locan* ("places"). "Bursts" for *hweorfeð* is plausible. Malone gives, "So my soul now soars from my bosom."

min modsefa mid mereflode,
ofer hwæles eþel hweorfeð wide,
My mood 'mid the mere-flood,
Over the whale's acre, would wander wide.

59-60: *Modsefa* calls for no stronger equivalent than "mood." Malone's image in this line, "the mood of my mind moves with the sea-flood," is only implied in the original. Pound's half-line mimics the clustered *m*'s.

eorþan sceatas, cymeð eft to me
gifre ond grædig; gielleð anfloga,
On earth's shelter cometh oft to me,
Eager and ready, the crying lone-flyer,

61-62: "Shelter" for *sceatas* is allowable; "oft" for *eft* seems a harmless license. Pound's reading of the whole passage, not surprisingly, differs from those of many recent commentators, who picture the *hyge* "ranging far abroad from the human being in whom it is normally lodged" and returning (G. V. Smithers), an implied comparison to the *anfloga*; thus it is a hallucination, like the parallel passage in the "Wanderer," lines 50-55. This has been much debated, however, and Pound's simpler reading is quite in line with 1911 scholarship. Except for *eft*, he understands all the words correctly. I suspect that Pound weakened *gifre ond grædig* so that his adjectives could apply equally to the seafarer and the *anfloga*.

hweteð on hwælweg hreþer unwearnum
ofer holma gelagu, for þon me hatran sind
Whets for the whale-path the heart irresistibly,
O'er tracks of ocean; seeing that anyhow

63-64: "Tracks" for *gelagu* ("expanse") is more concrete. Pound's diction slumps badly in the off-line, though, on account of the mistranslation following; I do not know why he ignores *hatran*. The cadence is close.

Dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif
My lord deems to me this dead life

*65: Pound has misunderstood *dreamas* and thus destroyed the balance of *hatran* with *deade*. He may be deliberately side-stepping the issue of *Dryhten* here, for I cannot imagine how the passage could be interpreted with a lower-case "lord" (especially since *dryhten dreamas*, as Mrs. Gordon notes, seems to be a common formula for heaven).

læne on londe. Ic gelyfe no
þæt him eor welan ece stondað.

On loan and on land, I believe not
That any earth-weal eternal standeth

66-67: Pound has not necessarily misunderstood *læne*, but he translates it as a riddling pun: a life "on loan" is roughly equivalent to "brief life." "Weal" for *welan* is acceptable. The cadence is close.

Simle þreora sum þinga gehwylce
ær his tiddege to tweon weorþeð :

Save there be somewhat calamitous
That, ere a man's tide go, turn it to twain:

*68-69: The problems here center on *þreora* and *tweon*. (The passage is corrupt in any case, but some such emendation as *tiddege* is widely accepted and does not trouble Pound.) Nothing in the early editions suggests Pound's errors. His phrase "to twain" is nonsensical even in modern English—perhaps he intended "to teen." And his omission of *þreora* ("three things") obscures the three things named in 70. Pound does recover his balance there, however, so that lines 65-69 are the low point of his poem, both as an English poem and as a translation. Malone here is admirably lucid, though he drops the image of "tide": "One woe of three ever awaits each man, dooms him to doubt ere his day is come."

adl oþþe ylðo oþþe ecghete
fægum fromweardum feorh oðþringeð.

Disease or oldness or sword-hate
Beats out the breath from doom-gripped body.

70-71: Pound's solution for the awkward *fægum fromweardum* is striking. In 70 he breaks the four-stress pattern for emphasis.

For þon biþ eorla gehwam æftercweþendra
lof lifgendra lastworda betst,

And for this, every earl whatever, for those speaking after—
Laud of the living, boasteth some last word,

72-73: This is a difficult passage, especially since Pound's text lacked the main verb *biþ* (lacking in all the early editions). Pound supplies "boasteth," not implausibly, and his paraphrase is not far off, though the syntax is as gnarled as the original's. Mrs. Gordon glosses, "Therefore for every man the praise of those who live after him and commemorate him is the best memorial." I wish that Pound had attempted the beautiful *lastworda* ("word-trace," meaning "reputation") instead of yielding to the pun.

þæt he gewyrce, ær he on weg scyle,
fremum on foldan wið feonda niþ,
deorum dædum deofle togeanes,

That he will work ere he pass onward,
 Frame on the fair earth 'gainst foes his malice,
 Daring ado. . .

74-76: Pound puns on *fremum*, suppressing the Christian sentiment while keeping the un-Christian one. "Fair" is supplied for alliteration and cadence. Pound admits to suppressing the off-line of 76 in his "philological note" (quoted above).

þæt hine ælda bearn æfter hergen,
 ond his lof sibþan lifge mid englum
 awa to ealdre, ecan lifes blæd,
 dream mid dugeþum.

So that all men shall honour him after
 And his laud beyond them remain 'mid the English,
 Aye, for ever, a lasting life's-blast,
 Delight 'mid the doughty.

