

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 150

TOPICS VOLUME

Volume 150

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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—★—
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Preface

Since its inception more than fifteen years ago, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by nearly 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 500 authors, representing 58 nationalities and over 25,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Thomson Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

Organization of the Book

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- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
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Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Thomson Gale, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Ezra Pound Controversy

Debate stemming from Ezra Pound's Fascist tendencies and anti-Semitic writings.

INTRODUCTION

Ezra Pound came to epitomize the heart of the art-for-art's-sake argument when he was arrested and charged with treason in April 1945. While widely hailed as an influential poet, writer, critic, and translator and one of the fundamental masters of the Modernist style, Pound was simultaneously reviled by the post-World War II world at-large as an anti-Semite and traitor for his provocative writing and treasonous radio broadcasts in Italy that espoused his Fascist leanings. As a writer, Pound was responsible for *The Cantos* (1915-1968), a verse narrative that is regarded as one of the most remarkable pieces of American literature. An epic poem of memorable beauty that combines European and Asian aesthetics with American sensibilities, *The Cantos* also incorporates Pound's vision of a new world order and regrettably, his vitriolic beliefs about Jews and period politics. It is this dichotomy between the stunning sensual clarity of his poetry and the acrimonious nature of his beliefs that has led to questions about whether a work of art can be viewed separately from the nature and intents of its creator.

Born in 1885 in Hailey, Idaho, to Isabel Weston Pound and Homer Loomis Pound, Ezra Pound was the scion of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow on his mother's side and Republican congressman Thaddeus Coleman Pound on his father's. While in his teens, he moved along with the demands of his father's work for the U. S. Mint to New York and eventually Philadelphia in 1898. In 1901 he attended the University of Pennsylvania where he began lifelong friendships with Hilda Doolittle (H. D.) and William Carlos Williams, the first of an amazingly varied list of strong personal and artistic connections he would make that would ultimately grow to include such luminaries as William Butler Yeats, Henry James, Robert Frost, Ford Madox Ford, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, and most especially, close friend and political ally, T. S. Eliot. After an innocent scandal led to his dismissal from the teaching staff at Wabash College in Indiana, Pound ventured to England, where he would begin a decades-long period of residency throughout Europe. During this time Pound studied and absorbed the classical literature of the region with zealousness—influences that would be later reflected in his own writ-

ing. After releasing a series of critically lauded work that included a volume of poetry, *Personae* (1909) and a critical study, *The Spirit of Romance* (1910), Pound founded a new writing movement called Imagism, a literary style he championed with H. D. that attempted to use clarity and exactness rather than symbolism as its primary means of description. Within a year, he had moved to a new abstract organizational style he called "Vorticism" which used cubism and futurism as its basis, which was followed by a study of Chinese poetry and Japanese Noh plays. These influences provided the last building block towards what would be his penultimate and most debated work, *The Cantos*.

Composed of 117 cantos and written at various intervals over a 53-year period, *The Cantos* was actually released as a series of shorter volumes, each with its own title but a continuation of the same epic piece of literature. The work is at times a treatise for Pound's theories on economics, his hopes for a different world (closely resembling some of Fascism's stated goals), a modern update of Greek myth, a history lesson, and an attack on political nemeses such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. A synthesis of wildly varying languages, styles, and subject matter, *The Cantos* nonetheless achieved tremendous fame and critical ovations for Pound, earning him an enviable level of critical respect from his peers. Given that *The Cantos* was written over such an extended period of time, it is a reflection of its author's growing shift of mood and temperament away from the mainstream. Living in Europe during the volatile period before World War II, Pound saw in Adolph Hitler and Benito Mussolini contemporary figures with the will and desires to create a utopian state where the class hostilities he felt inherent to the capitalist and communist ideologies could be eliminated. Favoring a government that would give more emphasis to culture and art and less power to the banking industry, whom he felt was directly accountable for the First World War, Pound became particularly drawn to the culture and growing power of the Fascist movement in Italy. As a result, Pound became an eager advocate for "Il Duce," even going so far as to praise him in a book, *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* (1935) that, in addition to defending Pound's economic and political theories, hailed the Italian dictator as a sort of second coming of Thomas Jefferson, a man Pound greatly admired. A strong opponent to the coming war, Pound stridently worked to prevent its seeming inevitability through his writings and even a last ditch visit to the United States in 1939. When war finally did flare, Pound

