1. In vain have I striven
to teach my heart to bow;
In vain have I said to him
"There be many singers greater than thou."

But his answer cometh, as winds and as lutany,
As a vague crying upon the night
That leaveth me no rest, saying ever,
"Song, a song."

Their echoes play upon each other in the twilight
Seeking ever a song.
Lo, I am worn with travail
And the wandering of many roads hath made my eyes
As dark red circles filled with dust.
Yet there is a trembling upon me in the twilight,
   And little red elf words crying "A song."
   Little grey elf words crying for a song,
   Little brown leaf words crying "A song."
   Little green leaf words crying for a song.
The words are as leaves, old brown leaves in the spring time
Blowing they know not whither, seeking a song.

White words as snow flakes but they are cold
Moss words, lip words, words of slow streams.

In vain have I striven
   To teach my soul to bow,
In vain have I pled with him,
   "There be greater souls than thou."

For in the morn of my years there came a woman
As moon light calling
As moon calleth the tides,
   "Song, a song."
Wherefore I made her a song and she went from me
As the moon doth from the sea,
But still came the leaf words, little brown elf words
Saying "The soul sendeth us."
   A song, a song!
And in vain I cried unto them "I have no song
For she I sang of hath gone from me."


Edward Thomas, reviewing Personae for the English Review, said: 'The beauty of it [the world of these poems] "In Praise of Ysolt" is the beauty of passion, sincerity and intensity, not of beautiful words and images and suggestions . . . the thought dominates the words and is greater than they are' (quoted by T.S. Eliot in Ezra Pound, his Metric and Poetry, originally published anonymously [New York, 12 November 1917]; reprinted in To Criticize the Critic [London, 1965]; on this pamphlet see also Robert Langbaum, 'Pound and Eliot' in George Bornstein [ed.], Ezra Pound Among the Poets [Chicago, 1985], p. 171). The first 20 lines of 'Praise of Ysolt' were originally a separate poem, 'Vana', collected in A Lume Spento (Venice, June 1908); CEP, p. 27, Poems and Translations, ed. Sieburth, p. 40; for a late echo, see Canto XCIII. The feminised vocabulary here, and the attempt to build a dialogue from gender differences and colours, is part of the pre-Raphaelite idea; for the weaving of 'the Iseult and Tristram story' into the fabric of biography and presentation, see Jerome McGann, Black Riders; The Visible Language of Modernism (Princeton, N.J., 1993), pp. 76-80. We might also notice how such legend can be cruelly solicited into individual lives; through most of 1917 Maude Gonne’s illegitimate daughter, set up with the name Iseult by her mother with whom Yeats had been hopelessly infatuated, had herself been subjecting Yeats to extended erotic torments (see Brenda Maddox, George’s Ghosts; A New Life of W.B. Yeats [London, 1999], and Ann Saddlemeyer, Becoming George; The Life of Mrs W.B. Yeats [Oxford, 2002]).

With lines 21-2 compare 'The Seafarer':

Hung with hard ice-flakes, where hail-scur flew,
There I heard naught save the harsh sea
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.  (lines 17-22)


2. BALLATETTA

The light became her grace and dwelt among
Blind eyes and shadows that are formed as men;
Lo, how the light doth melt us into song:

The broken sunlight for a helm she beareth
Who hath my heart in jurisdiction.
In wild-wood never fawn nor fallow fareth
So silent light; no gossamer is spun
So delicate as she is, when the sun
Drives the clear emeralds from the bended grasses
Lest they should parch too swiftly, where she passes.

Ezra Pound, first published in Canzoni (London, July 1911), then not reprinted until CSP (p. 52); Pers, p. 36, Poems and Translations, ed. Sieburth, p. 145; then self-quoted at the close of Canto 93. For the Victorian-romantic daintiness from which this idiom derives, compare James Joyce, ’My love is in a light attire’ (Chamber Music, 1907, VII; Poems and Shorter Writings, ed. Richard Ellmann et al. [London, 1991], p. 19). The title echoes one of Cavalcanti’s favourite verse-forms and the poem follows his device of a courtly visio; it is modelled exactly on the strophic pattern and rhyme-scheme of Ballata II, which Pound translated for The Sonnets and Ballate of Guido

3. **HE THINKS OF THOSE WHO HAVE SPOKEN
   EVIL OF HIS BELOVED**

   Half close your eyelids, loosen your hair,
   And dream about the great and their pride;
   They have spoken against you everywhere,
   But weigh this song with the great and their pride;
   I made it out of a mouthful of air,
   Their children’s children shall say they have lied.


