

De Vulgari Eloquentia; Dante's Book of Exile (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1990), pp. 69-89 and 92-3; Dante cites the 'Donna me prega' in company with his own 'Poscia ch'Amor del tutto m'ha lasciato' as examples of syllables 'answering like an echo to the rhyme of the preceding line' (p. 86). For further background here, see Gianfranco Contini, 'Cavalcanti in Dante', in his *Le Rime di Guido Cavalcanti* (Verona, 1966), pp. 85-104.

For a modern-edited Italian text (based on the Favini-Contini recension) see Lowry Nelson, Jr (ed. & trans.), *The Poetry of Guido Cavalcanti* (New York, 1986), XXVII, pp. 38, 40. Nelson's English version (pp. 39, 41) is careful and lifeless, his literary-critical insights are quite banal (cf. pp. xxxviii-xxxix); but his Prefatory Note to this poem (pp. xlii-li) is highly informative ('Whatever may be the poem's ultimate aesthetic success it excelled in its ambitions all previous lyric poems in history'--p. li).

Pound was studying and translating Cavalcanti early on, as evidenced by stilted versions in *Provença* (Boston, 22 November 1910) and *Canzoni* (London, July 1911) and by the interest shewn there in mediaeval Italian verse-forms; see also *The Spirit of Romance* (London, 1910), Chap. VI: 'Lingua Toscana'. For an important review of Pound's 1932 edition see Etienne Gilson (who did not know the identity of the editor) in *The Criterion*, XII (October 1932), 106-12, reprinted in E. Homberger (ed.), *Ezra Pound; The Critical Heritage* (London, 1972), pp. 273-9.

The musical prosody of Cavalcanti's metrical experiments came to a practical head for Pound with the commission for radio of his second opera, by Archie Harding of the BBC, who had already in 1931 mounted a studio broadcast of the revised first opera *Le Testament [de Villon]*. This was *Cavalcanti*, completed historical opera in three acts composed and orchestrated 1931-33 to texts from Cavalcanti and Sordello (eleven ballate and canzone by Cavalcanti, two Provençal songs by Sordello) with 'Donna mi prega' as centrepiece and connective libretto in English by Pound; never performed in his lifetime but a partial presentation of its first performance (not, by idiot omission, including the central canzone) is on *Ego Scriptor Cantilenae; The Music of Ezra Pound* (San Francisco, 2003; Other Minds, CD plus full booklet, OM1005-2 CD).

Pound's attempts at Sonnetto VII ('Chi è Questa') are given by Anderson in versions from 1910 (2), 1912 and 1932 (pp. 43-6); or compare *Collected Early Poems*, ed. M.J. King (London, 1976), p. 143 with *Literary Essays* (pp. 199-200); or see *Poems and Translations*, ed. Sieburth, pp. 141-2, 199-200, 575; and again see Marjorie Perloff, 'Pound Ascendant', *Boston Review*, April/May 2004. T.S. Eliot quotes this sonnetto in his third Clark lecture: 'Donne and the Trecento' (1926), giving without acknowledgement Pound's preferred reading of its second line; see *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, ed. R. Schuchard (London, 1993), p. 107 (in Nelson's ed. [pp. 6, 90] this reading has gone without trace). On these finally resurfaced Clark Lectures see the review by Frank Kermode, *Pleasing Myself; From Beowulf to Philip Roth* (London, 2001), pp. 25-36. Eliot's confessed lack of interest in the Provençal poets (p. 93 & n. 2), his contention that Donne's cast of mind was despite his education

not medieval (pp. 67ff), and his close discussion of Donne's 'Extasie' coming after his mention of Cavalcanti (pp. 106-117; of extreme interest) place his admiration for Dante in a more disputed context than Pound's; however, compare also J.P. Riquelme, *Harmony of Dissonances; T.S. Eliot, Romanticism, and Imagination* (Baltimore & London, 1991), pp. 120-42, 249-50, 293, and Jo Brantley Berryman, *Circe's Craft; Ezra Pound's 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley'* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1983), pp. 172-4; and compare also the final stanza quoted above with Dante, *Purgatorio*, XV, 67-75. Donne was never an important figure in Pound's canon; but compare his brief discussion of 'The Ecstasy' in Section Two ('Exhibits') of the *ABC of Reading* (London, 1934), p. 60, and see also K.K. Ruthven, *Ezra Pound as Literary Critic* (London, 1990), p. 115.