became a voice for Mussolini, airing a series of weekly radio broadcasts where he railed against the U.S. involvement in the war and spewed a series of racially tinged invectives against the Jewish people, including apparent support for Hitler's "Final Solution." Indicted for treason by the United States in 1942, he continued his attacks against U.S. policy until he was eventually handed over to U.S. forces by partisans following a coup against Mussolini in 1945.

For the next six months, he was held at the U.S. Disciplinary Barracks near Pisa, Italy, under harsh circumstances. Confined amongst U.S. military prisoners, some of whom were executed at Pisa by the military for such violent crimes as rape and murder, Pound suffered terribly under the stress and conditions of his imprisonment at Pisa. Out of his pain and suffering, and still mourning the death of his Fascist dream, Pound penned *The Pisan Cantos* (1948), numbers 74-84 in *The Cantos*, which were immediately hailed as a masterwork of English literature by many leading members of the literati of the time. The most directly personal segment of *The Cantos*, the elegiac tones are often moving in their expression of the despair he felt during this period of fragile emotional adversity. Unfortunately, *The Pisan Cantos* also reflected his growing antagonism and the exacerbated mental difficulties that were becoming increasingly apparent, problems that manifested themselves as expanding conspiratorial rants against Jews as well as several lines written in honor of his beloved fallen Mussolini. Upon his return to the United States, Pound had cause to fear for his life as he was charged with treason, which came with a possible death penalty. On the advice of his lawyers and many influential literary friends, Pound agreed to settle for acquittal on the grounds that he was mentally unfit to stand trial, a result that led to his committal at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C. The hope among his advisers was to avoid the trial at a time when emotions about the war were running at a fever pitch, and thus evade any chance he would be handed a death sentence. But the gambit backfired when St. Elizabeth's psychiatrists diagnosed him with narcissistic personality disorder and he was forced to spend the next thirteen years at the hospital against his will.

For their part, the literary community were already split regarding Pound's questionable actions during the war, though most believed that in no way were those actions deserving of execution. The atmosphere became further charged when months after its release, *The Pisan Cantos* was awarded the prestigious first-ever Bollingen-Library of Congress Award in 1949, given to the finest collection of poetry from the preceding year. The jury committee, which included among its membership famed poets Allen Tate, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Conrad Aiken, Louise Bogan, Leonie Adams, Robert Penn Warren, and Robert Lowell, was composed of mostly

anti-war Modernists like Pound himself. The possible motivations for Pound's selection may have been an attempt by the Bollingen membership to bring attention to Pound's plight, in addition to their desire to honor a work many of them believed to be perhaps the finest poetry of their generation. Instead, a war of words ensued between those who saw *The Pisan Cantos* as a grossly anti-Semitic and anti-democratic work and the Bollingen group—many of whom were followers of the New Criticism movement which sought to form a new system of literary criticism centering on the rigorous study of text by itself. The Bollingen jury believed that art should be studied on its own merits without any outside factors influencing one's determination of the quality or value of the work. Leading the voices speaking out against Pound was poet Robert Hillyer, himself a Pulitzer Prize winner, who savagely berated the Bollingen jury in a series of articles in the *Saturday Review of Literature* that singled out T. S. Eliot (himself rumored to be Fascist-leaning and anti-Semitic) for special condemnation. He believed the Bollingen group and its allies to be an elitist assembly cut off from real-world concerns and Pound to be a terrible choice for such an honor. Among Hillyer's supporters was famed anthologist and critic Louis Untermeyer, who summed up the feelings of much of mid-America when he described Pound as "the most belligerent expatriate of his generation."