4. **to break the pentameter, that was the first heave**

   Canto LXXXI (1945); compare Canto XCVIII: ‘... as for those who deform thought with iambics’. See also ‘Affirmations - As For Imagism’ (*New Age*, 28 January 1915): ‘There is no form of platitude which cannot be turned into iambic pentameter without labour. It is not difficult, if one have learned to count up to ten, to begin a new line on each eleventh syllable or to whack each alternate syllable with an ictus. Emotion also creates patterns of timbre. But one "discards rhyme", not because one is incapable of rhyming neat, fleet, sweet, meet, eat, feet, but because there are certain emotions or energies which are not to be represented by the over-familiar devices or patterns’ (*Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, ed. William Cookson [London, 1973], p. 345). Compare 'A Retrospect' (1918); 'Don’t make each line stop dead at the end, and then begin every next line with a heave. Let the beginning of the next line catch the rise of the rhythm wave, unless you want a definite longish pause. In short, behave as a musician' (*Literary Essays*, ed. T.S. Eliot [London, 1954], p. 6). On behaving 'as a musician' for early Pound, however, compare his argument against 'emotional, or impresionist music' in 'Arnold Dolmetch' (1918; *Literary Essays*, p. 434); which has in retrospect been taken as part of a general modernist alliance with pre-romantic performance practices (Bach!); see Richard Taruskin's excitable piece, 'The Pastness of the Present and the Presence of the Past' (1988), in his *Text and Act; Essays on
Music and Performance (New York, 1995), esp. pp. 102-4, 140-42. Eliot revived a related dramatic irony (Chopin!) within larger ironic perspectives, in 'Portrait of a Lady': "This music is successful with a 'dying fall' / Now that we talk of dying--" (Prufrock and Other Observations, [June] 1917 [500 copies, price 1 shilling]). For the wider context of breaking the pentameter see Donald Davie, Ezra Pound; Poet as Sculptor (New York, 1964), pp. 44-6, and Marjorie Perloff, Poetic License: Essays on Modernist and Postmodernist Lyric (Evanston, Ill., 1990), Chap. 6: 'The Contemporary of our Grandchildren: Ezra Pound and the Question of Influence' (pp. 119-44).


5.

GENTILDONNA

She passed and left no quiver in the veins, who now
Moving among the trees, and clinging
   in the air she severed,
Fanning the grass she walked in then, endures:

Grey olive leaves beneath a rain-cold sky.

Ezra Pound, first published in Poetry (Chicago), III,2 (November 1913), also in New Freewoman, 1,12 (1 December 1913); reprinted in Lustra (London, September 1916), and Pers, p. 93; CSP (p. 101) omits the important blank line; Poems and Translations, ed. Sieburth (p. 272) retains the blank line but indents line 3 more deeply. For the image of the central section, see 'Canzone: Of Angels' (stanza IV): Collected Early Poems, p. 140, Poems and Translations, ed. Sieburth, p. 139, and compare Kevin Oderman, Ezra Pound and the Erotic Medium (Durham, N.C., 1986), pp. 18-9, 138 n. 20. 'Gentildonna' and 'Ballatetta' are discussed together in Herbert N. Schneidau, Ezra Pound; The Image and the Real (Baton Rouge, 1969), pp. 104-6; and see also John Steven Childs, Modernist Form; Pound's Style in the Early Cantos (Cranbury, N.J., 1986), pp. 37-41, 63 (clumsy), and Vincent Sherry, The Great War and the Language of Modernism (Oxford, 2003), pp. 125-9. For the exceptional skill of the stress-patterning in the last line here, its durability marked by highly characteristic use of the predictive colon, and the contrast made thereby with the preceding suavities, compare John Berryman's acute passing remarks on
the use of spondaic or double-accented formations, in his 'The Poetry of Ezra Pound' (1949), collected in his *The Freedom of the Poet* (New York, 1976), pp. 254, 257. The same figure as here, though differently fragmented, hovers at the start of Canto IV: 'Dawn, to our waking, drifts in the green cool light; / Dew-haze blurs, in the grass, pale ankles moving'; and compare the uncollected 'Wine' (of 1918, after Li Po), *Poems and Translations*, ed. Sieburth, p. 1186.

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