Modernist Image

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By

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**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**
P U B L I S H I N G

In Memoriam:

Razak Dahmane
Robert McElroy
Hammed Shahidian

"Lordly men…to earth o'ergiven"

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FOREWORD

The history of Western thought may be seen (meaningfully, even if somewhat simply) as a shift from objectivity to subjectivity, and poetry reflects this transformation. The *Iliad* is entirely objective, focused on the external world of sea and plain, walls and weapons. There is not internal monologue recorded in the entire poem: every thought the reader knows about is spoken aloud by the character. Even the gods move entirely in the outer world, communicating with mortals exclusively by appearing physically to them and speaking aloud, grabbing them, or knocking them down. By the time of Virgil, the hero begins to have subjective experiences, a few (but very few) moments of inward cogitation. A balance of subjective and objective experience is hit in Dante's *Comedia*, where the hero is the poet himself and the action is a spiritual transformation, but where that inner action corresponds at every point to an experience of a literal, physical other world in which even the blessed are embodied and the human face is united in the final lines with the divine circle of light. By the time of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, nearly the entire poem records the subjective experience of the poet, while the external experiences of nature and other people tend to dissolve into his meditations.

This transition from ancient objectivity to modern subjectivity is what Yeats traces in the complex historical system of *A Vision*. It is also what Schiller is addressing when he makes his famous distinction between "naive" and "sentimental" poetry: he allows that some modern writers (notably Goethe) are of the naive type, but it is clear that he supposes sentimental poetry (with all its intense self-consciousness) to be the characteristic mode of the modern world. M. H. Abrams identifies the same dichotomy and the same historical shift with his well-known terminology: the ancients thought of poetry as essentially "mimetic," descriptive of the external world; from the Romantics on, it came to be seen as essentially "expressive," pouring forth the mind of the poet.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, subject and object tended to separate entirely, with an apparently unbridgeable chasm between. A new sort of objectivity appeared as some thinkers took a radically materialist approach. Various scientistic ideas (such as logical positivism) exemplify this pole of the modern duality. Two objectivist

notions swept the intellectual world: Marxist "realism" treats all inner experience as an illusory *Überbau* (superstructure) entirely reducible to material causes; Freud similarly considered all mental or spiritual or artistic phenomena as sublimations of physical, erotic impulses. On the other hand, there arose radically subjective notions, which effectively treated the world of objects as insignificant, assigning ultimate authenticity to the inner world of the mind, which gave meaning to its surroundings according to its arbitrary whim. Thus we have existentialism, which denies that there are any objective essences and claims that reality is composed inwardly, in the existential moment: there are no *essentia*, only *esse*. Heidegger perhaps best exemplifies the subjectivist view when he claims that we experience a "thrownness into being" (*Geworfenheit ins Dasein*), a state in which we can find no foundation but must name ourselves and the world into being through language. His idea has been, of course, violently attacked by Marxists (such as Georg Lukács). Thus the thinkers of the twentieth century found themselves called upon to take sides, to choose either a radical objectivism or an equally radical subjectivism. A few resisted this dualism and looked for ways to unite inner and outer experience, and among these were those who most influenced the young T. S. Eliot, Henri Bergson and F. H. Bradley.

In the present book, Ethan Lewis brilliantly describes Eliot's quest for the union of subject and object, for the resolution of the dichotomy that had been forced in the modern mind. And he shows that Eliot had a fellow poetic quester in his friend Ezra Pound. Everyone knows of this famous literary friendship, which began with Pound seeing to the publication of "Prufrock," editing *The Waste Land*, and soliciting financial support for Eliot—and concluded with Eliot lobbying for Pound's release from the mental hospital after World War II. Yet scholars today rarely speak of Eliot and Pound together except with reference to these biographical details. No one until now has seriously raised the question of whether Eliot might be regarded as a follower of Pound's Imagist movement. By defining Imagism carefully in terms of subject and object, Professor Lewis is able to show what Imagism meant in Pound's poetry, and then to say just how Eliot's poetry is also Imagist. In the process, he gives penetrating readings of many poems by both writers.

Pound did not come to his version of uniting object and subject via philosophical studies but rather through intuitive poetic practice, and, as Lewis demonstrates, the difference between his approach and Eliot's may be called intuitive versus discursive. Pound says his Image "presents" the object rather than commenting on it, thereby creating what he calls an "absolute metaphor" in which "a thing outward and objective transforms

itself into a thing inward subjective." Professor Lewis sets this statement beside Eliot's pronouncement that a healthy use of language "presents the object, is so close to the object that the two are identified." The marked similarity between these two statements, previously unremarked, gives a starting point for an extended consideration of the different ways in which the two attempted to enact moments of contact between words and objects, an analysis which reveals that Pound emphasizes severance at the point of contact, while Eliot emphasizes conjunction.