The attention negatively affected Pound, and he came to despise his time at St. Elizabeth's. During his incarceration, his travails inspired him to write two more volumes in his *Cantos* series, *Section: Rock-Drill* (1955) and *Thrones* (1959) as well as a prose essay on artist patronage, *Patria Mia* (1950). During his time at the institution, he became a sort of tragic, mythic figure to many in the literary world, leading Allen Ginsberg among others to visit him. These visits came to be known as part of the "Ezuversity" and enabled Pound to extend his influence onto a new generation of artists. Upon his release from St. Elizabeth's, Pound returned to his cherished Italy to live with his daughter, and where he mellowed a bit in his beliefs in later years, until his passing at the age of eighty-six in 1972.

Pound believed himself to be an optimist, who in a fashion, outlined his hopes for a dream society where art and culture were king. His legacy to literature is such that no matter what his controversial views, he remains one of the most studied artists of the twentieth century; his *Cantos* is a masterwork, his criticism continues to be a major influence on literature and he helped expose the works of James Joyce and T. S. Eliot to a wider audience. But regardless of those achievements his critical reputation is still haunted by his words and actions during the World War II period, and as a result a healthy debate continues to rage over his place in history. Critically, the heart of the debate seems to cen-

ter on two issues: 1) what might have been the truth regarding Pound's intentions during the war versus his own accounting of his goals and 2) can a work—even one as technically proficient and groundbreaking as *The Cantos*—be considered great art as a whole when pieces of it contain such harsh sentiments?

Selected Poems 1908-1959 (poetry) 1975
Ezra Pound Speaking: Radio Speeches of World War II
 (radio broadcasts) 1978

REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

Ezra Pound

A Lume Spento (poetry) 1908
Exultations (poetry) 1909
Personae (poetry) 1909
The Spirit of Romance (criticism) 1910
Cathay: Translations for the Most Part from the Chinese of Rihaku, From the Notes of the Late Ernest Fenollosa, and the Decipherings of the Professors Mori and Ariga [translator] (poetry) 1915
Lustra (poetry) 1916
Noh; or, Accomplishment: A Study of the Classical Stage of Japan [with Ernest Fenollosa] (criticism) 1916
The Fourth Canto (poetry) 1919
Hugh Selwyn Mauberly (poetry) 1920
Instigations of Ezra Pound, Together with an Essay on the Chinese Written Characters by Ernest Fenollosa (criticism) 1920
Poems, 1918-21 (poetry) 1921
A Draft of XXX Cantos (poetry) 1930
How to Read (criticism) 1931
ABC of Economics (criticism) 1933
ABC of Reading (criticism) 1934
Eleven New Cantos: XXXI-XLI (poetry) 1934
Jefferson and/or Mussolini (prose) 1935
The Fifth Decade of Cantos (poetry) 1937
Guide to Kulchur (prose) 1938
What is Money For (prose) 1939
Cantos LII-LXXI (poetry) 1940
L'America, Roosevelt e le Cause della Guerra Presente (prose) 1944; also published as *America, Roosevelt and the Causes of the Present War*, 1951
If This Be Treason (radio broadcasts) 1948
The Cantos (poetry) 1948
The Pisan Cantos (poetry) 1948
Selected Poems (poetry) 1949
Patria Mia (prose) 1950
Section: Rock-Drill 85-95 de los Cantares (poetry) 1955
Thrones 96-109 de los Cantares (poetry) 1959
Impact Essays on Ignorance and the Decline of American Civilization (prose) 1960
Canto CX (poetry) 1965
Selected Cantos (poetry) 1967
Drafts and Fragments of Cantos CX to CXVII (poetry) 1969
Selected Prose 1909-1965 (prose) 1973

POLITICS OF EZRA POUND

John Berryman (essay date April 1949)

SOURCE: Berryman, John. "The Poetry of Ezra Pound." In *Ezra Pound: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Eric Homberger, pp. 388-404. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972.

