

EZRA POUND AS TRANSLATOR OF ITALIAN POETRY *

Without that inevitable betrayal - the translation of poetry - creative contacts between different literature would have been far fewer and less decisive than they have turned out to be in the course of Western history, one reason being that many a salient figure in ages of poetical fervor would have lacked some unique challenge and nourishment. In the modern Anglo-American scene, to outlaw the quixotic enterprise of poetical translation would mean all but eliminating the pivotal figure of Ezra Pound. Whether we consider his versatility, his incisiveness or his effectiveness, he towers above all competitors in this regard; and if I single out the Italian band from his wide spectrum of endeavor, I shall still have the opportunity to watch a master craftsman at work, one who can turn to account both his basic fidelity to the original text and his occasional infidelities. They are calculated infidelities anyway, for the most part. Given Pound's deep-seated affinity for Italian culture, the strange thing is that he should not have tried his hand at more of the Italian masters, especially those of his time; but humility rather than ignorance or arrogance may have been the reason, and it is a fact that his versions from Cavalcanti, coeval as they are with his early "original" verse, stand as a milestone in his creative itinerary, a mark *by* and *from* which to assess his overall achievement.

Before I come to grips with the technical aspects of Pound's specific contribution in this province, however, I want to say something on two of his brethren who have also

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tested their craft on impervious Italian masterpieces, with divergent methods and results. Unfortunately, Richard Wilbur is not one of them, for his scarce work on Italian poetry to date does not warrant inclusion in this particular context; I can only hope that some Italian poet may afford him the same kind of inspiration Molière so far did. The two writers I have here in mind are Robert Lowell and Joseph Auslander. Their endeavor can serve as a foil to Pound's own.

The art of translation has been integral to Robert Lowell's development as poet, though not quite to the same extent as in Pound's case. He has in fact vied with Pound in tackling Propertius and Rimbaud, and he possibly owes to Pound his own fruitful interest in Villon; both Pound and Allen Tate certainly oriented him on Dante, who keeps cropping up in Lowell's poetical trajectory, from *Lord Weary's Castle* of 1946 (where one poem freely translates the Buonconte da Montefeltro episode in *Purg.* V) to *Life Studies* of 1959 (where the concluding tercet of *Inf.* XV is inserted very functionally in the moving epitaph for George Santayana) to, finally, the 1967 volume *Near the Ocean*, which includes in its rich translation experiments a complete version of *Inf.* XV to follow up the earlier cue. There can be little doubt about the elective affinity that the author of "Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" has discovered in himself for Dante's indignant prophecy and taut meter, even though no Dantean text appears in the 1961 collection of translations from various European poets, *Imitations*.

This book was highly praised at the time, and it should have met with a more severe critical response than it got, for it exhibits Lowell's faults along with some of his real talent.

In saying this, I am far from ignoring Lowell's own avowed rationale for the literary procedure he calls "imitation" rather than "translation" to dispel any delusion that he might have pursued a literal rendition of his chosen texts, whether Italian, French, German or Russian. In other words, I do not forget that these "imitations" are a chapter of Lowell's own history as the very personal poet he is, and I grant

him all the liberties he can use to sharpen and modulate his voice. It is the poor use he has made of those liberties that bothers me - especially when it comes to the Italian part of his chosen task. The relationship to be described between Lowell's idiosyncratic paraphrase of Leopardi's "L'Infinito" and the intangible original itself is not comparable, say, to the calculated latitude Pound claimed for his own English renovation of Propertius' Latin elegies. Despite some local felicities in verbal choice (like "antediluvian resignation" for *profondissima quiete*, or "silence that passes man's possibility" for *sovrumani/silenzi*), Lowell's poem stands out for its crudity vis-à-vis the Italian poem that inspired it; and crudity is a vice Lowell often mistakes for the virtue of strength. It shows blatantly in the facile conclusion he found for the miraculously self-transcending lightness of Leopardi's final lines:

... Così tra questa
 Immensità s'annega il pensier mio
 E il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.

It's sweet to destroy my mind
 and go down
 and wreck in this sea where I drown.

John Heath-Stubbs, who had a less intrusive ego to express than Lowell, captured an essential mystery of the Italian verse when he rendered the last line as

... sweet to me the foundering in this sea,

a phonically and semantically memorable solution which also happens to be a great English line in its own right (I refer to the first version of this translation by J. Heath-Stubbs as it appeared in the Lehnam edition of Leopardi, London 1946). But Lowell refuses to listen carefully to his Italian cue, and he introduces an element of violence where Leopardi had attained numinous peace. The ecstasy of self-transcending thought, a Zen-like experience in Leopardi's text, is thus

replaced by one of the self-assertive gestures of the Lowellian persona, and one wonders why Lowell should have tampered with Leopardi at all – unless it be to release his own temper in the face of a very different poetical personality. If so, the literary exercise on hand should be called a confrontation, not an imitation. One cannot blame Lowell for not being Leopardi, to be sure, but one may very well take him to task for having used such a great text as a mere pretext for self-indulgence. The challenge of translation (or imitation if you like) is precisely in the chance it offers to extend one's own resources; one does not summon the voice of a dead ancestor or remote confrère unless one is ready to learn something from it. Now one reason for Lowell's interest in Leopardi is certainly the element of spleen and despair, the black mood in the latter's poetical physiology, and in fact it is this component that Lowell tends to single out in most of his chosen texts: Rimbaud, Villon, Baudelaire, Heine, Montale, to name some authors included in his telling anthology.

But what Lowell fails to do is precisely what most of them do in their different ways: *modulate* the mood. Hence the greater stiffness of Lowell's performance by comparison with the formidable examples he has dared to emulate in his native language. The results can still be worthwhile in their way, for Lowell is not a mediocre spirit, just a one-sided one, an incurable Puritan who has spent his life trying to get away from his heritage; but the Puritan bile will embitter him to the end. Evidence of talent is always there, even at his worst; but the best poems are those he achieves by "imitating" the more decidedly splenetic among his selected foreign authors – Villon, Rimbaud, for example. His Baudelaire is strong, yet he has eliminated the sacramental aspect from Baudelaire's complex counterpoint, as a comparison of Lowell's "To the Reader" with Stanley Kunitz's rendition of the same poem will show. I am afraid that both as a translation and as a poem in its own right Kunitz's endeavor is finer, though something in Lowell's reductive exploit reminds us that this is a forceful writer speaking.

The same factor makes itself felt in Lowell's "imitation" of Montale's *Nuove Stanze* ("The Chess-Player"), but on the whole he misses Montale's subtler notes, for instance, in "News from Mount Amiata". "My letter is a paper hoop, etc...": this kind of caper contributes nothing to the gestalt of Lowell's English poem, and nothing in Montale's original verse could have suggested it. Likewise, Ungaretti's *Tu ti spezzasti* ("You knocked yourself out") is reduced to bathos at the very end, when Lowell replaces a powerful synaesthetic effect with the flat modifier "vandalistic" - and he himself must have felt uneasy about it, because when he read this "imitation" at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, in Spring 1964, for the occasion of a tribute of American poets to Ungaretti (who was there to read his Italian text), he removed the offending word. Even Lowell's rendering of the title is idiosyncratic: the Italian implies no such self-tormenting violence as his English brings out. In "Dora Markus", one of Montale's finest poems, a feat of over-interpretation mars Lowell's performance when he reads Montale's tolling refrain, "Tu non ricordi" (You don't remember), as etymological pedantry: "You didn't take it to heart". In general, Lowell's idiosyncrasy combines with his proneness to cliché to spoil many a promising effort; there is no excuse for his intruding the crass irrelevance, "goosestepping", into the bitter irony of a Heine poem, when he can do so much better by difficult texts like Rilke's or Valéry's.