Pound insists, as Professor Lewis points out, that in Imagist theory and practice, images are not to be ornaments. Rather, they are the medium of *rapprochement* between language and the outer world. Pound believed that certain characteristics of the external world were objective (in the sense of being real) and accessible to the intuitive understanding of all. I might add that this claim is very close to that of Heraclitus in one of the fragments used by Eliot as epigraphs to *Four Quartets*: "the *Logos* is common to all." Lewis shows us the way Pound makes his readers aware of the literal, objective reality of the vehicle of a metaphor, making it just as real as the tenor—thus using metaphor in a way consonant with Eliot's "objective correlative."

We are so accustomed to thinking of the Symbolist movement as the prime influence on Eliot's early poetry that it is startling to hear Eliot called an Imagist, but Professor Lewis makes good the claim, even while carefully defining the limits of the term as applied to Eliot's verse. Eliot's Imagism, he finds, is profoundly related to Bradley's notion of "Immediate Experience," a state of mind in which there is no awareness of a gap between inner and outer, subject and object. In much of the early poetry (through *The Waste Land*), we find a blurring of persons and surroundings that approximates Immediate Experience, the moment when, as Eliot puts it in his dissertation on Bradley, "consciousness and its object are one."

It would not do justice to the careful and complicated argument of this book to attempt a summary of it here. What I have attempted to do is to highlight and contextualize what I believe is its central concern, namely, the closely related and yet distinct ways in which Pound and Eliot confronted the subject-object duality that was taken for granted by many of their contemporaries. This issue is not only essential for understanding their poetry but is still of central importance today, when many post-structuralist theorists have enunciated ever more radical versions of the dualistic worldview. Some scholars have attempted to enlist Pound and Eliot as proto-post-structuralists, and Professor Lewis's book effectively shows that their impetus was in the opposite direction, even though their awareness of the gap between language and world was keen.

Lewis's thinking here is both intuitive and discursive; his argument, both analytic and synthetic. Readers will see that he has not only outlined the issues but has engaged them at a profound level. This is a scholarly book that embodies the literary virtues it describes.

—Ben Lockerd
Grand Valley State University
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PREFACE

Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'
Let us go and make our visit.

Prufrockesque question-begging won't here suffice any more than in most instances. Why, we ask first, study Pound and Eliot as Imagists when Pound abandoned Imagism and Eliot never embraced it in the first place?

To so approach them grants us, as Pound might say, "a language to think in" (LE 194) regarding Pound's and Eliot's emphasis on precise use of language; and their different reasons for this emphasis.

Pound values precision as a means of *carving distinctions between terms*, which he prizes as an ethical end-in-itself—though he seeks as well, *by carving*, to delineate components of a model culture.

The distinctions renderable by such apt language enable Eliot to intuit a divine "amalgamation," displacing otherwise inevitable confusions among objects, and between subject and object.

These essential dissociative and amalgamative tendencies of our subjects mark a fundamental difference which, once construed, allows us to read them, individually and in relation to each other, with "new eyes" (GB 85). One might have based a book upon this contrast; and in revising my material, I considered doing so. Yet a work on fusion and division *per se* seemed too abstract. Indeed the poets' predilections have oft been cited in conjunction with critical studies of their oeuvres and times. To center a text upon this opposition requires a concrete manifestation of the concepts. These manifestations exist, fortuitously, *as* the Pound Image—a process separating objects as it joins them; and *as* the Eliot 'Image'—which inexorably interpolating subject- and objectivity, focuses attention on the whole as the only *single* entity discernible.

Not surprisingly, then, Imagism not only informs a study of contrasting tendencies in Eliot and Pound; it also provides the best examples of that contrast.