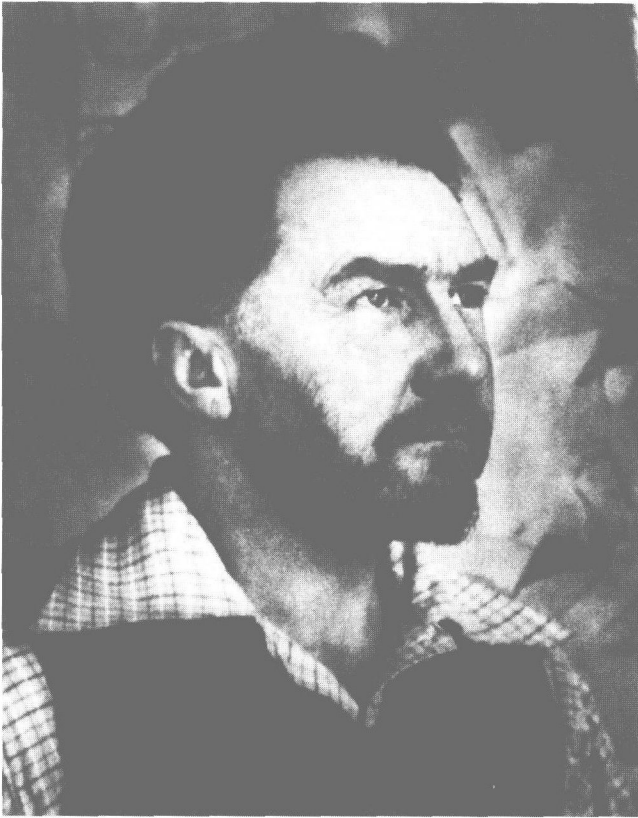
[In the following essay, originally published in the *Partisan Review* in April 1949, Berryman attempts to mark the influences underlying the various phases of Pound's work from his early roots in Imagism to his later Fascist views.]

Since Pound has been for several generations now one of the most famous of living poets, it may occasion surprise that an *introduction* to his poetry, such as I was lately invited to make for *New Directions*, should be thought necessary at all. It may, but I doubt that it will. Not much candor is wanted for the observation that though he is famous and his poetry is famous his poetry is not familiar, that serious readers as a class have relinquished even the imperfect hold they had upon it fifteen years ago, and regard it at present either with hostility or with indifference. The situation is awkward for the critic. Commonly, when the object of criticism is at once celebrated, unfamiliar, and odious, it is also remote in time; the enquiry touches no current or recent passion. Our case is as different as possible from this enviable condition.

In a few years no one will remember the *buffo*,
 No one will remember the trivial parts of me,
 The comic detail will be absent.

After thirty-five years neither comic nor tragic detail is absent. Whatever the critic may wish to say of the poetry runs the risk of being misunderstood as of the poet; one encounters *eager* preconceptions; and no disclaimer is likely to have effect. I make, however, no disclaimer just yet. Let us only proceed slowly—remembering that it is the business of criticism to offer explanations—towards the matter of hostility, beginning with the matter of indifference.

It is very surprising, perhaps, that readers of poetry should remain indifferent to the verse of a poet so influential as Pound has been. As one of the dominant, semi-



Author portrait of Ezra Pound.

nal poetries of the age, one would expect readers to want to become acquainted with it as a matter of course. That many do not want to, suggests that they do not in fact so regard it, or regard it as only in some special sense an influence; and I think this is the case. They regard *Pound* as a dominant influence. They are quite right, of course. But even this is often disputed or ignored, so we cannot avoid some discussion. It is necessary to see Pound under two aspects: as he worked upon poetry and as he worked upon the public. The notion of him as publicist for Joyce, Eliot, Frost, a hundred others, being still current, I feel free to select instances displaying rather the first aspect, and take his relations with W. B. Yeats, with Imagism, and with 'The Waste Land'—with the major poet, that is, the major movement, and the major poem, of the century so far.

Pound went to London in 1908, at twenty-three, to learn from Yeats how to write poetry, in the belief that no one then living knew more about it. Swinburne was just alive (when he died the following April, 'I am the King of the Cats,' said Yeats to one of his sisters meeting her in the street), inaccessible behind Watts-Dunton.

