EZRA POUND'S METERS AND RHYTHMS

By William McNaughton

EZRA POUND himself emphasizes some-
what his work on the element of meter.[1]
T. S. Eliot wrote of Pound's importance in
prosody to younger poets that "there is no one
else to study."[2] Yet of all the critical attention
which Pound's poetry has received in recent
years, not one piece analyzes this fundamental
aspect of his work.[3] We have almost uniquely
Pound's critical pronouncements and the verse
itself to lead us to an understanding.

Three statements by Pound offer us the most
convenient outline according to which we may
analyze his versification and its development.
The statements imply his intention at three
different personal moments and indicate his
development through forty years of practice.
These statements are: 1) "To break the pentam-
eter, that was the first heave";[4] 2) "Poetry
atrophies when it gets too far from music";[5] 3)
"Metre is the articulation of the total sound of a
poem."[6] Each formulation was arrived at after
the poet had been working for several years on
the specific problem involved.

"To Break the Pentameter"

The urge to break the pentameter manifested
itself in Pound's first book[7] and derived from the
desire to say something new and the conviction
that "quand la forme n'est pas nouvelle, le fond
ne l'est non plus."[8] The poet explained much
later, "I *still* think the best *mechanism* for break-
ing up the stiffness and literary idiom *is* a differ-
ent metre, the god damn iambic magnetizes cer-
tain verbal sequences."[9]

Pound's formulations. William Carlos Williams
spoke of "poetic anarchy" in *A Lume Spento.*
Pound responded, "Sometimes I use rules of
Spanish, Anglo-Saxon and Greek metric that are
not common in the English of Milton's or Miss
Austen's day."[10] Pound later compressed this
idea into the propagandist slogan, "As regarding
rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the
musical phrase, not in sequence of a metro-
nome,"[11] and shifted its emphasis from strictly
prosodic practices to musical ones; yet in 1913
he was again advising, "Let the candidate fill
his mind with the finest cadences he can discover,
preferably in a foreign language so that the
meaning of the words may be less likely to divert
his attention from the movement."[12]

Specific effects: Basinio of Parma. His break
away from the accepted metrical convention

did indeed enable Pound to introduce new qual-
ities of movement into English verse. We do not
know whether he was composing from a mind he
had filled with "the finest cadences," or whether
as Basinio of Parma he had a specific classic
prototype before him,[13] but some of Pound's
finest effects may be analyzed as Greek prosody.
"Eyes, dreams, lips, and the night goes"[14] reduces
to five feet, as the usual English line. But four
of the words are trisemes, lengthening by half
like the dotted note in music. Such an effect of
syncope[15] makes the words vibrate on the mem-
ory. (Anapests are admitted to iambic lines in
Greek except in the last foot, which frequent sub-
stitution bears the name "cyclic anapest.")

"In the gloom, the gold gathers the light
against it" also reduces to five feet, with a two-
syllable anacrusis or upbeat and the trochaic

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[1] More of Pound's published writing *on technical matters*
deals with metric than with any other problem. He concludes
the primer *ABC of Reading* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions,
n.d.; hereafter cited *ABC*) with a "Treatise on Metre," of
which he gives his own summary: "LISTEN to the sound it
makes." Equal emphasis with meter is probably shared in
Pound's own poetics only by Gourmont's principle. "Rien ne
pousse à la concision comme l'abondance des idées." Quoted
in *Make It New* (London: Faber, 1934), p. 328; hereafter
cited *MIN.*

[2] Quoted in Hugh Kenner, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*
(Norfolk: New Directions, n.d.), p. 109.

[3] "That dimension of the *Personae* collection comes within
the competence neither of the present commentator nor
(fortunately) of the present book," Kenner. J. J. Espey's
Ezra Pound's Mauberley (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1955)
accurately and sensitively analyzes the meter and rhythms of
the *Mauberley* sequence.

[4] Pound, "Canto LXXXI," *Cantos* (New York: New Direc-
tions, 1948), p. 96.

[5] *ABC*, pp. 14, 61.

[6] The poet in conversation, 1953 or 1954. He said that the
idea was in *Kulchur*, although "maybe I buried it in that
book." I cannot now find the precise remark anywhere, yet it
might be inferred from pp. 92–95, skilfully. See *Guide to
Kulchur* (London: Faber, 1938).

[7] *A Lume Spento* (Venice: A. Antonini, 1908).

[8] Quoted *MIN*, p. 325.

[9] Pound, *Letters*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: Harcourt,
Brace, 1950), p. 260.

[10] Pound continues characteristically: "I doubt, however, if
you are sufficiently *au courant* to know just what the poets
and musicians *and* painters are doing with a good deal that
had masqueraded as law." *Letters*, p. 4.

[11] The Imagist manifesto of 1912. See *MIN*, p. 335.

[12] *Poetry*, March 1913. See *MIN*, pp. 336–341.

[13] See *ABC*, p. 48.

[14] "Cino," *Personae* (New York: New Directions, 1926), p. 6.

[15] Christopher Simpson glosses this technical word as
"driving a note."

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measure. The quantitative measure is perfectly regular, and accent is used melodically in occasional opposition to the meter.[16] "The light there almost solid"[17] forms half a line of iambic trimeter (counting in the Greek way), with a dactyl in the third place. Pound's very famous line "What thou lovest well is thy true heritage" (Canto LXXXI) plays its accentual rhythm off against the quantitative meter: the accents all fall on short syllables. The meter of the line is regular iambic, with a spondee, and the tribrach in the last place.