Finally, partly because they transcended it, Imagism plots horizon points on which one can mark Pound's and Eliot's development. A poet wed to Imagism necessarily focuses on "small things," Reed Way Dasenbrock notes; risks confinement, in Hugh Kenner's words, to "a

poetic of stasis."[1] Yet by presenting at one moment multiple matters arranged in interactive "complexes"; by creating illusions of "freedom from time and space limits" (LE 4); this small static aesthetic set the course for the Modernist long poem. The operative strategy in Pound's "Pagani's, November 8"—

> Suddenly discovering in the eyes of the very beautiful
> 　　　　Normande cocotte
> The eyes of the very learned British Museum assistant.
>
> (P 157)

—resembles that of Canto 91:

> Miss Tudor moved them with galleons
> from deep eye, versus armada
> from the green deep
> 　　　　　　　　he saw it,
> in the green deep of an eye:
> 　Crystal waves weaving together toward the gt/
>
> 　　　　　　　　　　　　healing
>
> (91/625)

The Canto lines are freighted with more significance—and but constitute a node relating with ideas in surrounding passages. Yet discernment of the seascape "in the green deep of an eye" mirrors discovering one set of eyes in another's.

Moreover, the substance of poetic materials, albeit differing in import, is of a like consistency. In neither poem nor passage does the second sighting constitute a metaphoric vehicle; after all, "Pagani's" does not present one set of eyes in the terms of another, any more than sea momentarily re-places, and thereby enhances, the royal eye. Yet the correlated members do reflexively deepen comprehension of their counterpart—each "acts as some sort of predication about" the other, as Herbert Schneidau says.[2] Pound calls this interaction of actually perceived objects "absolute metaphor." "In...poem[s] of this sort, one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself into a thing inward subjective" (GB 85, 89).

As with the tintype, so in the opus magnus. Imagism "made possible" the *Cantos*, and "opened the way," additionally, to *Paterson, Maximus, The Bridge, A, The Waste Land,* and *Four Quartets*.[3] Hence, the *why* for studying Pound and Eliot as Imagists.

Now let us ask, 'What is it?'

We may focus, first, on the hygienic dictates of Imagism, points set forth by Pound in a now famous treatise[4], enabling attainment of clarity without forfeiture of complexity. These principles require more concrete definitions, which elsewhere, Pound himself provides. "Direct treatment of the thing, whether subjective or objective," he translates into "objectivity," or "the statement that portrays, and presents, instead of making a comment." "Concentration," "precision," "laconic speech" (LEP 11) gloss the second "Imagiste" tenet, to "use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation."

The third imperative, "regarding rhythm, to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome" Pound elsewhere expresses as the aim to notate "an 'absolute rhythm'... correspond[ing] exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed" (LE 9).[5]

Yet the Image is, additionally, a *process*, "that which presents an intellectual or emotional complex in an instant of time." Not the "complex" itself, in other words, but the language of presentation. In it is oft displayed an approximation—*on the poem's own terms, in "the resolution of difficulties to its own comprehensive organization"*[6]—of the qualities of the complex. The piece may, for instance, instance the "dart[ing]" of "objective"—into "subjective"—sight, as occurs in "Pagani's" or "In a Station of the Metro":

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
> Petals on a wet, black bough.

Or, in Eliot's case, the 'Image' may mirror the muddle of perception, one impression construed by two observers, the second of whom doubling as the thing observed:

> You had such a vision of the street
> As the street hardly understands;   (CPP 13)

This mimetic penchant on the part of the Image fundamentally derives from the authors' emphasis on clarity. Language ought, in Fenollosa/Pound's phrase, be "brought close to *things*" (CWC 13). "[I]n a healthy state," opines Eliot, "Language...presents the object, is so close to the object that the two are identified" (SE 285).

In these ideals inheres an assumption, that the Image accurately evoked will instill in the reader precisely what the poet intends. Several critics,

most brilliantly John T. Gage, expose the fallacies in this episteme.[7] Without weighting our Image-concept with a metaphysical albatross, we need yet note that bird of a feather with both Pound's "ideogrammic method," and Eliot's concept "objective correlative." Though these creations do not fly, they may be tellingly anatomized. What Gage terms *The Rhetoric of Imagism*—its trumpetings (sometimes, *Blast*ings)—*are also* rhetorical strategies, legitimate in themselves as means of creating impressions—hence, relating essentially to the *Cantos*, and to Eliot's oeuvre.