Swinburne my only miss
and I didn't know he'd been to see Landor

and they told me this that an' tother
and when old Mathews went he saw the three tea-
cups two for Watts Dunton who liked to let his tea
cool
So old Elkin had only one glory
He did carry Algernon's suit *once*
when he, Elkin, first came to London. . . .

Pound was a most odd disciple; he regarded himself as the heir of Browning, he was stirring free of Fitzgerald and the Nineties, he had already begun the war on the iamb and the English heroic line that would never end (consider the two opening dactyls here and then the spondee-two-dactyls-and-trochee of the beautiful sixth line), he was full of the Troubadours, and he was becoming obsessed with the concept of *verse-as-speech*. He had as much energy as Yeats. The older poet has recorded his debt to the younger for advice against abstractions, underlinings of them, help in revision, and so on. But the change that began to move in Yeats' verse about this time was towards speech, the beginning of his famous development, and like one or two others I have always supposed Pound the motor. What seems to have happened was this. Pound was going in the afternoons to see Ford Madox Hueffer (Ford), and in the evenings to see Yeats; the older men did not get on. Of four 'honourable debts' he acknowledged later, the chief was Hueffer, who 'believes one should write in a contemporary spoken or at least speakable language'—not the same thing, it will be observed, as Pound's famous earlier formulation of 'Mr. Hueffer's realization that poetry should be written at least as well as prose.'

So old Ezra had only one glory

here, that he passed on without source in the evening
what he had heard in the afternoon.

Then Imagism. There were two 'Imagist' movements (besides a dilution of the second, conducted by Amy Lowell, which reached the public), both in London. The first was started in March 1909 by T. E. Hulme who was insisting on 'absolutely accurate presentation and no verbiage', F. S. Flint who had been advocating 'vers libre,' Edward Storer who was interested in 'the Image,' and others, all strongly under the influence of French Symbolist poetry. Pound joined the group on April 22nd—Elkin Mathews had published the week before a third collection of poems, *Personae*, his first book proper, which would establish him. Pound read out to the startled Soho cafe a new poem 'Sestina: Altaforte.' *Exultations*, issued later that year and *Canzoni* (1911), continuing his Provençal investigations, display no Imagist affiliation; *Ripostes* (1912) does, and at the end of it he printed Hulme's five poems and named the movement, which had passed away meanwhile, perhaps because none of its other members could write poetry. Through Pound personally the first movement reached

the second. The second consisted of H. D. and Richard Aldington, who were inspired not by French but by Greek verse, in 1912; Pound got their work printed, wrote the movement's essential documents (in *Poetry* for March 1913, 'A Few Don'ts' and an interview with him signed by Flint), and edited *Des Imagistes* which appeared in March of 1914. By the time Miss Lowell arrived with her retinue that summer, Pound, joined now with Wyndham Lewis and the sculptor Gaudier-Brzeska, had launched Vorticism, in the opening *Blast*. The importance of literary movements is readily exaggerated; conceivably in the end Imagism will seem valuable above all as it affected Pound's verse. Still, with a doubtful exception for the unnamed movement of the Auden group about 1930, it is the migration to a new position, for our time, that retains most interest, and is a fair sample of Pound's activity.

His now celebrated operation some years later upon 'The Waste Land', disengaging that work as we know it from what its author describes as a sprawling, chaotic poem twice as long, is another. Keeping our wits and facts in order, we need not follow a critic sometimes so penetrating as Yvor Winters in seeing Pound as the 'primal spirit' behind every gesture, every deplorable gesture, of the deplorable Mr. Eliot. 'The principal influence' upon Eliot's verse, Mr. Winters writes, 'is probably that of Laforgue, whose poetry Pound had begun to champion at least as early as 1917.' This is very early indeed, only seven years after Eliot's 'Humour-sque, After J. Laforgue' in the *Harvard Advocate*. No, Eliot started alone. The two poets met first, and Pound persuaded *Poetry* to print 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,' in 1915, by which date Eliot was nearly through with Laforgue. Mr. Winters' remark neglects also the serial character of the influences on Eliot's poetry, which include Laforgue, Webster, James, Baudelaire, Pound, Gautier, Joyce, Apollinaire, Dante. It is emphatically not a mistake, however, to regard Pound's personal influence as great from 1915 on; and great on the period as a whole.