How well did the more liberal medium assume a traditional poetic function? A distinction that the poets have traditionally sought is to approximate in their own tongues Homer's onomatopoetic παρὰ θῖνα πολυφλόισβοιο θαλάσσης (*Iliad* I.34). We may consider a brief catalogue of imitation and variation. Virgil:

> qualis ubi alterno procurrens gurgite pontus
> nunc ruit ad terram scopulosque superiacit unda
> spumeus extremamque sinu perfundit harenam,
> nunc rapidus retro atque aestu revoluta resorbens
> soxa fugit litusque vado labente relinquit . . .
> (*Aeneid*, XI.624–628)

Gavin Douglas:

> Lyke as the flowand sey, wyth fludis rude
> Now ruschis to the land as it war wode,
> And on the skelleis at the costis bay
> Vpswakis fast the fomy wallis gray,
> And wyth his jawpis coveris in and out
> The far sandis our the bay about;
> Now wyth swyft fard gois ebband fast abak,
> That with his bulrand jaschis and out swak
> Wyth him he sowkis and drawis mony stane,
> And levis the strandis schald and sandis plane.[18]

Browning:

> And when wave broke and overswarmed, and, sucked
> To bounds back, multitudinously ceased . . . [19]

Yeats:

> Who paced in the eve by the nets on the pebbly
> shore.[20]

Shakespeare wrote "multitudinous seas incarnadine," but that rather more suggests the huge, slow-breathing movement of the sea, if it be intended at all for marine onomatopoeia. Yet Shakespeare also discovered

> The murmuring surge
> That on the unnumber'd idle pebbles chafes
> (*Lear*, IV.vi.20–21)

Pound's lines run

> the imaginary
> Audition of the phantasmal sea-surge
> ("Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," *Personae*, p. 202)

Pound comments on his own lines as "cross cut" and says they are "totally different, and a different movement of the water, and inferior."[21]

The standard which Pound was trying to break, a standard determined by the single element of accent, did not come into English verse-writing until fairly late, one supposes shortly after the "bump" began to assert its pre-eminence in musical execution. Musicians for 150 years after 1750 played the music of J. S. Bach and his predecessors with total disregard for the conventions of its redaction, in spite of ample contemporary explanation of these conventions, viz., the writings of Quantz. J. S. Bach and his predecessors distinguished main notes from passing notes by *lengthening* the main note. As per Giulio Caccini:

Written: Played:[22]

Renaissance Europe and Elizabethan England were very conscious of the practices of the classical poets. Shakespeare must have been at least as acutely aware of the quantity of words as of their accent.

> And such a flood of greatness fell on you
> (*1 Henry IV* v.i.48)

> An if we live, we live to tread on kings;
> If die, brave death, when princes die with us!
> (*1 Henry IV* v.ii.86–87)

> The tide of blood in me
> Hath proudly flowed in vanity till now:
> Now doth it turn and ebb back to the sea,
> Where it shall mingle with the state of floods
> And flow henceforth in formal majesty.
> (*2 Henry IV* v.ii.129–133)

> I have long dream'd of such a kind of man,
> So surfeit-swell'd, so old and so profane
> (*2 Henry IV* v.ii.53–54)

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[16] "Remember the SWAT must strain against the duration now and again, to maintain the tension," *Letters*, p. 262.

[17] "Canto 93," Section: *Rock-Drill 85–95 de los Cantares* (Milano: Vanni Scheiwiller, 1955), p. 88.

[18] *Poetical Works* (Edinburgh, 1874), IV, 57.

[19] "Aristophanes' Apology," *Poems* (Boston, 1895), p. 629.

[20] "The Meditation of the Old Fisherman," *Collected Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 21.

[21] *Letters*, pp. 274–275. Pound gives his own interpretation of the original Homeric effect: "the turn of the wave and the scutter of receding pebbles."

[22] Arnold Dolmetsch, *The Interpretation of the Music of the XVII & XVIII Centuries* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1946), p. 71.

In English the accent frequently coincides with the quantity, sometimes absolutely and sometimes with the elisions customary to the spoken language. It seems almost so elementary that one feels silly saying that quantity in English shows up differently than in Greek because of different spelling practices.

Consideration of quantity is necessary in the analysis of Anglo-Saxon versification. Quantity was important to determine the Anglo-Saxon arsis, and Anglo-Saxon poets varied quantity to "resolve the stress." Analogies between the four-stress Anglo-Saxon line and the dramatic verse of Shakespeare can derive only from a "good ear"[23] and the "genius" of language. Milton could have learned by a study of Italian the elision with which he resolves his "irregularities."[24]

Every versifier's debt to Pound is for his "original practical example." When theorizing from his own practice, he is clear always when not intentionally cryptic; but in explaining the discoveries made by Pierre Jean Rousselot's "phonoscope" at the Collège de France, Pound made one serious error. He claimed that the syllable "in" of phrases like "in the wind" is not long and that the phonoscope recorded the syllable as not long. Yet our ear confirms the judgment that the syllable is long. The vowel of "the" disappears, or is so far suppressed that it enters the ear almost precisely as the extra breath expelled in pronouncing theta: ἔνθ᾽, ὦ κρατίστου πατρὸς Ἑλλήνων τραφείς. . . . The machine was unable to discriminate between irrational iambs and cyclic anapests, but we should have expected a greater subtlety of Pound.