I would like to think that the subjects of this inquiry also sanction it. Pound never abandoned his Imagist credo, and his allegiance to Vorticism may be construed as his attempt to preserve those principles from dilutions of the "'Amygists,'" anthologized in the series published by Miss Lowell from 1915-1917. Pound had asked the impressaria to call her collection by another name, "Vers Libre or something of that sort. Obviously it will consist in great part of the work of people who have not taken the trouble to find out what I mean by 'Imagisme.' I should like to keep the term associated with a certain clarity and intensity." "I should like it to stand," he told Lowell in another letter, "for hard light, clear edges" (LEP 39, 38)

It would not do to call Eliot an Imagist, as no connection with Imagism, other than through Pound's well-documented influence (—and even Pound confessed that Eliot had "modernized himself on his own" [LEP 40]) may be drawn. The bracketed 'Imagist' is warranted, however, and, as I hope to show, considerably informs an appreciation of Eliot's work and development. Eliot sketches the relation, in a late address:

> As so often happens in the fields of science, when a new
> discovery is made, it has been preceded by a number of
> scattered investigators who have happened to be groping,
> each at first in ignorance of the efforts of the others, in the
> same direction. In retrospect, it is often impossible to
> attribute the discovery to the genius of one scientist alone.
> The point de repere usually and conveniently taken, as the
> starting point of modern poetry, is the group denominated
> 'imagists' in London about 1910. (TCC 58)

"I was not there," Eliot continues, though he might have qualified the reference to place as exclusive from time. Not "there" in London (whence he came within a year to scotch his "ignorance of the others," and theirs of him), but in a newer, or at least less ancient Cambridge,"groping" toward like discoveries with different material. "Imagism...is a theory about the use of material" (TCC 184). That on which the method is applied, is

immaterial save with respect to the longevity of the poet.   "[As] a movement [Imagism], on the whole, is chiefly important because of the stimulus it gave to later developments" (TCC 59).

And how should I presume?

Supposing their implicit authorization of this project means that Eliot and Pound mainly do so from out of a long tradition, named and masterfully limned by Sir Frank Kermode. *Romantic Imag[ism]*, so to speak, compasses the later years of an aesthetic born at the close of the eighteenth century, placing "high valuation...upon the image-making powers of the mind at the expense of its rational powers"; "animat[ing] much of the best writing between Coleridge and Blake at the outset and Pound and Eliot."[8] Hence, the latter partner in this project less with Fletcher and H.D. than with giants whom, in Eliot's words, "are that which we know" (SE 6). A parallel critical inheritance, drawn through Schwartz, Brooker, Kenner, Kermode et al., likewise emanating from Coleridge and his more immediate (though for us increasingly remote) heirs Pound and Eliot, this study would humbly continue.

Chapter 1 restates Modernism's fundamental paradox, that authors of recondite works esteem clarity above all. We shall examine Pound's Imagist method in theory and practice, focusing especially on interpretive metaphor; its structural correlate, super-position; and the Image as a process at once segregating objects it conjoins—i.e., "carving distinctions," depicting, precisely, "relations" "more real and more important than the things that they relate" (CWC 16).

"Imagist Method in the *Cantos*" (Chapter 2) further separates Pound's practice from the "stationary" (ABC 52), relatively mindless mode of Lowell, Fletcher, and their ilk: a mode often foregrounding trite matter, and obtruding between poem and reader a personality proportionately intriguing to the time of recitation.

Au Vieux Jardin

I have sat here happy in the gardens,
Watching the still pool and the reeds
And the dark clouds
Which the wind of the upper air
Tore like the green leafy boughs
Of the divers-hued trees of late summer;
But though I greatly delight
In these and the water lilies,
That which sets me nighest to weeping

> Is the rose and white colour of the smooth flag stones,
> And the pale yellow grasses
> Among them.[9]

Aldington (—we can at least identify the speaker *with* Aldington if not *as* him, considering the cult of self he promulgates) inserts bland curios as direct objects: first for former "happy"ness; then for what the French and archaisms reinforce, his *tristesse*. Images pass as irrelevantly as forgettably. Irony in aligning a brooding cluster with joy might stir in one a slight titillation (—"the faint susurrus Of his subjective Hosanna," in Pound's words for his *alter ego* Mauberley (P 200); a "petting and teasing of one's mental offspring" derided by Eliot in his Clark Lectures (VMP 85).) Only the precieux "pale yellow grasses" *would* intimate a mood *had the poet not already gushed* that he is "nighest to weeping": which statement obliterates all need for the reader to respond with any more than passive, and ephemeral, pity.

Pound's "Jewel Stairs' Grievance" (P 136), on the other hand, lodges emotion in its presentation:

> The jeweled steps are already quite white with dew,
> It is so late that the dew soaks my gauze stockings,
> And I let down the crystal curtain
> And watch the moon through the clear autumn.