77-80: Pound admits to the reconversion of *englum* in his note, and of course he allows *dugeþum* only its secular meaning. "Life's-blast" is a not too implausible pun for *lifes blæd* (cf. 86). The passage closes again on an adonic pattern.

 Dagas sind gewitene,
 ealle onmedlan eorþan rices;
 nearon nu cyningas ne caseras

 Days little durable,
 And all arrogance of earthen riches,
 There come now no kings nor Caesars

80-82: Pound omits the main verb *sind*, stressing the falling cadence and the gnomic feeling. I have cited Hugh Kenner's comment already on the *eorþan rices* pun. *Nearon* does not mean "come," nor even "near," but Pound's paraphrase is close enough.

ne goldgiefan swylce iu wæron,
 þonne hi mæst mid him mæþa gefremedon
 ond on dryhtlicestum dome lifdon.

Nor gold-giving lords like those gone.
 Howe'er in mirth most magnified,
 Whoe'er lived in life most lordliest,

83-85: "Mirth" is a dubious pun for *mæþa* ("glorious deeds"), but it might be stretched to include tale-telling entertainment. Malone is literal: "where most they matched them in mightiest deeds." Pound here follows the parallel syntax of the original.

Gedroren is þeos duguð eal, dreamas sind gewitene;
 Drear all this excellence, delights undurable!

86: "Drear" is an acceptable pun for *gedroren*. "Undurable" for *gewitene* has the near-equivalent meaning "ephemeral," but it also suggests "unden-urable," an oxymoron pointing up the paradox of the seafarer's wanderlust (cf. 80). "Excellence" is a neat, secular solution for the troublesome *duguð*. *Dreamas*, which gave Pound trouble in 65, is here understood correctly.

wuniað þa wacran, ond þas woruld healdap,
Waneth the watch, but the world holdeth.

*87: Gordon translates literally: "weaklings live on and possess this world." I suspect that the puns suggested themselves, and Pound was simply enchanted with the result. This is probably too distant to be called a paraphrase, but the image of night-watch waning into dawn does in a sense suggest the disappearance of the good old days.

brucað þurh bisgo. Blæd is gehnæged,
Tomb hideth trouble. The blade is laid low.

*88: Mrs. Gordon glosses the on-line, "occupy it in toil and trouble" with a note on the peculiar construction. Sisam thinks that Pound arrives at "tomb" by misreading *þruh* ("coffin") for *þurh*. This seems possible, though Pound copes successfully with *þurh* elsewhere. May he not also have mistaken *brucað* for some form of *byrgan*, giving him "coffin buries trouble"? One error may have forced the other. Or the peculiar syntax may have tempted him to emend. "Blade," punning on *blæd*, is simple metonymy for "glory" (cf. 79). The text of both 87 and 88 is undisputed. Pound's replication of sound is, not surprisingly, very close. His larger rhythmic structure deserves note as well: the passage builds from 80 to the exclamation of 86; the two mistranslated lines following are, I think, intended as subdued after-thoughts.

eorþan indryhto ealdað ond searað,
swa nu monna gehwylc geond middangeard.
Yldo him on fareð, onsyn blacað,

Earthly glory ageth and seareth.
No man at all going the earth's gait,
But age fares against him, his face paleth,

89-91: "Seareth" is a legitimate archaism. The pun on *nu monna* does not harm the sense. "Going the earth's gait" loosely paraphrases the tamer *geond middangeard*. The sound is close, though the intricately crossed alliteration of 90 is not matched.

gomelfeax gnorað, wat his iuwine,
æþelinga bearn eorþan forgiefene.

Grey-haired he groaneth, knows gone companions,
Lordly men, are to earth o'ergiven,

92-93: "Gone companions" is a neat solution for *iuwine*. Pound uses his

beautiful line 93 as a refrain in the *Pisan Cantos*; Malone translates, "begotten of athelings he knows given to earth."

Ne mæg him þonne se flæschoma, þonne him þæt feorg losað,
ne swete forswelgan ne sar gefelcan
ne hond onhreran ne mid hyge þencan.

Nor may he then the flesh-cover, whose life ceaseth,
Nor eat the sweet nor feel the sorry,
Nor stir hand, nor think in mid heart,

94-96: Pound loses the construction *þonne . . . þonne* without harming the sense, but he manages the polished balance of the next lines perfectly. Alexander gives, "nothing can pain or please flesh then."

þeah þe græf wille golde stregan
broþor his geborenum, byrgan be deadum
maþmum mislicum, þæt hine mid nille;

And though he strew the grave with gold,
His born brothers, their buried brothers
Be an unlikely treasure-hoard.

97-99: Pound leaves *wille* untranslated. "Born brothers" for the awkward *broþor his geborenum* is slick. Mrs. Gordon calls these lines "the most disputed passage in the poem," and provides a gloss: "Though brother will strew with gold the grave for his brother born, bury him beside the dead with various treasures, that (i.e. the gold) will not go with him." Pound's paraphrase comes close to the general idea, although he makes the buried bodies the treasure-hoard—not without striking effect. He ends the poem here, as promised, just short of the closing prayer.

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