The real purport of Pound's movement against the pentameter was to shift some attention away from accent to quantity as a function in verbal music, and to classical meters in their diversity. He was able, at least in his own verse, greatly to enlarge the repertoire of poetic rhythms in English[25] and to exploit a variety of conversational and quasi-conversational rhythms.[26] Pound himself came to deride the influence that his principle "as regarding rhythm" had on the diluters: "*Vers libre* has become as prolix and verbose as any of the flaccid varieties of verse that preceded it. . . . At times I can find a marked metre in 'vers libres,' as stale and hackneyed as any pseudo-Swinburnian, at times the writers seem to follow no musical structure whatever."[27] Pound seldom attempted to write without at least the control suggested in Goethe's statement: "Wäre ich noch jung und verwegen genug, so würde ich absichtlich gegen alle solche technische Grillen verstoßen, ich würde Alliterationen, Assonanzen und falsche Reime, alles gebrauchen, wie es mir käme und bequem wäre; aber ich würde auf die Hauptsache losgehen und so gute Dinge zu sagen suchen, daß jeder gereizt werden sollte, es zu lesen und auswendig zu lernen."[28]

Two of Pound's own critical remarks probably contributed somewhat to an excess of license in the reaction. When Pound wrote, "Christopher Simpson, 1655, is much concerned with physical means of getting a regular beat. . . . his date is interesting . . . The movement toward regularity in verse . . . ,"[29] he did not take into account the rhythmic constant of the older music, which was the length of adjacent sounds. His citation of Arnold Dolmetsch's advice, "Mark not the beat too much" (p. 153), diminishes in application when we examine the original text. The advice Dolmetsch gives, or transmits, is actually: [Viol players] must take care, in lively movements, not to mark the beat too much, so as not to depart from the spirit of the instrument, which will not be treated in the manner of the Violin, of which the purpose is to animate, whilst that of the Treble Viol is to flatter."[30] Thus, having encouraged his contemporaries and successors to write only an inner part, Pound was dissatisfied many years later with the effects, and would probably be dissatisfied today if his reading were current: "The definite *vacancy*," he wrote to Mary Barnard in 1934, "is in melodic validity" (*Letters*, p. 260). We shall see that these misconstructions affected also Pound's technique in writing verses to *sing*, to which he began seriously to apply himself at about this time (1918).

Poetry and Music

Pound also addressed himself earnestly to "an attempt to revive the art of song." He worked at

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[23] "The question of the relative duration of syllables has never been neglected by men with susceptible ears." *ABC*, p. 56.

[24] Milton, writing at the Puritanic distance from ancient myth, created a curious blend of mythologies. Dante invokes pagan enlightenment "rather tactfully to rebuke the Church, in a way that will not stir up the rabble." See Pound, *Spirit of Romance* (London: J. M. Dent, 1910), p. 125.

[25] Eliot observed that a man who introduces new rhythms to the language "enlarges our sensibilities."

[26] It is necessary to maintain the dissociation of verse "be it rouned, red or songe" (*Hous of Fame.* I.722). Pound calls it "melopoeia . . . to sing; to chant or intone; and to speak." *ABC*, p. 61. The *Lustra* poems, in which Pound catches so effectively various tones of voice, appear in *Personae*, pp. 81–123.

[27] *MIN*, p. 336.

[28] Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe* (Zürich: Artemis-Verlag, 1948), II, 443.

[29] *Pavannes and Divisions* (New York: Knopf, 1918), p. 155.

[30] Dolmetsch, p. 17.

the revival in two ways: 1) in translation and imitation of the finest lyrics of other languages; 2) by composition of music.

Translation and imitation. Dante's treatise *De Vulgari Eloquentia* led Pound first to serious study of troubadour poetry and the union of words with music.[31] Pound worked back to translation of the troubadours through Cavalcanti's ballate, of which he published translations in 1910.[32] In 1918 he published a series of variations of, and descants on, troubadour themes.[33] Prevented then from reading by eye trouble, he rendered into English certain poems of Arnaut Daniel, which he had memorized while studying Provençal with Shepard.[34] In 1931 he published a version of Cavalcanti's famous canzone "Donna mi priegha," in an essay dated "1910/1931."[35] A still more skilful rendition of this canzone appeared in Pound's Canto xxxvi, published in 1934.[36] His latest efforts in song occur in the translations *The Confucian Anthology*[37] and Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*.[38]

Musical composition. "Part of what a musician HAS to know," wrote Pound, "is employed in writing with words" (*ABC*, p. 197). Pound worked to learn this part of his craft as an actual practioner, not as a dilettante. He studied and practiced musical composition for various periods beginning about 1907. He wrote an opera *Le Testament* around Villon's words, an opera *Cavalcanti* around Cavalcanti's and Sordello's. He collaborated with Walter Rummel to set certain troubadour songs, published musical criticism under the name "William Atheling,"[39] organized the Rapallo concerts, and associated with Tibor Serly and Gerhart Münch. In *Who's Who 1962*, he describes himself as "American poet and composer."

The standard to which Pound consistently adhered is that the music should throw light on the words, not distort the words for musical effects. He could have inferred the standard from Dante's marvellous lines, in which in "buon" and "buon" we hear the citara follow: "E come a buon cantor buon citarista / Fa seguitar lo guizzo de la corda, / In che più di piacer lo canto acquista . . ." (*Paradiso*, Canto xx.142–144).

Formulations. Of the knowledge which Pound gained from these investigations, such as can be formulated may be summarized almost in two statements: 1) Pound concluded the "Treatise on Metre": "Beyond which we will never recover the art of *writing to be sung* until we begin to pay some attention to the sequence, or scale, of vowels in the line, and of the vowels terminating the group of lines in a series" (*ABC*, p. 206). 2)

Concerning the *setting* of troubadour poems, he wrote: "Try to interpret Troubadour tune on the hypothesis that the line (of verse) is the bar and can be graphed to best advantage as a (that is one single) bar."[40]

Rhythmic vitality. Pound failed in his "Langue d'Oc"[41] translations and descants to give the songs a vital beat. He was fresh from an enthusiasm for free verse and from the successful *Lustra* applications of it. He may also have too much admired the intricate divisions *within the line* that Arnaut Daniel imposed by internal rhyme. The poems fall apart over lines like "I care not a glove," and "She by one touch / Reft me away; / So doth bewilder me / I can not say my say / Nor my desire."