On the whole, *Imitations* must be taken as a determined attempt on the part of Robert Lowell to break out of his provincial shell, and the outcome was positive in the long run, to judge from the Montalian assimilations in *For the Union Dead* and, even better, from the altogether finer translations which were included in *Near the Ocean*.

Here it can be said that Juvenal's bile found an adequate outlet in Lowell's style, while the versions of Du Bellay's and Gongora's sonnets stand on their merits as tight English poems; the same is true of Lowell's translation of Dante's

Brunetto Latini episode (*Inf.* XV), where John Ciardi's experiment in American colloquialism has been duly taken into account. If we remember also the very free, and unevenly successful "imitations" from Racine and Aeschylus (the latter a parallel to Pound's operation on Propertius), we shall recognize the central function of translation for Robert Lowell's life as a poet, and, objections apart, we shall be grateful to him for helping to introduce great poets like Montale, Ungaretti and Leopardi into the wider circulation they deserve in the United States - even at the cost of violent distortion. But certainly Lowell has been learning more of this craft since the time of *Imitations* - Pound's example proving, perhaps, inescapable in the long run, with the lesson of literary discipline without which even great talents risk going to waste.

With Joseph Auslander, whose 1924 exordium, *Sunrise Trumpets*, was warmly endorsed by Padraic Colum, we move in the opposite direction.

His initial promise was never fulfilled in the many books of verse¹ which followed, because his gift for vivid imagery came to be generally squandered in luscious or sentimental effusions; nor did his self-therapy work when he turned to political themes at the end of the Thirties, and to slangy toughness of the proletarian muck-raking type (see *Hell in Harness*). But the best of Auslander's talent, his delicate sense of outline and atmosphere, as evidenced in some of his own sonnets from *Sunrise Trumpets*, was elicited by that most unfashionable poet, Petrarch, whose sonnets he translated².

1. Among them: *Hell in Harness* (Garden City, N. Y., 1929); *Letters to Women* (New York, 1929); *No Traveller Returns* (New York, 1935); *More than Bread* (New York, 1936); *Riders at the Gate* (New York, 1938).

Some consideration should be given to the didactic treatise, *The Winged Horse - the Story of Poets and their Poetry*, published in co-authorship with F. E. Hill (New York 1927), for the sample translations from Dante and Petrarch in the long chapters devoted to them.

2. *The Sonnets of Petrarch*, tr. Joseph Auslander (New York, 1931). A fair sampling of these versions has been included by Harold H. Blanchard, along with some versions due to Lady Dacez, in his anthology, *Prose and Poetry of the Continental Renaissance in Translation* (New York, 1949, 1955).

These versions may well outlive the rest of Auslander's uneven work.

His was probably the case of a poetic sensibility which lacks a firm center and thus needs the body of an extant literary text - a given structure of meaning and meter - to incarnate itself. I notice with surprise that he has been left out of George Steiner's fine anthology, *The Penguin Book of Modern Verse Translation* (1966). Actually, Steiner failed to include any version from Petrarch, but he should have recognized Auslander's outstanding performance in propounding afresh that outworn model. Auslander ranks with the poets of translation rather than with mere translators of poetry, and his metrically observant reworking of Petrarch's filigree has certainly superseded, to modern ears, Lady Dacre's decorous Romantic workmanship.

In a way, English literature (like its sister literatures in Europe) had to live down its pervasive, tenacious Petrarchan strain, and today Petrarch is the least popular of Italian authors in the English speaking countries, while Dante - who was all but ignored in the Renaissance centuries when Petrarch was at his zenith - has taken over the role of paramount inspirer, as the sheer number of translations from his work show. Thus Auslander had a pretty hard challenge to face in tackling Petrarch, for he was thereby trying to renew an author who called to mind dead languors and cozy mannerisms, one whose melodious smoothness was unpalatable in the rugged age of Eliot, Auden, Pound - and later Lowell. What he has managed to elicit from his difficult original is remarkably modern. Firmness of diction enables Auslander to echo Petrarch's own music without succumbing to its temptations, while imagery receives a tactful and sometimes striking emphasis:

In thee I burn, in thee still draw my breath,
 Being all thine. Death now has disciplined
 All lesser pain to nothing; no sharp teeth
 Can gnaw the constant grief-bright music dinned
 By thy last words, snatched up by jealous Death
 To vanish with their hope upon the wind.

That is the concluding sextet of Sonnet 267 (written by Petrarch after Laura's death). Maybe Auslander has skirted baroque mannerism here in overemphasizing a Petrarchan conceit into the strenuous image of teeth gnawing music - a feat worthy of Hart Crane; but hear the conclusion of another sonnet on Laura's death (N. 301):

... Here still I pass
Her farewell footprints and the spot from which,
The flesh discarded, she flamed from the grass!

The apparitional quality of sudden reminiscence comes through in a neat, forceful cadence, and will indeed give us, as Pound would have it for good verse translation in general, "the feel of being in contact with the force of a great original"³ - whatever Pound's violent protestations might conceivably be against my daring to call Petrarch a "great original". These lines, anyway, stand up as good English poetry on their own. Sometimes, as in Sonnet 310, Auslander overinterprets and lavishes an all-too-rich imagery on us, nor is he always immune to residual mannerisms in the Petrarchan vein; yet he always has striking solutions in phrasing and rhythm, while clinging to the exacting rhyme scheme of the sonnet.

As sonnets, some of his versions compare with those of E.A. Robinson and Allen Tate, to name two modern practitioners of this forgotten art (Elliot Coleman also comes to mind). Tilting Petrarch toward the baroque, with the risks this entails, is no demerit in itself. The ornamental bent of Petrarch's diction, so repellent to Pound, is rescued by Auslander without archaistic excesses; in fact, for this purpose he banks on the Saxon fund of verbal combinations, in a way not too dissimilar from Pound's own in the early *Cantos*. Inversions are kept to a minimum, and never strained; music prevails, of a resilient kind that has nothing to do with the

3. *Investigations of Ezra Pound* (New York, 1920, repr. 1967), ch. VIII ("Translators of Greek"), pp. 350-51.

metronome, and vision often rises to astonishing intensity, so that we have a modern image of what a Petrarchan poem was, but the image, while sending us back, allusively, to the remote original, retains or acquires enough independent strength to exist by itself. A telling example would be Sonnet 279:

If the lone bird lament or the green leaves
 Shiver beneath the summer's soft caresses,
 Or rapid streams flash from dark wildernesses
 Churning the rock that with my sorrow grieves,
 While Love his slow eternal elegy weaves,
 Then, then I see her whom this blind earth presses
 Those eyes like wells of stars, those golden tresses,
 That voice like tears, that silver breast which heaves:

"Unhappy soul, why weep? Ah why, sad lover,
 Thus, thus with anguish and remorse devour
 Your splendid manhood in its perfect flower?
 Let light and warmth its radiance recover:
 Bewail me not: the brightness that seemed over
 Has burst into one white perpetual hour!"

One merit of Auslander's is that he reminds us of Shakespeare's very Petrarchan sonnets. While he occasionally mimicks Petrarch's stylization of feeling (as he does in the central part of this sonnet with that "silver breast") in a way not totally germane to the generally modern idiom adopted, he manages to rescue the poem by a tactful beginning and a strong ending, as here. For here the lines of imagery and rhythm streaming through the sonnet converge into a unique visionary resolution. "Has burst into one white perpetual hour": the Hopkinsian syncopation of rhythm matches the Hart Crane-like effect of semantic condensation. And a syncopation of meaning and sound is what we get in

to my war-shattered life *appoint* Thou still
 Death as the port of peace,

a superb passage from the sustained rendering of a particularly irksome sonnet (N.365), so beset by lurking clichés that Auslander can be said to have triumphed over odds. My italicizing of one pivotal word in the quote will do for illustration.