2. **A** lady asks me

I speak in season
She seeks reason for an affect, wild often
That is so proud he hath Love for a name

Who denies it can hear the truth now
Wherefore I speak to the present knowers
Having no hope that low-hearted

Can bring sight to such reason
Be there not natural demonstration
I have no will to try proof-bringing
Or say where it hath birth

What is its vertu and power
Its being and every moving
Or delight whereby 'tis called "to love"
Or if man can show it to sight.

Where memory liveth,
It takes its state
Formed like a diafan from light on shade

Which shadow cometh of Mars and remaineth
Created, having a name sensate,
Custom of the soul,
will from the heart;

Cometh from a seen form which being understood
Taket locus and remaining in the intellect possible
Wherein hath he neither weight nor still-standing,

Descendeth not by quality but shineth out

Himself his own effect unendingly
 Not in delight but in the being aware
 Nor can he leave his true likeness elsewhere.

Ezra Pound, from Canto XXXVI (1934); for clarity I have restored line-gaps between stanza breaks, matching the Italian (the *Cantos* text has only one such line-gap, after line 14). Text also in Anderson, *Pound's Cavalcanti*, p. 179, which also gives the 1929/32 'Aquila fragment' version, pp. 171, 173, 175, 177 (see passage 3, below). Full and helpful commentary in Peter Makin, *Pound's Cantos* (London, 1985), pp. 179-90, though (as usual) hedging its bets about Pound's 'scholarship', as also Nelson (op. cit., p. xxxv). Larger discussion in Peter Nicholls, *Ezra Pound: Politics, Economics and Writing; A Study of 'The Cantos'* (London, 1984), pp. 60-9; briefer but useful notes in Christine Froula, *A Guide to Ezra Pound's 'Selected Poems'* ([New York], 1983), pp. 161-3; and compare also the rather breathless discussion of Canto CV in J.-M. Rabaté, *Language, Sexuality and Ideology in Ezra Pound's 'Cantos'* (Houndmills, 1986), pp. 265-9. Pound came very strongly to see this poem as an act of clear and decisive intelligence, despite such opinion as that expressed by Rossetti: 'A love-song which acts as such a fly-catcher for priests and pedants looks very suspicious; and accordingly, on examination, it proves to be a poem beside the purpose of poetry, filled with metaphysical jargon, and perhaps the very worst of Guido's productions. . . . I have not translated it, as being of little true interest' (Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Early Italian Poets*, ed. Sally Purcell [Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1981], p. 137). However it has also to be admitted that, at least up to 1913, prior to his closer analysis of Cavalcanti's qualities, Pound shared Rossetti's opinion: in his *Little Review* essay on 'Troubadours--Their Sorts and Conditions' (1913) Pound groups Cavalcanti's 'Donna mi prega' with the work of what is 'to us the dullest of the schools, set to explaining the nature of love and its effects' (*Literary Essays*, p. 103).

Cavalcanti's enterprise lies in one way close to the heart of the Italian humanists' attempted reconstruction of a platonic psychology; his principal debt in the theory of love is by the conventional view to Marsilio Ficino, and through him back to Plato's *Symposium*, although for his own reasons this is not a pedigree that Pound explores; for these links see James Hankins, 'Pico della Mirandola', in Edward Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (10 vols, London, 1998), Vol. 7 pp. 387-8, and compare the more florid treatments in Book IV of Baldesar Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, translated by Sir Thomas Hoby in 1561 (reprinted, London, 1900, where the grand culminations of Book IV are at pp. 342-63).

Gilson, the noted historian of medieval philosophy (for ref. see above) discusses Pound's earlier version of Cavalcanti's stanza concerning 'possibile intelletto' as follows: 'The origin of our concepts is a form perceived by our senses (veduta forma), abstracted from the sensible image by an act of understanding (ches s'intende), and impressed by the active intellect in the possible intellect (nel possibile intelletto), where it stays as in its receiving and conserving subject (chome in soggetto locho e dimoranza). Considered as a

context see e.g. Erik S. Ryding, *In Harmony Framed; Musical Humanism, Thomas Campion, and the Two Daniels* (Kirksville, Missouri, 1993), esp. Chap. 5; Ryding concludes subsequently, 'his most successful classicizing, then, comes in those songs in which the spirit of ancient Rome hides behind an Elizabethan mask. Indeed, much of Campion's art lies in its self-concealment: for in naturalizing his ancient themes, Campion disguises the very classicism that he deftly incorporates into his songs' (p. 194). Compare also Campion's 'Are you what your faire lookes expresse?' in *The Third and Fourth Booke of Ayres* (London, c.1617), XV; *Works*, ed. Walter R. Davis (London, 1969), p. 182.