The reader who is not a student of poetry has another ground for indifference. Pound, he has always heard, has no 'matter.' Granting the 'importance' of his verse, granting the possibility that having been for poets fertile it might prove on acquaintance agreeable or beautiful, what has he to do with this sport, a matterless poetry? This is a much more sophisticated dissatisfaction, and can claim the highest critical support. 'I confess,' Mr. Eliot once wrote, 'that I am seldom interested in what he is saying, but only in the way he says it'; and R. P. Blackmur, 'he is all surface and articulation.' We notice Mr. Eliot's qualification ('seldom') and we are puzzled by an ambiguity in Mr. Blackmur's 'articulation' (is this jointing or merely uttering?); but on the whole they put authoritatively the established view. Now there can be no question of traversing such

authorities directly. But it is a violent and remarkable charge; I think we are bound to look into it a little.

If his critics are right, Pound himself misconceived his work from the beginning and has continued to do so. This is of course not impossible; in fact I shall be arguing presently, in another sense, that it is just what he has done. But let us hear what he has said. In a very early poem, 'Revolt Against the Crepuscular Spirit in Modern Poetry,' he says:

I would shake off the lethargy of this our time, and
give
For shadows—shapes of power
For dreams—men.

If the poem is bad, the programme is distinct. Then one of his debts, he records later, 'may be considered as the example of or hint from Thomas Hardy, who, despite the aesthetic era, has remained interested in his subject, i.e. in distinction to being interested in "treatment."' Among other passages to the same effect, I give one more, later still, which readers must have come on with surprise. Speaking of Mr. Eliot and Miss Moore, Pound remarks, 'Neither they nor anyone else is likely to claim that they have as much interest in life as I have, or that I have their patience in reading.'

The 'literary' or 'aesthetic' view taken of Pound now for many years will not be much disturbed by such assertions, until we observe how oddly they are confirmed by the opinions expressed in 1909 about *Personae*. These opinions are worth attention, because Pound's literary personality became known as a leader's thereafter, and most reviews his books have received, since, show the impress of this knowledge; they are impure. It is hardly too much to say that the first *Personae* was the last volume of Pound's that was widely judged on its merits. What did the old reviewers say? 'He writes out of an exuberance of incontinently struggling ideas and passionate convictions. . . . He plunges straight into the heart of his theme, and suggests virility in action combined with fierceness, eagerness, and tenderness'—so R. A. Scott-James whose excitement, by the way, about 'the brute force of Mr. Pound's imagination' did not prevent his noticing the unusual spondee-dactyl use which he exemplified with a lovely line from 'Cino':

Eyes, dréams, / líps, and the / níght góes.

It is absolutely unnecessary, and appears to a scholar probably very ridiculous, to patronize the reviewers of an earlier age. The 'beauty of ("In Praise of Ysolt") is the beauty of passion, sincerity and intensity,' wrote Edward Thomas, 'not of beautiful words and images and suggestions . . . the thought dominates the words and is greater than they are.' One hardly recognizes here the 'superficial' or 'mindless' Pound whom critics

have held up to us since. Faced with a welter of Provençal and Browning and early Yeats, not to mention Villon, the reviewers nevertheless insisted upon the poet's strong individuality: 'All his poems are like this, from beginning to end, and in every way, his own, and in a world of his own.' Faced with this learning (the notes quote Richard of St. Victor, etc.), they admired 'his fearlessness and lack of selfconsciousness,' 'the breath of the open air.' 'He cannot be usefully compared,' Thomas went on, 'with any living writers . . . full of personality and with such power to express it, that' and so on. The Oxford *Isis* agreed that 'physically and intellectually the verse seems to reproduce the personality with a brief fullness and adequacy.' Instead of pursuing the engaging themes thrown up by this medley of exaggeration and justice, culled mostly from the back leaves of *Exultations*, let me pass to a third, more serious difficulty with the view that Pound has no 'matter'.