Daniel wrote the poem "L'aura amara" in the same strophic pattern as Campion's "Since She, Euen She." But in Daniel's poem, the internal rhymes break out as follows:

> L'aura amara
> Fals bruoills brancutz
> Clarzir
> Quel doutz espeissa ab fuoills,
> Els letz
> Becs
> Dels auzels ramencs
> Ten balps e mutz,
> Pars
> E non-pars;
> Per qu'eu m'esfortz
> De far e dir
> Plazers
> A mains per liei
> Que m'a virat bas d'aut,
> Don tem morir
> Sils afans no m'asoma.[42]

Campion's music fits the Daniel poem perfectly,

[31] William Pierce Shepard "*gave*" Pound an extracurricular course in the Provençal poets at Hamilton.
[32] *The Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti* (London, 1912).
[33] "Homage a la Langue d'Or [sic]," *Little Review*, v, 1 (May 1918), 19–24.
[34] So doing, he broke an oath taken to himself "never to attempt translation again." The versions were published in an essay on Daniel in *Instigations* (New York, 1920), pp. 286–320.
[35] *Guido Cavalcanti: Rime* (Genova, 1931).
[36] *Eleven New Cantos*, xxxi–xli (New York, 1934).
[37] *The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1954).
[38] New York: New Directions, 1957. Hereafter cited *WOT*.
[39] "Music," *New Age*, running almost every two weeks from 6 Dec. 1917–21 April 1921.
[40] *Kulchur*, p. 199.
[41] See *Personae*, pp. 171–177.
[42] *MIN*, pp. 67–73. Cf. Carl Appel, *Provenzalische Chrestomathie* (Leipzig, 1895), p. 11.

with the repetition of Campion's last two lines as
indicated by the score:

> Since she, eu'n she, for whom I liu'd,
> Sweet she by Fate from me is torne,
>   Why am not I of sence depriu'd,
> Forgetting I was ever borne?
>   Why should I languish, hating light?
>   Better to sleep an endlesse night.[43]

Pound may weave nearly as intricate a rhyme in
some *Langue d'Oc* poems, but the poems fall flat
because he does not build up an effective beat:

> When the springtime is sweet
> And the birds repeat
> Their new song in the leaves.
> 'Tis meet
> A man go where he will.
> But from where my heart is set
> No message I get;
> My heart all wakes and grieves;
> Defeat
> Or luck, I must have my fill. (p. 173)

(And Pound has even attempted to improve
metrically on Guillem de Peitau's original, which
runs "Ab la dolchor del temps novel / Foillo li
bosc, e li aucel / Chanton chascus en lor lati," and
so on, regularly.)[44]

Schemes *have* been carried out in English,
though by poets working very close to their musi-
cal inspiration, which rhyme with as intricate
purpose as the Provençal. Perhaps we need the
music to "get" it. One song by Henry Lawes is
conventionally divided:

> Tis true (fair Celia) that by thee I live,
>   That every kisse, and every fond embrace
> Forms a new soul within me, and doth give
>   A balsam to the wound made by thy face:
>   Yet still methinks I miss
>   That bliss
>   That lovers dare not name
>   And only then described is
>   When flame doth meet with flame.[45]

We could as well divide it (as the music very
clearly does):

> Tis true (fair Celia) that by thee
> I live,
> That every kisse
> And every fond embrace
> Forms a new soul within me,
> And doth give
> A balsam to the wound made by thy face:
> Yet still methinks I miss
> That bliss
> That lovers dare not name,
> And only then described is
> When flame
> Doth meet with flame.

We can find internal rhyme used freely by T'ao
Ch'ien to strain against the beat, but always in
subtle subordination to the basic pattern:

愧通識　所保詎乃淺！
遠。是以植杖翁，悠然不復返。即理
風送餘善。寒草被荒蹊，地爲罕人
吾駕啓塗情已緬鳥�節洽
屢空既有人春興豈自免凤晨裝
在昔聞南畝當年竟未踐。

(Slashes in the phonetic transcription indicate
the internal rhymes):

> dz'ai: sįäk mįuǝn nậm mǝu:,
> tâng nien kįþng: mjwęi- / dz'jän:.
> lįu- k'ung kjęi- / jįǝu: / ńźįěn,
> tś'įuěn χįǝng k'âi: dz'i- mįän:!
>
> sįuk źįěn / tsįang nguo / ka-,
> k'iei: d'uo/dz'jäng i: mįän:.
> tieu: lung- / χuân sįěn / tsiet,
> lieng pįung sung- / įwo zįän:.
>
> γân ts'âu p'jįę / χwâng γiei,
> d'i- jwię / χân: ńźįěn jįwþn:.
> źįę: i: d'i- / d'iang: 'ung,
> iǝu ńźįän / pįǝu- b'iǝu- piwþn:.
>
> tsįek lji: kjwi- / t'ung tśi-,
> sįwo: pâu: g'įwo: nậi: ts'jän:![46]

The poem keeps basically to a strict five-syllable
beat, and this beat is punctuated by the basic
rhyme scheme: x a x a / x a x a / x b x b / x a.
Rhyme "b" is probably used in the third qua-
train to anticipate the close.

Rhythmic freedom. The Imagist idea of "musi-
cal phrase" was too vague to sustain a technique

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[43] "Fourth Book of Ayres," *Third and Fourth Booke of
Ayres* (London, circa 1613), no. XVI. See also *Works*, ed.
Percival Vivian (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1909), p. 183.

[44] *Anthology of the Provençal Troubadours*, ed. R. T. Hill and
T. G. Bergin (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1941), p. 9.

[45] *Ayres and Dialogues* (London, 1653–58), Pt. I, p. 29
[misnumbered 27].

[46] T'ao Yüan-ming, *Shih*, ed. Fu Tung-hwa (Hong Kong:
Hsiang kang Shih Hsüeh Shu Tien Yin Hang, n.d.), p. 1.
Concerning the reconstruction of "Ancient Chinese" and the
indication of tones, see Bernhard Karlgren, *Grammata Serica
Recensa* (Stockholm, 1957), esp. pp. 4–5.

for song. In statement the idea failed significantly to dissociate between instrumental music and vocal music, and the practice which developed from it did not achieve sufficiently definite an articulation. No tradition of simultaneous music, dance, and poetry had flourished for centuries in Western Europe.