The version preferred for Canto XXXVI has largely abandoned this level of overt *melopoeia*, at least so far as chime of like sounds is concerned. The choice is evidently pondered and deliberate: but what is its rationale? The reader of the *Cantos* has maybe sterner work in prospect than merely the revival of ancient music, long overdue though that is. More important still is the thorough-going apprehension that strong expression is used 'with purpose to convey or to interpret a definite meaning', and that 'the philosophic terms are used with a complete precision of technique' (*Literary Essays*, pp. 154, 159; compare also Adrian Stokes, *Stones of Rimini* [1935] in *The Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes* [3 vols, London, 1978], I, p. 289 and n. 109, p. 330). The floating image as a complex sensation repeated within a structure of affective memory is already a working practice for the *Cantos*; and what by this stage is needed is exactness and cognitive method rather than a return to the melismatic blurs and swoops of Rossetti's lyricism, from which Pound escaped only in gradual stages (for discussion of Rossetti and Pound see Anderson, *Pound's Cavalcanti*, pp. xv-xviii; for discussion of the locus in memory and *dove sta memoria* as repeating phrase see Christine Brooke-Rose, *A ZBC of Ezra Pound* [London, 1971], p. 28).

Of course Pound knows that Campion and Lawes can combine musicality and precision to the highest degree, and in the *Cavalcanti* essay Pound is still defending rhyme pattern as not fundamentally damaging (*Literary Essays*, p. 169); but for a modern poet the figure of Rossetti intervenes, and the ersatz Victorian sentiment parodied relentlessly in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is a ghost finally to be laid rather than revived. (Note here that Rossetti's *Early Italian Poets* [1861] was, according to Schuchard, 'one of TSE's texts for the Clark Lectures' of 1926; see T.S. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, ed. Ronald Schuchard [London, 1993], p. 58, n. 34). It is thus by now for Pound a positive advantage that Rossetti disliked *Cavalcanti's* 'philosophic canzone', and the moments of stiff awkwardness in the version included in Canto XXXVI are intended as exemplary and therapeutic; the route back to 'cantabile virtue' from the vantage of modern English poetic possibility could not lie through any part of the iambic pentameter tradition, because that route was silted up and blocked (see also *Literary Essays*, pp. 193-4; and further, David Anderson, 'A Language to Translate into: The Pre-Elizabethan Idiom of Pound's Later *Cavalcanti* Translations', *Studies in Medievalism*, 2 [1982], 9-18).

4.

XII

"Daphne with her thighs in bark
 Stretches toward me her leafy hands,"--
 Subjectively. In the stuffed-satin drawing-room
 I await The Lady Valentine's commands,

Knowing my coat has never been
 Of precisely the fashion
 To stimulate, in her,
 A durable passion;

Doubtful, somewhat, of the value
 Of well-gowned approbation
 Of literary effort,
 But never of The Lady Valentine's vocation:

Poetry, her border of ideas,
 The edge, uncertain, but a means of blending
 With other strata
 Where the lower and higher have ending;

A hook to catch the Lady Jane's attention,
 A modulation toward the theatre,
 Also, in the case of revolution,
 A possible friend and comforter.

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Conduct, on the other hand, the soul
 "Which the highest cultures have nourished"
 To Fleet St. where
 Dr. Johnson flourished;

Beside this thoroughfare
 The sale of half-hose has
 Long since superseded the cultivation
 Of Pierian roses.