Evanescence is a vice in Ezra Pound's system of aesthetics, and this is one reason why he openly rejects Petrarch and would probably, if asked, dismiss Auslander's impressive, if not entirely flawless feat of artistic recovery. As a founder of Imagism, as theorist, reader and preceptor he has always stood for the values of sharp delineation in style, for essentialness and the correspondence of word to thing. These are such well known truths that to dwell on them now would be tedious, were it not to remind ourselves that the polemical one-sidedness of creative spirits like Pound is a providential component. Just as widely known is Pound's importance as a translator, which prompted the late R.P. Blackmur to declare that Pound's real poetry was to be found in the translations. As Hugh Kenner, Thomas Jackson and J.P. Sullivan have recognized⁴, Pound's abundant and elaborate verse translations from a number of languages are part and parcel of his original poetry, or at least contiguous to it; "Homage to Sextus Propertius", according to Sullivan, is of a piece with the coeval "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley". The *Cantos*, which have seemed too "academic" to literary historians like Leon Howard, are the best proof of that convergence. They are a translation, or transferral, into actuality, of what has been accidentally obscured by the sheer passing of time and by the entropy of human neglect. A recovery of the past - and a multiple past at that - in the supreme effort to make perceptually available to our consciousness whatever peak of attainment has marked man's manifold history, East and West.

4. HUGH KENNER, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (Norfolk, Conn., 1951), chs. XV, XVI, XVII; *id. id.*, Introduction to *Ezra Pound: Translations* (Norfolk, Conn., 1954, 1963); THOMAS JACKSON, *The Early Poetry of Ezra Pound* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968); J. P. SULLIVAN, "Pound's *Homage to Propertius*": The Structure of a Mask, in *Ezra Pound, a Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. WALTER SUTTON (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963); *id. id.*, *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius, a Study in Creative Translation* (Austin, Texas, 1964).

"It is dawn at Jerusalem while midnight hovers above the Pillars of Hercules. All ages are contemporaneous": thus *The Spirit of Romance*, Pound's unforgettable youth, in 1910⁵.

The seeds of the *Cantos* are here: in the realization that historical time differs from physical time, because the former's rhythms are neither linear nor univocal, and there is no part of it (and no part of historical space either) that cannot be made sent in, through, and to human consciousness. "All ages are contemporaneous" in consciousness, in the locus of realization; but one must add that they can only *become* contemporaneous in the poet's (or thinker's) *translation*. Translation is actualization, the change that preserves and renews, one and the same thing with "Make it new" - Pound's central commandment. Small wonder that the poet himself, in one of his letters, should have protested that "Homage to Sextus Propertius" was not a translation⁶! He meant that it was an extension of the Latin original's import into the present context of historical relevance, rather than a dutiful reproduction.

By the same token, we could expect him to say that his stirring translation of the initial sequence in *Odyssey XI* from the Latin rendering of Andreas Divus from Capodistria is no translation as such; and there would be no point in gain saying him once we are agreed on the ultimate value of the term as well as on the restrictive meaning Pound assigns to it when he answers pedants in their own language. For Canto I is the best illustration of what I meant above by translation as the actualizing act. Odysseus momentarily summons the dead from their limbo-like Hades; Pound conjures Homer, through Odysseus, permanently and the conjuring makes the *periplus* of the whole long poem possible, since by analogy Odysseus is like Dante and the modern poet descending to the realm of the dead in search of life. We are told that Odysseus, and through him Homer, is one of the "masks" of the poet - of Pound

5. *The Letters of Ezra Pound*, ed. D. D. PAIGE (New York, 1950), pp. 148-49.

6. EZRA POUND, *The Spirit of Romance*, pap. ed. NDP 266, p. 8.

himself, that is. If so, I like to think of masks in a funereal ceremonial sense, as the magical tool of the necromancer to summon the dead ancestors.

And a further dimension of the summoning act which (in Pound's case) is both translation and poetry, or better, translation *as* poetry, can be glimpsed in the poet's tactics of piercing through several layers of cultural time. He translates, not Homer directly, but Andreas Divus' translation of Homer; and not into a Hellenizing English meter like syllabic hexameters (Lattimore's choice) nor into iambic pentameters, but into a free cadence obviously patterned on Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, that very verse Pound had likewise rendered in modern English with "The Seafarer". Thus the "translation" or actualizing of Homer goes hand in hand with a re-immersion in the linguistic past of the English nation: Homer's aboriginal cadence evokes a parallel Anglo-Saxon cadence, if only analogically. The mediator of this spell, Andreas Divus, is pushed back among the shades as soon as he has performed his function:

Lie quiet, Divus. I mean, that is, Andreas Divus,
In officina Wecheli, 1538, out of Homer.

Just so, in the Homeric passage mediated to us through these several agencies, Odysseus "beat off" the eager shade of Anticlea, because the shade he did want to interview first was Tiresias. Pound's poetical behavior toward his literary source mirrors the behavior of the Homeric hero whose mask he is donning at the outset of his newfangled epic. He wants to evoke the shade of Homer, not that of Homer's Renaissance translator whose book, Pound tells us in *Instigations*⁷, he had accidentally found "in the year of grace 1906, '08; or '10" on "the Paris quais", and used as a crib to facilitate his reading of the Greek. In the *Cantos*, though, there is no question of "cribbing", and Pounds shows he can freely quote from Homer's "untranslatable" Greek - in Canto II, for instance -

7. *Instigations of Ezra Pound*, *cit.*, p. 334.

while the operation he has carried out at the outset amounts to a summoning of the resurrectable past.

This past must be felt as living and relevant (and this is done by re-embodiment of Homer's story in modern English), yet, at the same time, as past (and this is done by "estranging" the whole passage thus translated). Moreover, the manifold dimensions of this cultural past are brought out by the device of resorting to literary intermediaries like Divus and putting them in their place. When Pound briefly resumes the Homeric evocation in Canto II, he does it on his own, and with an eye on other translators of Homer than just Divus⁸. He also, by the logic of mythic implications, modulates the Homeric passage of the old men commenting on Helen's beauty from Ilion's tower (see again the chapter "Translators of Greek" in *Instigations*) into a Dionysian episode from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, thereby proving, as he had done in Canto I, that he can perform in the poetical act the very thing narrated in the ancient story he now translates: the translation of *Odyssey* XI was a conjuring, just as the "Neknia" itself is, and the translation of Ovid now is a metamorphosis - of Latin poetry into modern English poetry with a strong Anglo-Saxon ingredient (the kennings). Poetry as such is "metamorphosis" (of experience into vision and song; but experience can also be literary to begin with).

Yet when Pound aligns his normative texts in the *Cantos'* circular sequence, whether they be Latin, Greek or Provençal, whether Chinese or Italian, he is not claiming to improve upon them, but simply to re-present them in his native linguistic context, by a kind of juxtaposition which is supposed to operate as the Chinese ideogram and the Saxon kenning do - a magnetization of aggregate images yielding significant form, the process of multiple sensuous prehension Pound elsewhere opposes to the abstracting process of Western scientific thought. In this connection we can think of the Cubist collage, especially if we remember that the poet has staked out the

8. *Ibidem*, pp. 332-345.

whole available space of human history for his field, in the light of this idea of contemporaneity. But he is not pursuing art for art's sake, he is not trying to set up an aesthetic museum; he is giving us a "Paideuma", an educative poem, which means that he is doing poetically the same thing he had done in *The Spirit of Romance*, in *Instigations*, in *The ABC of Reading*, bringing the classics back, upholding the worthwhile modern, exemplifying, battling what he considers the formless drive of the age. His whole work is indeed a *paideuma* - and that includes the *Letters*. His poetical method is of a piece with his critical method, which consists mainly of illustrations by textual quotations and sober comment.