Freedom of certain kinds is not inimical to the effective song. Homer sings:

αὐτὰρ ἔπειτ' αὐτοῖσι βέλος ἐχεπευκὲς ἐφιεὶς
βάλλ'· αἰεὶ δέ πυραὶ νεκύων καίοντο θαμειαί
(*Iliad*, i.51–52)

And:

πρῶτον γάρ μιν ἰόντα βάλε στῆθος παρὰ μαζὸν
δεξιόν· (*Iliad*, iv.480–481)

John Donne moves his caesura around in the line with as much vitality and grace as Homer does:[47]

Where, like a pillow on a bed,
    A Pregnant banke swell'd up, to rest
The violets reclining head,
    Sat we two, one anothers best.
Our hands were firmly cimented
    With a fast balme, which thence did spring,
Our eye-beames twisted, and did thread
    Our eyes, upon one double string;
So to'entergraft our hands, as yet
    Was all the meanes to make us one,
And pictures in our eyes to get
    Was all our propagation.
As 'twixt two equal armies, Fate
    Suspends uncertaine victorie,
Our soules, (which to advance their state,
    Were gone out,) hung 'twixt her and mee. . . .
And if some lover, such as wee,
    Have heard this dialogue of one,
Let him still marke us, he shall see
    Small change, when we'are to bodies gone.
("The Extasie")

Donne, although he uses binding devices which the Imagists eschewed, really writes "in the sequence of the musical phrase." His poem does not break down nor sprawl. It does suggest lines of movement beyond the metrical frame. Donne's arrangements define the sound at every moment.

Beddoes uses another kind of variation in his songs, which may be seen in the lines beginning "The rim o' the sun" and "Of Love's stars" below:

If thou wilt ease thine heart
Of love and all its smart,
    Then sleep, dear, sleep;
And not a sorrow
    Hang any tear on your eyelashes;
    Lie still and deep,

Sad soul, until the sea-wave washes
The rim o' the sun tomorrow
    In eastern sky.

But wilt thou cure thine heart:
Of love and all its smart,
    Then die, dear, die;
'T is deeper, sweeter,
    Than on a rose-bank to lie dreaming
    With folded eye;
And there alone, amid the beaming
Of Love's stars, thou'lt meet her
    In eastern sky.[48]
("Wolfram's Dirge")

Beddoes put a musical sigh on "Love's." The least sophisticated of folk-singers will understand the principle, but will probably not use it with the same aptitude for emotional definition.[49] And although Auden has derided the distribution of six syllables over a dozen notes, he should not object to usage which suggests an *Affekt*.

Pound worked his translations from the *Shih Ching* (*Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius*) into very definite rhythms. Pound advised an inquisitive young versifier to listen "only to the beats." When working to translate the tight four-syllable Chinese line, Pound was also interested in the excitement introduced by equivocal syllables like "chi-ang." The effect in a sequence of monosyllables delighted his ear.

But probably the best indication of Pound's eventual effective technical dissociation of *sung* verse and *spoken* verse comes in his translation of *Women of Trachis*, which includes sections in each style.

Internal rhyme. Arnaut Daniel uses internal rhyme to emphasize special sound qualities. Cavalcanti uses it to keep the line from "going heavy" (see *MIN*, pp. 368–375). Internal rhyme can also be used to enforce the cadence, or it may work to suggest *rallentando* or *tempo rubato*.[50]

[47] " . . . it seems even to be supposed by some critics that Donne did not know how to scan. This last supposition may be rejected at once; what there was to know about poetry was known to Donne. But it seems certain that he intentionally introduced a revolution into English versification." Edmund Gosse, quoted by F. E. Schelling, "Elizabethan Lyrical Measures," *Elizabethan Lyrics*, ed. Schelling (Boston: Ginn, 1895), p. lxvii.

[48] Beddoes handles the rhyme too with great musical skill. He admits one unresolved rhyme ("sky") to his first stanza and uses it in the second stanza to proceed to his close (die/eye/sky).

[49] See also Gourmont, "Le Vers Populaire," *Esthétique de la langue française*, ed. R.-L. Wagner (Paris, 1938), pp. 171–186.

[50] "In *tempo rubato* in an Adagio, the left hand should go on playing in strict time." *Mozart's Letters*, ed. Eric Blom (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1956), p. 58.

Pound found internal rhyme again in the ancient Chinese *Shih Ching* songs which he translated, and the style radically affected the technique of his versification. Often enough the poets who composed those old odes, many of which are in lines of four syllables, rhymed on the third or penultimate syllable. When Pound went on to "english" Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*, he attempted to capture some of the lyric choruses in a modified Chinese pattern:

> KUPRIS bears trophies away.
> Kronos' Son, Dis and Poseidon,
> There is no one
>   shaker unshaken.
> Into dust go they all.
> Neath Her they must
>   give way.
> TWO gods fought for a girl,
> Battle and dust!
> Might of a River with horns
>   crashing.
> Four bulls together
>   Shall no man tether,
> Akheloos neither,
>   lashing through Oneudai.
> . . .
> Kupris decides
> To whom brides
>   fall.
> . . .
> Who shall have her?
> To stave her and prove her,
> Cowless calf lost,
> Hurtled away,
>   prized for a day?
>   (*WOT*, pp. 23–24).