Pound's poetry treats of Provence, China, Rome, London, medieval living, modern living, human relationships, authors, young women, animals, money, games, government, war, poetry, love, and other things. This can be verified. What the critics must mean, then, is that they are aware of a *defect*, or defects, in the substance of the poetry. About one defect they have been explicit: the want of originality of substance. Pound has no matter of *his own*. Pound—who is even in the most surprising quarters conceded to be a 'great' translator—is best as a translator. 'The "Propertius" is a sturdier, more sustained, and more independent poem than "Maunderley,"' writes Mr. Blackmur. 'Craftsmanship may be equally found in both poems; but Mr. Pound has contributed more of his own individual sensibility, more genuine personal voice, in the "Propertius" where he had something to proceed from, than in "Maunderley" where he was on his own. . . . This fact, which perhaps cannot be demonstrated but which can be felt when the reader is familiar enough with the poems, is the key-fact of serious judgment upon Mr. Pound.' I do not feel sure that time is bearing out the first part of this careful judgment; the finest sections of Pound's postwar farewell to London, where the grotesquerie of Tristan Corbière is a new element in the complex style, naive and wily, in which he celebrates the modern poet's difficulties and nostalgia, seem to me somewhat more brilliant, solid, and independent, than the finest sections of the Roman poem. But my objections to the point of view begin well behind any value-judgment. *All* the ambitious poetry of the last six hundred years is much less 'original' than any but a few of its readers ever realize. A staggering quantity of it has direct sources, even verbal sources, in other poetry, history, philosophy, theology, prose of all kinds. Even the word 'original' in this sense we find first in Dryden, and the sense was not normalized till the mid-century following. A few hours, or days, with several annotated edi-

tions of *Lycidas* will transform the reader's view of this matter, especially if he will bear in mind the likelihood that the serious modern poet's strategy resembles Milton's—exceptional as Milton was—far more closely than his (the reader's) attitude and knowledge resemble Milton's contemporary reader's attitude and knowledge. Poetry is a palimpsest. 'The old playwrights took old subjects,' remarks a poet who has not been accused of want of originality, 'did not even arrange the subject in a new way. They were absorbed in expression, that is to say in what is most near and delicate.' So Yeats; but our literary criticism, if at its best it knows all this well enough, even at its best is inclined to forget it and to act as if originality were not regularly a matter of *degree* in works where it is worth assessing at all. A difficulty is that modern critics spend much of their time in the perusal of writing that really is more or less original, and negligible. This African originality is very confusing. One of the writer's favourite poems is perfect Thomson in manner as well as perfect Wordsworth, the substance is all but purely Wordsworth's, and how are we accustomed to deal with this? The answer is that we are not. It clearly troubles Mr. Eliot that the two first sections of 'Near Perigord' resemble Browning, Pound's master, though the poem seems to him (as to me) beautiful and profound; this poem is extremely original in substantial development. Now though Mr. Blackmur is preferring derivation and Mr. Eliot is deprecating it, they appear to illustrate an identical disorder of procedure, that of a criticism which is content to consider in isolation originality of either matter *or* manner, without regard to the other, and with small regard to degree. I term this a disorder rather than a defect because with regard to a poetry as singular as Pound's, and with such diverse claims upon our attention, it is all but fatal to criticism. The critics were writing, one fifteen years ago, the other twenty, but I do not know that our situation has much improved, and it goes without saying that the best criticism of the period has addressed itself almost exclusively to manner, except for the proliferation in the last decade of an exegetical criticism similarly limited and comparatively abject. Until we get a criticism able to consider both originalities, in degree, Pound's achievement as a poet cannot be finally extricated from the body of his verse; and prepossessions should be avoided. That he has translated so much has no doubt cost him many readers, who (despite Dryden and Pope) cannot imagine that a 'real poet' would be content to translate so much; but criticism should be wiser.