The *Cantos*, therefore, take shape as a dramatized anthology of Pound's exemplary texts (whether complete, or broken up into dovetailing fragments, or foreshortened), and these include large samples from nonliterary sources of historical, economic and political relevance, like Sigismondo Malatesta's letters, a French history of classic China, Jefferson's papers, or contemporary excerpts of journalistic tenor on the subject of modern world war and its alleged usurious plotters. This amounts to saying that the *Cantos* are to a large extent poetry *as* translation, not just poetry *in* translation: a procedure once followed by Catullus on a smaller scale when he incorporated Sappho and Callimachos in his own Latin - and Catullus is among Pound's favorite authors. The catalyst of this gigantic literary collage is Pound's persona, his direct voice, sometimes intrusively shrill (as in the beginning of Canto II: "Hang it all, Robert Browning! There can be but the one Sordello"), and sometimes grave and beautifully applied, as when he paints his own self-portrait on the Dogana steps at Venice in 1908, when he vents his indignation against usury in Canto XLV, or when, in the Pisan *Cantos*, he gives his own lay *Confiteor*, "from the wreckage of Europe, ego scriptor". I am not concerned here with the success or failure of the whole as a sustained poem, nor with the preposterousness of certain mythomaniac tirades, but with the urgency of the voice which makes it its task to re-embodiment the ancient voices.

In this regard, the absence of any sizable translation from Dante, Pound's favorite poet, is striking, even though Dante keeps cropping up as quotation or reference, while some of the *Cantos* not essentially translated from another source are modelled on Dante's example (this is the case of the Hell cantos, namely No. XIV, No. XV and part of XVI, describing modern capitalist society). I have elaborated on this fact elsewhere, and I still think that with characteristic humility (Pound is not basically humble, but he can transcend his ego) our American expatriate chose to help Laurence Binyon in the translation of the *Divine Comedy* rather than undertake the monumental task himself - the more so as the *Cantos* as a whole were supposed to be the Dantesque *Comedy* of our time. Yet neither in the volume of his *Translations* (1954, 1963) nor in that other paideutic anthology, *Confucius to Cummings* (1965), done in collaboration with Marcella Spann, has Pound included a sample version of his own from Dante's lyrical verse. In the latter anthology he has, instead, included some of Rossetti's translations from the *Vita Nova* - a plausible choice for the man who had confessed in 1910, apropos of his own versions from Cavalcanti, that Rossetti was his "father and mother", but not entirely satisfying for us when we reflect that even then Ezra Pound had striven to emulate Rossetti's tasteful and lucid translations, upon finding that, if excellent, Rossetti was not flawless. The same consideration might have impelled him to try his hand at some early sonnet or canzone of Dante's - but no, he seems to have bowed to an unapproachable numen here. Pound has Dante in his blood, and it may even be that he feels such a closeness to the Florentine - almost to the point of identity - as to prevent the effort of "translation". I seem to contradict myself here, by postulating both imperviousness and closeness as a reason for Pound's failure to cope with the problem of translating anything of Dante, but it all comes down to the same thing - Pound can only "translate" Dante by speaking of whatever concerns Pound himself in his own world. Dante may very well be his *daimon*, the intangible center from which he speaks and operates.

At this point the name of Guido Cavalcanti forces itself upon my ears and puts a stop to my digressive speculation. Cavalcanti's work – both as voice and artifact, as shaped object and inherent personality – has engaged Pound the critic, editor and translator since the early days of *The Spirit of Romance*, and the latest sign of such involvement dates from 1965, when Pound jotted down his afterthoughts on his early work on Cavalcanti, at a half century's interval, for publication in the 1966 deluxe edition undertaken by New Directions. It is also to be noted that while Pound printed in 1932 the versions from Cavalcanti's poems which stood more or less as he had penned them in 1910 (though the index to the 1954 *translations* volume mentions revisions done in 1920 and 1931)⁹, he radically changed the translation from one crucial Cavalcanti text, the canzone "Donna mi prega", for inclusion in the *Cantos* as the bulk of Canto XXXVI, yet in the 1966 volume both versions appear, as if the later one had not superseded the earlier but simply represented a different use of the same *donnée*. Now Cavalcanti may be one reason why Pound never came around to translating Dante, both because Cavalcanti is like Dante and because he is Dante's antagonist, Dante's alter ego, the part of Dante that – in Pound's view – did not surrender to Aquinas and conformism. I am simply suggesting that, as far as the experience of Pound the translator went, Cavalcanti fulfilled the function of a close analogue to Dante (as well as of an anti-Dante).

9. Perhaps because memory betrays him, Ezra Pound himself proves unreliable on this subject. In his brief Introduction (written in 1965) to *Cavalcanti Poems* (New York, London, Milan, 1966) he denies having revised anything but the canzone "Donna mi Prege" since the original printing of his translations from Cavalcanti. These were first published in London as *Sonnets and Ballate of G. C.* (1912), then came the Marsano edition (Genoa, 1932), with the title *G. C., Rime, Edizione rappazzata fra le rovine*. So far I have been unable to collate the two texts, but Hugh Kenner (pp. 129-30 *op. cit.*) compares an earlier (1910) with a later versions of Sonnet VII (the one appearing in the 1963 *Translations* volume, I shall shortly analyze). Kenner is quoting the 1910 version from the London 1912 edition. The stylistic difference between the two versions is strong, and Kenner has aptly pointed out how the earlier one is tinged by Rossetian manner while the second is "pre-Elizabethan"; it is to be inferred that the revisions done in 1920 and 1931 (according to the notes to the *Translations* volume of 1963) had to do with this and other rewriting.

At any rate, Cavalcanti is the one Italian poet in whom Pound's interest has been absorbing and sustained to the point of bringing about a translation of most of the former's extant verse; the technical reasons were as subtle as those operating in the Englishing of Arnaut Daniel's difficult Provençal poems, while the doctrinal reasons were far heavier. "Dante himself never wrote more poignantly, or with greater intensity than Cavalcanti", says Pound in *The Spirit of Romance*, and later, in the essay appended to the 1966 deluxe edition of his Cavalcanti¹⁰ with the title "Mediaevalism", he remarks:

Guido's canzone "Donna mi prega"... shows traces of a tone of thought no longer considered dangerous, but that may have appeared about as soothing to the Florentine of A.D. 1290 as a conversation about Tom Paine, Marx, Lenin and Bucharin would today in a methodist bankers' board meeting in Memphis, Tenn.... Guido shows, I think, no regard for anyone's prejudice, we may trace his ideas to Averroes, Avicenna¹¹; he does not definitely proclaim any heresy, but he shows leanings toward not only the proof by reason, but toward the proof by experiment. I do not think that he swallowed Aquinas. It may be impossible to prove that he had heard of Roger Bacon, but the whole canzone is easier to understand if we suppose... that he had read Grosseteste on the Generation of Light. In all of which he shows himself much more "modern" than his young friend Dante Alighieri, *qui était diablement dans les idées reçues...*

In the same context Pound goes on to say that, both in poetry and in the visual arts, there was a "mediaeval clean

10. *Ezra Pound's Cavalcanti Poems* (New York, 1966), pp. 89-96. The same essay was included, with the title "Cavalcanti", in *Make It New* (London 1934, New Haven 1935), and then in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London, 1954).