Closing rhythms. Shelley, writing with a workman's ease of his craft, defined the function of the regular plan of metric "which would include under determinate forms the varied pauses" of a style.[51] Pound once emerged from his door in Washington, the rapid beating of a stripped-down metronome audible behind him. "God damn it," he said to his visitors, "I've wasted forty years listening to the clicks that thing makes, instead of the pauses between the clicks."[52]

Pound had serious trouble with his middle closes in *Langue d'Oc*: "Defeat / Or luck, I must have my fill"; " . . . that Love goes out, Leaving me no power to hold him"; " . . . Wanting only what / No man can get or has got." (We are able in Donne to hear the middle closes wherever they should occur: "Might thence a new concoction take / And part far purer than they came"; " . . . For th'anatomies of which we grow / Are

souls whom no change can invade"—"The Extasie.")

Yet in the *Classic Anthology* Pound is very sure of his closing rhythms. In the poem beginning "Pheasant cock flies on easy wing" (p. 15), the *meter* is regular for the first three stanzas; the sixth and tenth lines are used like monometer in a Greek song. The poet identifies his close by altering that meter in "conscienceless" and "not covets." It prepares the auditor's ear and thereby brings the ode to a more satisfying conclusion.[53]

Such anticipation of the close is an essential device in the art of song writing. Arnaut Daniel varies the fifth and eighth lines to mark the close of the *stanza* in "Lancan son passat li giure":

> Sus el entrecim on poma,
> La flors e li chan eil clar quil
> · · ·
>
> M'enseignon c'ab joi m'apoigna,
> Sai al temps de l'intran d'april.[54]

(The troubadours achieved the final close of their longer songs with codas.) The Greek poets, in assembling systems of trochaic, iambic, or anapestic meters *acatalectic*, closed the system with a catalectic line: the catalexis was used to indicate the close, to solve the song. In the strophe in the *Frogs* beginning ταῦτα μὲν πρὸς ἀνδρός ἐστι, Aristophanes ends with the lines:

> πὺξ πατάξας μούξέκοψε
> τοὺς χοροὺς τοὺς προσθίους.
>   (ll. 533–549)

Campion indicates the approach of his close in "Fain would I my love disclose" by varying the meter as Daniel did:

> Wise she is, and needs must know
> All th'attempts that beauty moves:
> Fayre she is, and honoured so
> That she, sure, hath tryed some loves.
> If with love I tempt her then,
> *T'is but her due to be desired:*
> What would women think of men
> *If their deserts were not admired?*

Total Sound of the Poem

Pound has, as a critic remarked, devoted most

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[51] "A Defence of Poetry," *Prose Works*, ed. H. B. Foreman (London: 1880), III, 107.
[52] Anecdote told by Rudd Fleming.
[53] Another indication of the translation's musical qualities is to be found in the excellence of the terminal sounds: tone . . ., moon, pain, . . . —the use of consonance across the rhymes. The rhymes were evidently planned out in advance, as the rhymes were in Arnaut Daniel's songs.
[54] U. A. Canello, *La Vita e le Opere del Trovatore Arnaldo Daniello* (Halle, 1883), p. 98.

of his creative energy during the past forty years to the *Cantos;* "literary history gives us few other examples" of such total commitment.[55] What then of the work on which Pound has really staked his reputation as a poet?

Ground plan. Pound uses three different techniques of articulation to create the local tensions of his *Cantos:* there are Italian, American, and Chinese elements in his scheme, and each of them may successively cause the same reader delight, consternation, and dismay. A principle of departure from these elements also operates, the principle of effective free verse that "permits a poem to arise out of its own rhythm, as [in] Turner and Pound at their best."[56] To such departure we owe some of the finest cantos, as XLV ("With *Usura*"). A beat actually is more marked in the departures than elsewhere. Pound may also "depart" to more conservative forms for a special purpose, as to adapted Anglo-Saxon rhythms (Canto I) or to imitation of Fitzgerald (Canto LXXX). "It is just this adaptability of metre to mood," writes Eliot, "an adaptability due to an intensive study of metre, that constitutes an important element in Pound's technique."[57] The principle that holds it all together is stated by Pound as, "metre is the articulation of the total sound of a poem."

Dante. Pound began to compose his *Cantos* in a meter based, more or less, on Dante's hendecasyllabics. Since the *Cantos* was at its conception a grand descant on the *Divine Comedy*, this choice of a metrical base was logical enough. Pound praised the explanation of Dante's metric given in G. Biagoli's *Tractato d'Armonia di Verso Italiano:* "The author did not 'lay down rules,' he merely observed that Dante's hendecasyllabics were composed of combinations of rhythm units of various shapes and sizes and that these pieces were put together in lines so as to make, roughly, eleven syllables in all."[58]

Pound developed for the *Cantos* a versification that omitted the rhymes and tends toward a more conversational movement. Homer's poems could have been the best after-dinner entertainment in Ionia; Pound aims to recreate the best conversation of several epochs in England and Europe, because he believes, as Yeats said, that "Nothing affects these people except our conversation." The fundamental intent of Pound as poet is not to teach or to delight, but to *move*. He called an early, important book *Instigations*; he signed the back of his last installment of *Cantos* with the word 動 (the American edition omits it). Sometimes the conversation is uninteresting, sometimes it is very exciting. Pound's skill as a

mimic may lower the tone, but it adds life to the moment:

"an doan you think he chop an' change all the time
stubborn az a mule, sah, stubborn as a MULE,
got th' eastern idea about money" . . .
this day October the whateverth   Mr. Coxie
aged 91 has mentioned bonds and their
                                                        interest
apparently as a basis of issue
and Mr Sinc Lewis has not
            and Bartók has left us
And Mr Beard in his admirable condensation
(Mr Chas. Beard) has given one line to the currency
at about page 426 "The Republic"
                              (Canto LXXXIV, pp. 115–116)

These lines are not exactly conversation, yet they do suggest conversation. And where the rhythms of the verse are conversational, there they are 'right' as the form for the occasion; the rhythms of the *Cantos* are then as right as the rhythms Homer fitted to his lyre. They fit equally the "lange Atem des epischen Erzählers."