Why *has* Pound translated so much? The question is an important one, and the answers usually given ignore the abyss of difference between his just-translations, like the Cavalcanti (the Canzone aside, of which his final version opens Canto XXXVI), such as might have been made by another poet of superlative skill, and renderings like those in *Cathay* and 'Propertius', which are

part of Pound's own life-poetry. The first class may be considered as exercise, propaganda, critical activity, taken in conjunction with his incoherent and powerful literary criticism. The second class requires a word about Pound's notion of *personae* or masks, which issued successively in the masks of Cino, Bertran de Born, various Chinese poets, Propertius, Mauberley, fifty others. They differ both from Yeats's masks and from the dramatizations, such as Prufrock and Auden's 'airman,' that other poets find necessary in a period inimical to poetry, gregarious, and impatient of dignity.

We hear of the notion in two of his earliest poems, a sonnet 'Masks' about

souls that found themselves among
Unwonted folk that spake a hostile tongue,
Some souls from all the rest who'd not forgot
The star-span acres of a former lot
Where boundless mid the clouds his course he swung,
Or carnate with his elder brothers sung
E'er ballad makers lisped of Camelot. . . .

and 'In Durance':

But for all that, I am homesick after mine own kind
And would meet kindred even as I am,
Flesh-shrouded bearing the secret.

The question is, what the masks are for.

Does any reader who is familiar with Pound's poetry really not see that its subject is life of the modern poet?

It is in 'Faman Librosque Cano' and 'Scriptor Ignotus' of *Personae*—

And I see my greater soul-self bending
Sibylwise with that great forty-year epic
That you know of, yet unwrit
But as some child's toy 'tween my fingers.

If my power be lesser
Shall my striving be less keen? . . .

It is in 'Histrion' of *Exultations*—

'Tis as in midmost us there glows a sphere
Translucent, molten gold, that is the 'I'
And into this some form projects itself

And these, the Masters of the Soul, live on.

It is in one of the few good lines of *Canzoni*—

Who calls me idle? I have thought of her.

It is in 'N. Y.' of *Ripostes* (1912), the volume in which Pound established his manner and the volume with which modern poetry in English may be felt to have begun—

My City, my beloved, my white! Ah, slender . . .
Delicately upon the reed, attend me!

Now do I know that I am mad,
For here are a million people surly with traffic:
This is no maid.
Neither could I play upon any reed if I had one.

It is everywhere (as well as in the Chinese work) in the more 'original' poems and epigrams of *Lustra*, written 1913-1916. (A lustrum is 'an offering for the sins of the whole people, made by the censors at the expiration of their five years of office.' It has not perhaps been sufficiently observed that Pound is one of the wittiest poets who ever wrote. Yet he is serious enough in this title. In certain attitudes—his medieval nostalgia, literary anti-semitism, others—he a good deal resembles Henry Adams; each spent his life, as it were, seeking an official post where he could be used, and their failure to find one produced both the freedom and the inconsequence that charm and annoy us in these authors.) It is in the elaborate foreign *personae* that followed, *Cathay* (1915)—

And I have moped in the Emperor's garden, awaiting
an order-to-write!

and 'Propertius' (1917)—

I who come first from the clear font
Bringing the Grecian orgies into Italy
and the dance into Italy.

It is in 'Mauberley', of course—

Dowson found harlots cheaper than hotels;
So spoke the author of 'The Dorian Mood,'

M. Verog, out of step with the decade,
Detached from his contemporaries,
Neglected by the young,
Because of these reveries.

Meanwhile Pound's concept of method had been strongly affected by Ernest Fenollosa's essay on *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* ('Metaphor, the revealer of nature, is the very substance of poetry. . . . Chinese poetry gets back near to the process of nature by means of its vivid figure. . . . If we attempt to follow it in English we must use words highly charged, words whose vital suggestion shall interplay as nature interplays. Sentences must be like the mingling of the fringes of feathered banners, or as the colors of many flowers blended into the single sheen of a meadow . . . a thousand tints of verb') and for years he had been trying to work out a form whereby he could get his subject all together; by the time of 'Mauberley' he had succeeded, in the final version of the opening Cantos. And it is, as we shall see, in the Cantos also.

Above all, certain themes in the life of the modern poet: indecision-decision and infidelity-fidelity. Pound has written much more love-poetry than is generally re-