11. For the Avicennian and Averroistic influences, Pound relies on Dino del Garbo, Cavalcanti's early XIVth century commentator; the Averroistic theory has been strongly upheld by Karl Vossler (also known to Pound) in *Die Philosophischen Grundlangen des suessen neuen Stils* (1904) and then by Bruno Nardi. In the sequel to his own second version of the canzone in Canto XXXVI, Pound brings in Scotus Eriugena as a possible source. For a lucid account of the many, and widely divergent, commentaries on Cavalcanti's canzone "Donna Prege" see J. E. Shaw, *Guido Cavalcanti's Theory of Love* (Toronto, 1949), and also the footnotes to *Poeti del Duecento*, vol. II (Milano-Napoli, s.d., pr. 1960), ed. G. Contini, pp. 522-29.

line" as a cure for the diseased asceticism which in his view had threatened the Western mind in that period; so that the cultivation of a clear, sober style in the arts was the antidote to an inner sickness of the society, and in this, the Provençal first, and the Tuscans even better, gave the decisive contribution. The Tuscans, according to him, demanded harmony in something more than the erotically charged plastic form (as the Greeks had done); for the Tuscan "declines to limit his aesthetic to the impact of light on the eye". What we get with Cavalcanti, Guinizelli, Dante and the Quattrocento visual artists, then, is a kind of return of the Greek style in transfigured form, *beyond* the pagan sensuousness and (as far as poets were concerned) beyond mere sonority. The word of the Stilnovisti, the line of Giotto and Pier della Francesca, the plastic form of Donatello embody a *virtù*, a power of perception which is also an indwelling radiance, soon after lost with the High Renaissance corpulency of portrayal:

We appear to have lost the radiant world where one thought cuts through another with clean edge, a world of moving energies "mezzo oscuro rade", "risplende in sè perpetuale effecto"¹², magnetism, that take form, that are seen, or that border the visible, the matter of Dante's *Paradiso*, the glass under water, the form that seems a form seen in a mirror...

the form, that is, untouched by the contrary disease of hostility to the flesh (=mediaeval asceticism) and hostility or indifference to the intellect (= High Renaissance sensualism).

These considerations, which represent a deepening of Pound's Imagist and Vorticist phase with a concomitant Pre-raphaelite touch, help us to understand why he chose to employ, for the translation of Cavalcanti's poems, a vocabulary studded with archaism. These might, at first, strike the reader as professorial quaintness in flat contradiction to Pound's repeated urgings to "make it new", to avoid fossil language, to

12. These, of course, are quotes from Guido's canzone.

stress the "contemporary" element of natural speech; and actually the poet himself has observed in 1965, in the short foreword to the 1966 edition of his Cavalcanti:

I have left my early translations of the sonnets and ballate as they were originally printed, and perforce, for I am further removed from the years 1910-12 than from the original Italian. Written in 1932, in a note to the Marsano edition, this statement holds good for 1965. If in all these years I have not got round to revising the sonnets, as I did the "Donna mi prega", it is because "toils urged other" [i.e. lack of foundation support in his time]... I am aware as any of my critics that it is ridiculous to introduce a few obscure archaisms, having more or less to do with the text, and lopsided metaphors, as I did in the sonnets. It seemed more useful to publish a bilingual edition, adding photos of the early manuscripts, than to publish the earlier translations. This I did, in 1932...

Yet the archaisms - which have been defended by Hugh Kenner (implicitly) and by Thomas Jackson - had a specific function. They were not conceived as ornamentation, but as pointers to the hieratic, "radiant" quality of Guido's language. For this purpose, Pound hearkened back, not so much to Victorian stylization (despite his debt to Rossetti) as to Geoffrey Chaucer's and possibly Thomas Wyatt's examples; an understandable policy, in view of Chaucer's closeness to the European and specifically Italian culture Pound emphasizes so admirably in his *ABC of Reading*. Recovering some linguistic elements from Chaucer's work would help to suggest that "radiance" Pound felt to inhere in the work of Chaucer's Italian brethren and immediate predecessors. This extends at times to grammar and orthography, as the famous Sonnet No. VII¹³ shows - where, may I anticipate, the use of *vertu* for the Italian *virtute* in Line 10 is lifted from Chaucer's Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*. But let us hear and see Pound's own English:

Who is she that comes, making turn every man's eye
And makyng the air to tremble with a bright clearenesse

13. It is numbered IV in Contini's edition of *Poeti del Duecento*, cit.

That leadeth with her Love, in such nearness
 No man may proffer of speech more than a sigh?

Ah God, what she is like when her owne eye turneth, is
 Fit for Amor to speake, for I can not at all;
 Such is her modesty, I would call
 Every woman else but an useless uneasiness.

No one could ever tell all of her pleasauntness
 In that every high noble vertu leaneth to herward,
 So Beauty sheweth her forth as her Godhede;

Never before was our mind so high led,
 Nor have we so much of heal as will afford
 That our thought may take her immediate in its embrace.

No one will deny that this is a pretty elegant performance in style, despite or rather because of its anachronistic premise. Guido's vision and style embody a lost integrity, and Pound's English (which is meant to lead the reader back to the original text, to catch some reverberation of the "absolute rhythm" and "absolute symbol or metaphor" Pound sees in Guido's verse) strives to recapture that layer of English linguistic history (Chaucer's phase, of course) which partook of that integrity. The reader is expected to approach this English version with the same kind of historical awareness he should bring to Pound's modernization of "The Seafarer" - another telling instance, and of probably more lasting independent value, of Pound's emphasis on the vertical dimension of the word, a poetical philology he turned to account with remarkable and sometimes unique results. One may quarrel with the method or the results, but first the fact must be granted that we are witnessing an act of restoration, not gratuitous mannerism.

Pound does not believe in a flat language; he thinks language can reincorporate, for expressive purposes, the significant strata of its past; which amounts to saying that he sees the possibility of aesthetic expansion backward, toward the source. The "reactionary" implications of such a stance are

counterbalanced by the iconoclastic freedom Pound applies otherwise. One conclusive observation to be made is, that way back he defended the archaistic tactics of his translations from Cavalcanti and the Provençals on the ground that these mediaeval writers represent a culture far more remote from ours than the culture of imperial Rome was. What he defined, with picturesque venomousness, the "ineffable and infinite imbecility of the British Empire" at the time of World War I corresponded to the analogous "imbecility" of Augustus' Roman Empire, and consequently, the lyricists and satirists of Augustan Rome - like Propertius and Horace, and Catullus before them - were essentially "modern", our Western civilization as a whole, and not only Britain's, having come round again to a comparable state of social looseness and intellectual debasement¹⁴. This is why Pound decided to "translate" (if that's the word he would use here) Propertius into English current speech, an operation both textually and contextually justified by the realization that Propertius' rejection of official Rome matched Pound's rejection of official Britain and America. We, as candid readers, may prefer Pound's Propertius and Horace to his Cavalcanti, but we should remember that Pound did not mean his Cavalcanti versions to exist quite independently of the Italian texts, while his Propertius and Horace, in his opinion, can¹⁵.