Whitman. Pound has pushed to its utmost in his presentation of "the Adams dynasty" (Cantos LXII–LXXI) the second technique of metrical articulation for the *Cantos*, which may be called "American" although it is particularly Whitmanian. "Whitman," in the words of William Michael Rossetti, "introduces into his compositions passages indistinguishable from ordinary prose."[59] (We are considering the metrical organization of the *Cantos'* language, and not its syntax—in syntax it is, of course, "distinguishable.")

But "Out of the mockingbird's throat, the musical shuttle" may last *because* it has a musical structure. When some tune that Whitman had heard at the opera began to act on his genius, the genius began to produce immortal verse. The other parts of *Leaves* are Whitman's recitativi, and—except for brilliant bits and phrases—they will slide quietly into literary history. Whitman got his idea for the form of *Leaves* from the opera, and the trouble with opera as a form is that the recitativo is *not* in verse. The language moves too roughly from prose to song; or it may be in passing the other way, from song to prose, that our sensibilities are dishevelled.

[55] M. L. Rosenthal, *A Primer of Ezra Pound* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 43.
[56] W. B. Yeats, *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (New York, 1936), p. viii.
[57] *Ezra Pound, his Metric and Poetry* (New York: Knopf, 1917), pp. 7–8.
[58] *MIN*, pp. 370–371.
[59] *Some Reminiscences* (New York: Charles Scribner's Son, 1906), p. 400.

When Galilei, Corsi, Caccini and Jacopo Peri "invented" the opera, they were actually experimenting with a revival of Greek drama. But they (or their successors) attended to the song and did not, evidently, perceive the necessity for keeping up a beat in the non-singing sections. The recitativo is a formal decadence, and Whitman should not have imitated it. To use a predecessor's compromise as an excuse for not hammering your own verse into better shape and more solidity, which Pound has done in adopting this element from Whitman, is not what we expect of a classical artist. When Whitman actually went out and heard the birds sing, the results were much more interesting: "Soothe! Soothe! Soothe!" in "Out of the cradle, endlessly rocking," is precise imitation of bird-song. Whitman has found an effect particular to his language and subject. The secret is in the diphthongal glide, and the musical effect is about like this:

Such an effect would be the despair of translators into a Continental language.

Pound operated earlier in the Vorticist principle, "so to concentrate the mind on a particular rhythm, defined plane, or arrangement of colors, that it becomes more sensitive to all other rhythms, defined planes, etc." For the purposes of metrical analysis, this could be the structural principle of the *Cantos*. As a principle it functions perfectly well right up to Canto LXII. The firmer meters of Cantos XVII, XXXVI, XXXIX, and XLV echo across the weaker meters of Cantos XIX, XXXVIII, XLI, and XLVI, and confer on them form and validity. The subtler articulations of these latter cantos would not be possible as poetry without the harder articulations of XVII, XXXVI, XXXIX, and XLV. Yet in the Adams cantos, the poet has pushed his technique beyond its durable limits. There is no "hardening" in the section, there is too large a gap from the last firm metrical expression, and our appreciation is confuted:

"TO THE GOVERNOR AND THE COMPANIE
            whereon Thomas Adams
            19th March 1628
18th assistant whereof the said Thomas Adams
            (abbreviated)
Merry Mount become Braintree, a plantation near
                                        Weston's.
Capn Wollanston's became Merrymount."
                            (Canto LXII, p. 87)

There should be great national interest in Pound's presentation of "the Adams dynasty." Yet

    Numbers of small birds from the shore
    instant they light on a ship
            drop asleep from exhaustion
                        (Canto LVX, p. 116)

are about the only lines in the section that move us immediately, and this may be from a fortuitous sympathy. Homer's catalogue of the armies breezes by in comparison (Homer anyway parodies the dullness of his directory less than 200 lines later: ἄμα τῇ γε καὶ ἀμφίπολοι δύ' ἕποντο *Iliad* III.143). Pound has provided us with the notes of a very erudite man on Adams' papers; yet just to the extent that the work fails to match his master's definition, it fails as poetry "que nichil aliud est quam fictio rethorica musicaque posita."[60]

Chinese. Later in the *Cantos* when Pound seems even more "to be improvising at sight from an unknown Greek masterpiece," there is a principle of organization at work which retains our interest, even if we do not understand it analytically. The precisions in the later cantos derive more from the tension between ideas than between syllables or "feet." Pound is moving closer to the definition of 'style' as "the absolute subjugation of the details of a given work to the dominant will; to the central urge or impulse";[61] he is more nearly realizing Goethe's mature wish "auf die Hauptsache losgehen," and he could not have done it earlier in the poem. Pound's studies of the Chinese classics have inspired and sustained him in this articulation, and these classics probably gave him the original idea for this technique. It fits in with his expressed aim as poet "to charge words with meaning to the utmost possible degree."[62]

Pound found in the verbal relations of Chinese a key he had sought and not found many years earlier in Tacitus: Pound imitated Tacitus for five years, to the "ruin" of his prose, "trying to write English as Tacitus wrote Latin" (*Letters*, p. 87) in a search for compression, compactness. W.A.C.H. Dobson has invented the term "rule of economy" to explain the compression in classical Chinese. Dobson describes its operation as follows: "One of the most distinctive linguistic

[60] Dante, "De Vulgari Eloquentia," II, iv, *Le Opere*, a cura M. Barbi et al. (Firenze: R. Bemporad & Figlio, 1921), p. 341.
[61] Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: a Memoir* (London: John Lane, 1916), p. 89.
[62] *ABC*, p. 36.

features of L[ate] A[rchaic] C[hinese] . . . [is] the non-obligatoriness of the use of many of its grammatical devices. . . . Statements are made with the minimum of grammatical indications consistent with clear statement. . . . It might seem to those accustomed to the obligatory grammatical indications of Indo-European languages that such selectivity in their use would make for ambiguity or lack of clarity, but in practise this is rarely so . . . "[63] Dobson further notices of Archaic Chinese "the metrical flexibility it enjoys through the operation of the rule of economy."[64] Pound uses analogous ellipses also in his *Cantos* to achieve metrical flexibility.