Ezra Pound, from *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, first published, London, June 1920; text from *Personae* (1990), pp. 193-4 (CSP text, pp. 213-4, has minor differences; see also *Poems and Translations*, ed. Sieburth, p. 556); for facsimile of Pound's typescript see Jo Brantley Berryman, *Circe's Craft; Ezra Pound's 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley'* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1983), p. 229. The sequence as a whole describes with trenchant ironies the London literary scene, narrated via two counterposed personae, Mauberley himself and E.P.: 'historically, Pound saw himself as working in a tradition that had been notable recently for its failures . . . and he also detected within himself certain predilections and weaknesses that are cast in terms of eroticism so as to emphasise their dangers for the young poet'; see K.K. Ruthven, *A Guide to Ezra Pound's 'Personae'* (1926) (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), p. 126. The

Lady Valentine, parodic character-sketch of a predatory Bloomsbury hostess presiding in her literary *salon*, must be modelled on the likes of Lady Ottoline Morrell: she quotes preciously from Gautier's 'Le Château du Souvenir' (1852; opening two lines) and from Laforgue's 'Complainte des Pianos' (1885; line 22), and she evidently prefers a poetry with decorative ideas and accommodating, blurred edges; whereas the lineated strata of Cavalcanti's canzone present exacting ideas as central to its argument, set out with its precise edges of phrases and sounds demarcated by rhyme and closely parallel construction.

For the purged lyrical effects of such precision compare, e.g., the 'blue banded lake under æther' of Canto XVI (1923), or 'the clear edge of the rocks' in Canto XX (1927). 'Lady Jane' is (happens to be) the name of the egregious literary hostess in Henry James, 'The Figure in the Carpet' (1896): 'Lady Jane threw into her eyes a look evidently intended to give an idea of what she always felt; but she added that she couldn't have expressed it.' On such scenes and the conception of *Mauberley* see also Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character; The Life of Ezra Pound* (London, 1988), pp. 367-8; on Lady Valentine, Stan Smith, *Inviolable Voice; History and Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Dublin, 1982), pp. 108-9. The social opportunism of manoeuvres for Lady Jane's attention in Pound's vignette has reduced a discourse of exact meanings to drawing-room coterie poeticality; the bitter farce of rhyming the commercial market in knee-socks with Sappho's roses from Mount Olympus (Sappho LXXI) marks a nadir of disillusion that is entertained with sardonic gleefulness; but note that Berryman, following Davie's view, assigns this critique to *Mauberley* and not to Pound himself (*Circe's Craft*, pp. 133-4).

More generally it has been possible to take the trail of mannered and self-contorting argument in the larger overall poem-sequence, resentful and paradigmatically demonstrating its own failure to revive an ancient music, as a weakening decadence closing almost all its own options: 'The material residue of the tradition of poetic song lies in a wholly archaic manner, utterly unquickened by contemporary idiom. One major project of literary modernism has failed to come alive. The matter of literary and cultural tradition remains archival, inert, silent. His failure proves exemplary, however. His case, or fall, represents the lapsed ambition of the generation he typifies' (Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* [Oxford, 2003], p. 146). This formula may however itself demonstrate a premature critical glee in alleging the failure of failure, awarding low-grade second prizes so that the critic may occupy the victor's camp-stool.

The line of spaced periods, separating the first five stanzas from the remaining two, functions as almost a geologic fault or cleavage plane between modes of discourse, one cutting through and undercutting the other; but note too that in *CSP* the 14 points here are reduced to 9, and in the typescript (*Circe's Craft*, p. 229) this hiatus is represented by a centred row of four unspaced x's. In the *TLS* notice of *Mauberley* the anonymous reviewer complained with rather imperfect irony of Pound's enmity to the semi-artistic public, and of his lack of sweetness (*TLS*, 27th October 1921, p. 427); Eliot, *per contra*, praised the poem without qualification: 'It may give surprise that I attach so much

importance to *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*. This seems to me a great poem'; it is 'a positive document of sensibility' and is 'genuine tragedy and comedy' (Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems*, ed. with an intro. by T.S. Eliot [London, 1928; 2nd imp., 1952], p. 20; compare the comment of F.R. Leavis in *New Bearings in English Poetry* [London, 1932]: 'the *Introduction* does not represent his criticism at its best' [p. 134]). This overestimation (surely?), fully shared by Leavis (pp. 138-51) who had his own reasons and who goes on to announce that 'the *Cantos* appear to be little more than a game' (p. 155), is all of a piece with Eliot's reluctance about *Sextus Propertius*, very evident in this same Introduction of 1928 and only partly modified in the Postscript of 1948 (*Selected Poems*, p. 21).

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PDF file created on 8 September 2008