I am particularly fond of his Horace and regret his failure to do more than three Odes, while keeping in mind that whether in his calculated archaism or in his motivated modernism there operates a rare artistic integrity, the respect for his foreign text and context we should vainly find in other gifted poet-translators. This humility seems the more remarkable in a man of such Quixotic arrogance as Pound is,

14. See the letter to Felix Schelling in *The Letters of Ezra Pound*, cit., pp. 178-79.

15. In the section 'Hendecasyllables' of the "Cavalcanti" chapter (*Literary Essays of E. P.* cit.), p. 172, Pound says: "I have not given an English 'equivalent' for the *Donna mi Prega*, at the utmost I have provided the reader, unfamiliar with old Italian, an instrument that may assist him in gauging *some* of the qualities of the original". In the same essay, E. P. distinguishes between interpretative and "creative" translation.

and may help us to appraise his uncommon stature. When he goes against the grain – and sometimes he overdoes it – he is being both humble and arrogant at the same time; humble in the belief that something exists before and outside himself, whether Italian or Provençal or Chinese, something which matters more than his own private endeavors and needs to be brought back into the light of social consciousness; arrogant in the belief that civilization can only be cured by his own partly anachronistic prescriptions. Both the humility and the arrogance are of heroic size. There is something in him of the pioneer born too late, the man who was meant to be the founding father of a culture but found more to destroy than to create; the poet who cannot quite accept the role of *Zivilisationsliterat* (as Thomas Mann and Oswald Spengler would call it), and must fight for his Platonic utopia. The man is larger than life.

To return from the man to his artifact, one trait to be noticed in the Poundian rendition of our sonnet is the archaic, mainly Chaucerian spelling of words like *makyng*, *clearenesse*, *owne*, *speake*, *pleasauntness*, *vertu*, *sheweth*, *Godbede*, and *heal*. These words work almost like Chinese ideograms in their context, because they engage to some extent the eye by itself. One cannot perceive the difference otherwise; pronunciation would not do it for us. On the other hand, the rhythm is paramount; Pound has emphatically said that Guido's poems were meant to be sung, and although he has been unable to dig up the relevant score, he has striven for vocal plenitude and metric resilience to match or suggest the "cantability". To this effect, Pound has refused to adopt the standard iambic pentameter for Guido's hendecasyllables, and offers instead a syllabically and accentually more elastic pattern that allows important words to get stronger relief. Of these, "bright clearenesse" (matching the focal Italian *clarità* in line 2) stands out for the spondaic effect engendered by the two contiguous stresses. Chaucerian "vertu" exactly renders the Italian *virtute* in line 10, which Pound – unlike Rossetti – interprets magically rather than ethically. For according to Pound,

virtute here, as elsewhere in the mediaeval poets, means "power", of either a magical or numinous, astrological, or (as in Chaucer's *Prologue*) biological kind, and not the notion of moral virtue alone which it has come to convey in our modern European languages by a process of semantic erosion – the very process Pound is trying to reverse with his verbal choices. Consequently, where Rossetti (and modern Italian commentators like Ceriello) sees a pageant of allegorical personifications in conventional decorum:

To whom are subject all things virtuous¹⁶,

Pound descries a gravitation of occult, numinous forces this side of personification, and he reads the Italian verb "*s'inchina*" as an expression of magnetic attraction ("leaneth to herward") rather than of curtsying. We are reminded of his statements on the sense of radiant power the mediaeval Tuscans possessed, and Pound clinches the point in his Introduction to the Cavalcanti poems. It could be that both levels of meaning are implied by Cavalcanti; in any case the magnet metaphor is salient in the Sicilian school and in the Stilnovisti; thus Pound's reading is far from gratuitous, and there is no need to emphasize the care he has put in the reading of manuscripts, since going to the source is a rule with him.

A similar act of semantic restoration occurs in the last line but one, where the intense word *salute* (which in Guido's Italian carried religious as well as medical implications, meaning both "salvation" and "health") prompts Pound to use the obsolete "heal" (Rossetti had the more obvious "redemption"). The last use of "heal" as a noun is recorded by the N. E. D. as having taken place in 1605, with the meaning of "well being", "health". Pound's revamping of the word heightens its connotations from the biological to the numinous sphere; we common mortals, to paraphrase Guido's two last lines, have no such wholeness and spiritual strength as to

16. For Rossetti's translations I have consulted: *The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. by WILLIAM M. ROSSETTI (London 1890), vol. II.

withstand the power of that lady's being. The etymological palimpsest helps also in view of the fact that "heal" is a root word, related to German *Heil* and *Heiland* (the Savior-Healer). Pound, then, is if anything lexically more archaistic than Rossetti, and rhythmically more rugged, because he has gone back to the original text to listen to its hidden cues. The result may stand both as a guide to the Italian text and as an independent poem in the antiquarian vein for which Chatterton and Beddoes had provided a precedent, even though the unique effect of Line 2 cannot be duplicated or approximated:

Che fa di clarità l'aer tremare.

Those long open vowels in slow, sustained succession are a perfect vehicle for the atmosphere of miracle the words create, an atmosphere Dante reattained after Guido when he wrote the *Vita Nova* sonnet "Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare".

Pound is sometimes tortuous and mannered beyond Guido's own warrant for mannerism, as some of the sonnets can show, and despite his philological care he sometimes misreads the text, yet this often results in felicities of his own – as in Sonnet VI, where the Italian "*maestria*" clearly means the mechanical craft of an engineer, and Pound renders it as "mastering quality" of the "wound" in the persona's heart, without spoiling the internal coherence (of his English construct). It is a case of fortunate betrayal, and it is not the only one. Cases of unfortunate betrayal are much rarer with him than with other practitioners of the art. Semantic and rhythmic fidelity, on the other hand, can also lead Pound to solutions whose firmness is a delight:

Love that is born of loving like delight,
Within my heart sojourneth
And fashions a new person from desire...

That is the beginning of Stanza 2 in Ballata XII, whose Italian music goes like this:

Amor, che nasce di simil piacere,
 Dentro de 'l cor si posa,
 Formando di desio nova persona...

and Pound likes it so much that he occasionally quotes the last line, in the original tongue, in the *Cantos*. I don't think that here the linguistic and metric model comes from Chaucer as much as from the Elizabethans, with some help from Rossetti - who, however, did not happen to translate this particular ballata. The whole performance is as sustained as the excerpt quoted, with a fine counterpoint of rhymes and alliterations that bring out the resources of English harmony in competition with the formidable Italian cue.

It is this example of victorious discipline that shows how Pound earned his metric freedom; the liberties he takes with a text to be translated are never cheap, and he proves himself as capable of expressive restraint as Picasso does in his classical drawings, while his epic technique in the *Cantos* - the shock of clipped juxtaposition - may remind us of Picasso's collages and Cubist displacements. Pound knows it, in fact he brings Picasso's name into the context of his Second *Canto*. But I am not through with his Cavalcanti, and rather than glean on from the many poems translated by Pound (many more than by Rossetti, and not always the same), I shall touch on his crucial encounter with Cavalcanti's hardest and exegetically most controversial poem, the canzone "Donna mi prega", which Rossetti omitted from his *Early Italian Poets* because he probably found it too abstruse. That it is difficult, and doctrinally paramount, shows also from the fact that the mediaevalist scholar J. E. Shaw devoted an entire book to it¹⁷, in which he reviews earlier interpretations and stresses its philosophical sources (chiefly Albertus Magnus), while another distinguished scholar, Gianfranco Contini, tends to dismiss any philosophical readings (whether by Shaw, or by Casella or by Nardi¹⁸) and stress the literary convention

17. *Guido Cavalcanti's Theory of Love*, cit.