"When two propositions are stated, one after the other, without any qualifying words," writes H.G. Creel of ancient Chinese literary prose, "the former is very often a condition and the latter a consequence."[65] A typical example is the passage from the *Filial Piety Classic* reading:

在上不驕高而不危

Literally, these characters read "On top not arrogant, high and not precarious." The qualifying words have been omitted. A recent translation renders it, "When a prince is not proud and arrogant, he will not incur peril in spite of his high position."[66] Pound minimizes his use of qualifying and connecting words, phrases, and paragraphs. And he sticks in such "binding matter" as there is, after the elimination of all superfluities, at the end of the canto. He demands that the qualification and connection occur in the reader's mind, without unnecessary verbal assistance. This explains what at first appears to be an 'unorganized' syntax, and it explains the tension and drive of the later cantos.

Pound uses his intellectual material in the later cantos the way a composer uses thematic material: he states a basic idea, drops it, repeats it, varies it, restates it, inverts it, abbreviates it— until Pound feels it may finally have delighted the reader's memory, or worn out his resistance. Pound could not otherwise have controlled and determined the meaning and reference of material from which he had suppressed indicia, according to his own "rule of economy." Yet by using these techniques of statement, elimination, repetition, variation in analogy to musical composition, Pound is able lucidly to accumulate and dispose his abbreviated and compressed material.

We perceive in various sections, reasons to believe that "something new in poetry" is being made to happen:

King Offa at 6 and ½
     Alfred, finally, Athelstan 12;
Canute opposing Byzantium, 20 scads to the dinar,
    100 scads to the mark (of accountancy)
Edgar's leather (?) came after Athelstan
    "thon yilden he gon rere"
     that is, guilds into England,
"And he, the president, is true to his caste
   "and that caste," said old Lampman, "the underworld."[67]

Pound is assembling his facts in sentences, and the sentences always end with a perfectly clear statement, if the reader will watch the stops. The lines cited above end with one of Pound's themes or responses for the canto. The theme occurs elsewhere, as:

 Some faint connection
   between criminality and calamity
    lo jorn, Der Tag

that at least a few should perceive this 旦 tan. (p. 29)

and again:

Started with a limited (if not by dogma, but in practice)
   suffrage of the qualified,
πανουργία now at the top. (p. 30)

And the two lines on "caste" are tied in verbally with "yilden."

These lines all come early in Canto 97. There are many other examples of this practice in the same canto. The sentence beginning "Struck at Bassora" ends "And that the Senate coined after Nero . . . / LIBERTAS RESTITUTA" (pp. 20–21). The sentence on Prussian notes and so on ends: " 'Window-dressing' as Bryan admitted to Kitson" (p. 25).[68]

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[63] *Late Archaic Chinese* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1959), p. xxvi.

[64] *Early Archaic Chinese* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1962), p. xxxi.

[65] *Literary Chinese by the Inductive Method* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1948), I, 95.

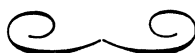[66] *The Hsiao Ching*, trans. Sister Mary Lelia Makra (New York: St. John's Univ. Press, 1961), p. 7.

[67] "Canto 97," *Thrones: 96–109 de los Cantares* (Milano: Vanni Scheiwiller, 1959), p. 22.

[68] Pound comments on his principle for the organization of the introductory clauses in these sentences, which is his principle for the handling of detail generally in the *Cantos*, by remarking that "points define a periphery." Sometimes, however, points may define a periphery as the blind men defined the elephant. Furthermore, in the same section of the poem where he assists us with "echoes, apparatus, text, translations, French version, Latin version, footnotes and . . . scholarly reverberation," the poet advises us to "get rid of paraphernalia." See Kenner, *Gnomon* (New York: McDowell-Obolensky, 1958), p. 288. Cf. "Canto 91," *Rock-Drill*, p. 75.

"Obscurity" disappears from the *Cantos* if one has studied enough Chinese, not because one recognizes allusions, which are explained; not because one understands quotations, which are translated always, if elsewhere; but because one grasps the style. Another approach is to read the poem *slowly*. Whether or not the reader chooses to invest the time is his individual concern. Certain pleasures are to be had even from a first reading, and they are largely the result of Pound's metrical virtuosity.

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IN THIS WORK, when it shall be found that much is omitted, let it not be forgotten that much likewise is performed; and though no book was ever spared out of tenderness to the author, and the world is little solicitous to know whence proceeded the faults of that which it condemns; yet it may gratify curiosity to inform it, that the *English Dictionary* was written with little assistance of the learned, and without any patronage of the great; not in the soft obscurities of retirement, or under the shelter of academick bowers, but amidst inconvenience and distraction, in sickness and in sorrow. It may repress the triumph of malignant criticism to observe, that if our language is not here fully displayed, I have only failed in an attempt which no human powers have hitherto completed. If the lexicons of ancient tongues, now immutably fixed, and comprised in a few volumes, be yet, after the toil of successive ages, inadequate and delusive; if the aggregated knowledge, and co-operating diligence of the *Italian* academicians, did not secure them from the censure of *Beni;* if the embodied criticks of *France*, when fifty years had been spent upon their work, were obliged to change its oeconomy, and give their second edition another form, I may surely be contented without the praise of perfection, which, if I could obtain, in this gloom of solitude, what would it avail me? I have protracted my work till most of those whom I wished to please have sunk into the grave, and success and miscarriage are empty words: I therefore dismiss it with frigid tranquility, having little to fear or hope from censure or from praise.—Samuel Johnson, Preface to the *Dictionary*, 1755.