18. Nardi and Casella give different syntactical readings of the second stanza, with far reaching interpretative consequences. See Shaw and Contini, cit.

operating in this poetical discussion of the nature of Love. Fernando Figurelli¹⁹ gives us one of the most balanced and sensitive interpretations, because (like Pound himself) he keeps his focus on the poetry. Difficulties are compounded by discrepancies in the extant manuscripts, as Contini's account shows; and Pound, with his customary scruple, and characteristic boldness, has chosen one manuscript, the 'Ld' in the Laurenziana library, collating it with the Giustine edition for accents and, as he says, correcting a few errors. His can be called an edition in the scholarly sense, then, and he has broken up the Italian lines into their metremic components, to the dismay of many an orthodox scholar; even his friend Manlio Dazzi, who helped him with the research, said that Pound's edition of the canzone was "*parole in libertà*", Futurist style...

Pound's rationale in this textual iconoclasm (which Haroldo De Campos²⁰ has seen as a foreshadowing of the *Cantos'* free rhythm) escaped everybody at the time, but he has defined it clearly enough. He was just underscoring the musical sub-units of each stanza and line, by isolating the metremes, those nuclear elements of metric structure that Cavalcanti himself had marked by an intricate system of internal rhymes and pauses; and this, again, with an eye on the intrinsic openness or "radiance" of the apparently compact stanzas, as well as with an ear for the melodic potential. Modern structural criticism would find little to quarrel with in this kind of emphatic analysis, which amounts to an elemental restoration of a sort²¹. Whatever Pound has had to say of Guido's *canzone* - whether in *The ABC of Reading*, where

19. FERNANDO FIGURELLI, "Guido Cavalcanti", in *Letteratura Italiana, I Minori*, series "Orientamenti Culturali" (Milan, 1961), pp. 217-235.

20. "Futurismo no Duecento?" - Texto e tradução de Haroldo de Campos, in *O Estado de São Paulo*, Suplemento literário, February 10, 1968.

21. In "Cavalcanti", section 'The Other Dimension' from *The Literary Essays of E. P.*, cit., p. 168, Pound says: "The canzone was to poets of this period what the fugue was to musicians in Bach's time. It is a highly specialized form, having its own self-imposed limits. I trust I have managed to print the *Donna mi Prega* in such a way that its articulations strike the eye without need of a rhyme table..."

The second version takes an utterly different tack; it gives up the attempt to imitate Guido's rhyme scheme, it simplifies grammar and syntax for the sake of greater directness, it regroups stanzas into the five major units of the Italian text, and it focuses on what I would call a semantic priority which leads Pound to restore several pivotal units of syntax and meaning he had liberally reshuffled or glossed over in the 1910 draft:

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 denys 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 virtu and power
 Its being and every moving
 Or delight whereby 'tis called "to love"
 Or if a man can show it to sight.

The semantic palimpsest outweighs the metric breakup. Though Pound still relies on the Saxon fund of English root words, he is now doing it in a less conspicuously antiquarian way, and being relieved of the necessity to fill in a set metric mold, he can dispense with roundabout turns of phrase. "Fell and...overweening becomes, very incisively, "wild often...so proud," a modern expression that perfectly matches the semantic charge of "*fero*" and "*altero*". "Affect" for "accidente" has been retained, since Pound could not depend on many readers to recognize the defunct Aristotelian-Scholastic import of the term "accident"²². Compound words in the

22. Actually, Pound here relies avowedly on Dino del Garbo's interpretation of "accidente" as "passion" (*Literary Essays of E. P.* cit., p. 182).

Saxon style, so dear to the author of the *Cantos*, replace looser semantemes: "low-hearted" supersedes "base in heart" for the Italian "*di basso core*", "proof-bringing" erases "to prove Love's course" for the Italian "*voler provare*". Tactful alliteration, another favorite device of the *Cantos*, underscores the free accentual beat to make up for the loss of rhymes - though a few are left, notably "season" and "reason", to stress a capital concept; but they are no longer structural, they are episodic, and thus the lines are free to project beyond their respective boundaries.

Guido's *canzone*, while retaining its semantic and iconic physiognomy (what Pound would call its logopoeia and phanopoeia), is thereby effectively translated into the melopoeia or rhythmic and phonic configuration of the long poem which has been assigned to it for a new habitat. Perhaps the chief semantic change must be recognized in the substitution of "Be there not natural demonstration" for the earlier "save they know't aright from nature's source", to match the straightforward Italian of Guido: "*senza natural dimonstramento*", for apart from the relative awkwardness of the earlier solution, the concept is basic to Guido's philosophy as assessed by Pound, and it tallies with the keynote words "reason" and "in season". In this later version, Pound rightly stresses the experiential aspect of Guido's anatomy of love. What we should normally call abstract words are not supposed to work as bloodless abstractions, but as names of felt dynamic entities or actions: thus *virtu* (vertu), emanation, form, etc. The logical movement of the exploring mind is thrown into sharper relief, indeed sharpness of outline and definition is turned to aesthetic account; thus (in the next stanzaic grouping Pound has set up here) words regain the kind of cutting edge they had in Guido's Italian, for

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

replaces the evasive sfumato of

In memory's locus taketh he his state
 Formed there in manner as a mist of light
 Upon a dusk that is come from Mars and stays.
 Love is created, hath a sensate name...

One of Pound's erudite coinages, *diafan* (it's actually an ancient Provençal form akin to obsolete English *diaphane* and elicited in Pound's mind by Guido's own Italian, "*diaphon*") chases any mist and clots the meaning in a manner very close to Guido's example.

At the same time, abstract nouns are reactivated into numinous entities beyond the requirements of literal translation: "Where memory liveth" is grammatically less literal than "In memory's locus" for "*In quella parte dove sta memoria*", yet poetically more effective. Almost the same is true of "shadow" versus "dusk" for "*schuridade*".

Despite some misunderstanding of the text (where the text is unambiguous), Pound manages to convey the driving force of intellectual passion in the exploratory argument the canzone develops on its theme after stating it in the first stanza: source, power, essence, manifestations, etymology and possible visibility of Love. Two such misunderstandings could have been avoided, but only the first one bothers me. The Italian line N.35 (according to Contini's edition), "*Di sua virtute segue spesso morte*", becomes in Pound's rendition:

Often his power cometh on death in the end

a negligible variant of the earlier translation, and this seems to weaken or blur the obvious meaning, with a corresponding loss of dramatic force; for the Italian line says that "death often results from Love's power", an idea in perfect keeping with force of Guido's saturnine meditation in verse on the destructive force of Love. The other case of indisputable misreading occurs in the last stanza, just before the envoi:

Who heareth, seeth not form
But is led by its emanation.

The Italian "*E chi ben aude*" is a mere syntactical insert to be understood just about as follows:

And, for those who get it right, form is not visible.

Yet here Pound's poetical instinct has rescued the translation from serious jarring with the semantic context; it was almost a fortunate fall from literal exactitude.

A return to exactitude, instead, was effected by Pound when he discarded his earlier translation of the line

E vol ch'om miri
in un formato locho

And wills man look into *unformed* space

for the obviously more correct

Willing man look into that forméd trace in his mind.

I predicate this correctness on Pound's chosen codex, which says "*formato locho*", the very opposite of "unformed" as he had it in the earlier translation. But other textual readings, as Shaw and Contini instruct us, diverge from this; Shaw, in fact, takes Pound to task for his weak philology. I am more concerned with the English poetry that has sprung from his meeting with Cavalcanti's impervious text.

The movement of thought in Guido's *canzone* is a continuous probing of the elusive, ever more mysterious, and yet tangible object, a Love conceived as dark psychological force with astrological implications; the poetical logic manages to estrange the object progressively by applying negative qualifications to it (it is not this, nor that; it is not a substance, nor a primal power or *virtu*; it operates against reason, it can have deadly effects, yet it involves only the noble spirits; it cannot be described, it has no color or face, it sits

apart in the midst of darkness, divided from light, yet truth and worth come from it alone). One understands why Pound sees in this canzone a manifesto of subversive import, especially when compared with Guinizelli's and Dante's altogether luminous and positive statements on love. Cavalcanti truly is the anti-Guinizelli in this regard; Pound has inserted a passage from the latter poet's "*Al cor gentil*" to open Canto LI, and it is contrapuntally meant. In the translation we are examining, Pound's fortunate betrayals of the text have tilted the semantic compass of the *canzone* toward godlike personification, by rendering the passage

E vol ch'om miri etc...
 E non si mova
 perchè lui si tiri
 E non si aggiri
 per trovarvi giocho
 E certamente gran saver né pocho

as follows:

Willing man look etc...
 He himself moveth not, drawing all to his stillness,
 Neither turneth about to seek his delight
 Nor yet to seek out proving
 Be it so great or so small,

which sets Love up as an analogue of the Divine Unmoved Mover in Aristotle's system, whereas the Italian text unmistakably refers to the paralyzing effects of imperious Love on his victim. The same creative misreading occurs a few lines below, to reinforce the image of Love as a powerful anti-God:

Nor is he known from his face
 But taken in the white light that is allness
 Toucheth his aim

Now the Italian text here is far from unequivocally ascertained, nor are the best critics in agreement on its meaning, thanks to Guido's compressed syntax which reaches elliptical peaks in this last stanza as if to match the noumenal ineffability of his object. But one thing few exegetes would allow is Pound's interpretation of "*viso*" as "face". "*Vista*", "sight", is the plausible meaning here, since it is reiterated shortly after by the statement

forma non si vede (form is not to be seen)

with what follows about darkness and light, darkness being presented as the locus of Love this side of light ("*assiso 'n mezzo schuro luce rade*"). And yet few readers of Pound's English poem would object to his departure from one semantic certainty in this tortured passage, because he manages to sustain the pervasive image of love as numinous power, form beyond form. The first time the word *forma* appears in the poem, it denotes a visible and definite object, a *forma formata* or formed form (woman's shape); now instead *forma* is a *forma formans*, a forming form, the hidden, invisible source of the visible in man's perception. The protagonist of Guido's *canzone* recedes into a deeper mystery just as the inflexible argument strives to capture him in its logical meshes. This is the paradoxical success of the Negative Way followed by the Tuscan poet for the purposes of "natural demonstration", and the American poet has grasped this central fact. For this reason I approve of Pound's rendering of "*mezzo schuro luce rade*", another cryptical and disputed passage, as

Disjunct in mid darkness
Grazeth the light...

It seems to me extremely successful as an image that makes the invisible tangible and brings to a vivid consummation the inherent paradox of the whole logical movement of the *canzone*. His choice will be instructively compared with Contini's reading ("excludes the light") and

Ceriello's²³, based on Shaw's ("rarely shines"). There is a continuity between this difficult *canzone* and the sonnet "*Chi è questa che vien*"; the *canzone* grapples with the source of that spell that is manifested in the visible beauty of woman; and even she is finally beyond our grasp (last line of the sonnet).

In all of this, I have not argued for perfection, but for revealing poignancy of interpretation and expression. Pound has referred to the doubtful spots in his translations from Cavalcanti as "atrocities"²⁴, but the felicities are more numerous and important. In particular, the translation of "Donna mi prega", beset as it is with subjective interventions, or downright misreadings, grows on us if we regard it a variation on a theme by Cavalcanti; and this should be the best answer to Professor Shaw's curt dismissal of this part of Pound's work. No other Italian poet has engaged Pound so closely, and the encounter was decisive for his artistic development. One cannot leave the subject without mentioning Pound's later work on a sonnet by Guinizelli, on St. Francis' "Cantico del Sole" (where I detect the influence of Luigi Foscolo Benedetto's essay²⁵), whose poetry Pound called "splendid" in a letter to Iris Barry while denying its metrical usefulness. The closeness of Pound's version to Leopardi's *canzone* on the sepulchral portrait of a lady is matched by its clarity and melody. Pound has even been able to carry over into his English context the alliterative effects of "*Immobilmente... Muto, mirando*" in Stanza I, without forcing the phrase or the verse.

It is a pity that he should not have given us more Leopardi.

23. *I Rimatori del Dolce Stil Novo*, ed. GUSTAVO RODOLFO CERIELLO (Milan, 1950), p. 45.

24. In the essay "Cavalcanti", printed first in *Make It New* (1934) and then in *The Literary Essays of E. P.* cit.

25. L. F. BENEDETTO published an interpretation of St. Francis' poem in *Pegaso*, 1930, VIII, pp. 130-85, where the recurrent phrase "Laudato si', mi Signore, per tutte le creature" is taken to mean that the Lord should be praised *by* rather than "on account of" all His creatures (the latter reading was then current, while the former postulates a Latinism on the part of the medieval writer). Pound's translation follows Foscolo Benedetto's reading in this regard.

A special note emerges from the last five poems included in the 1963 paperback anthology of Pound's translations. They are by Saturno Montanari, a young man who died at the front in 1941 and is still relatively unknown²⁶. Pound has lent him his own experienced voice, the same voice that had known how to summon the great Chinese shade of Li-Po and make it feel like flesh:

Road in the open there,
all sun and grain-dust
and sour air
from the canal bank,

Ditch-water higher now
with the tide,
turns violet and red.

A swallow for shuttle, back,
forth, forth, back
from shack to
marsh track;
to the far
skyline that's fading now.
A thin song of a girl plucking grain,
a child cries from the threshing floor.

26. On Montanari I received (November 1970) the following information from Pound's daughter, (Mrs.) Mary De Rachewiltz, through her son Walter Siegfried D. R.:

"Montanari: one of the usual young poets, who sent his first book of verse to your grandfather. Then he died in the war and his father had more poems of his published, from the posthumous papers and [Mr. Montanari père] started a correspondence with your grandfather. This was, above all, a human relationship. Montanari's books, I think, were 3: *Orcilucanti* (Bright Eyes); *Canzoni all'orecchio* (Songs sottovoce); *Voci in tono minore* (Voices in minor key). 20 years ago Montanari's father sent manuscripts also to me - but who knows where they ended up About the son, I think there isn't much to know. Born in 1918, died in 1941. A promise. On Pound's part: consoling a father who lost his son. Homage to a young man. Protest against the war that kills the several Gaudiers etc After Cavalcanti, Guinicelli, Francis of Assisi and Leopardi, I don't think Ezra Pound ever took any Italian poet seriously", (English translation mine, from part of a letter of Mrs. De Rachewiltz to her son). I might add that at several points in his work Pound takes D'Annunzio very seriously.

Pound's versatility as a translator, who can range from the archaic depths of language to the freshest surfaces, is the versatility of a master poet. Only recently, in *Near the Ocean*, has Robert Lowell learned to submit his riotous talent to the kind of discipline Pound has always observed; and the results have become that much more convincing. Pound can modulate his language to match either Lowell's spleen and vehemence or Auslander's melodic sensitiveness, and he has so much to teach a fellow practitioner of the art because he has never stopped learning from his encounters with other artists.

Among them, the Italians have their place. Too few of them perhaps, when we consider the existence of poets like Ungaretti and Montale - but who wants to question Ezra Pound's elective affinities? ²⁷.

GLAUCO CAMBON

27. A recent monument to Pound's cultural ties with Italy is the 1970 *Opere Scelte* volume (Mondadori, Milan) edited by his daughter Mary De Rachewiltz who also translated many of the selections.