To set aside, for the moment, reservations about producing in the reader the precise mood expressed[10], the *Image*—henceforth, I shall designate the poem with a capital "I," as distinct from the *images* comprising its components—prompts inference not merely about the situation. We are drawn more by the energies selecting and recasting objects into a bright ("jeweled," "white"), textured ("dew soak[ed]," "crystal") light. The process of the piece engages; its attitude offers but a ground, necessary but secondary, for engagement.[11]

Such studied application on, even to the point of eliciting, relations, availed Imagism to the long poem genre as a unifying means, while allowing the long poem wider spatial and temporal range. Reflexively, lengthy works extended Imagism's *efficacy of distinguishing* beyond problems of linguistic hygiene. Pound specifically adapted Imagist technique in order to elongate the *Cantos*, and "make new" old ideas therein featured. The super-positioning process undergirding his tiny works—a method, again, of discrimination between things closely related—impacts the opus magnus due to both the value this process espouses and to the important content it presents.

In remarking the potential reductiveness of reading Eliot as an Imagist, "Eliot as 'Imagist'" (Chapter 3) forwards fruitful criteria drawn from the Possum himself—who, characteristically, never broadcast, albeit oft intimating this facet of his overall project. His earlier works, I contend, display relevant affinities with Imagism by training Eliot for the later, more ambitious presentation of "an intellectual or emotional complex in an instant of time," "At the still point of the turning world" signified, and to some degree mimed, by *Four Quartets*. But first—for years his oeuvre over and again images a viewpoint (also, a fear) expressed in Eliot's doctoral thesis: that all presumably demarcated realms of experience are not definitively severable. By eliding boundaries between objects, and between subject and object, the poems up to and including *The Waste Land*, approximate "Immediate Experience," "'a positive non-distinguished non-relational whole.'" F.H. Bradley, about whom Eliot wrote his dissertation, equates "Immediate Experience" with Divinity; Eliot identifies It with "chaos and utter night" (KE 31). Hence, one compelling reason not to return to Harvard and defend. Undoubtedly attracted to Bradleyan Idealism, Eliot sought, to adopt the title of Brooker's classic work on him, *Mastery* in order to *Escape*.

As passionately as Pound champions severance, Eliot longs for unity; but the possible nature of that union haunted him. With his hard-won faith evolves a new poetic to manifest the promised oneness with God. Eliot's mature style, found by Pound repugnantly discursive, readjusts earlier fusing strategies toward genuinely miraculous ends.

In the final chapter, on "Metaphysics and Mechanics," I delineate *Quartets*' discursive style, repetitions, and constant re-centerings. The resultant patterns thus evoke, continually, *a sense of transcendence, followed by memory of (as distinct from presence in) the transcendent moment*. Ironically, the epistemological premise that a poet's exact feelings may be replicated in the reader, is most successfully effected by a poem most Imagists might not appreciate.

As my text progresses, opportunities for comparison increase. The most trenchant discoveries are recapitulated in the *Afterword*. Even readers who reject my postulates will, I hope, benefit by attendant deductions. Regarding lineation, we observe Eliot's work "refractory" to study of the single unit, whereas Pound's "yield[s] up its secrets to examination of the single line" (OPP 157). Along processual lines also, the contrast of *Eliotic resolution* to *Poundian interaction*; likewise, the mainly metaphoric penchant of Pound (with the exception of the *Pisan Cantos*), versus the metonymic tendency of Eliot, should contribute to critical debate. The ancillary observation closest to my Imagist argument

links, to some degree, George Dekker's approach to the *Cantos* with one of
Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley's tenets in *Reading "The Waste
Land."*[12] By dissociating writings from their context, Pound requires our
recourse to sources. Eliot, conversely, principally relies on relational
relevance—he "amalgamate"s his drafted fragments into a "new whole of
feeling" that constitutes an independently coherent poem (SE 247, 182).
Thus, our authors' differing concepts of *Tradition* are manifest in form as
well as content.

    If "indeed there will be time" for all things, there exist those rare
occasions that require question-begging—else, like Prufrock (and Tiresias
in his "prison" [*WL*, ll. 412ff])—we might never leave our rooms. Yet J.
Alfred hardly serves as an arbiter of such instances. Perhaps I can defer to
Keats (—to Keats or to his object? As in early Eliot, we cannot in the
"Ode" distinguish urn from speaker[13]): "that is all...ye need to know" about
the rationale for this study—about adopting the "language to think in" that
the discourse of Imagism supplies. The validity of this rationale becomes
the burden of what follows.

Notes

[1] Dasenbrock, *The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis:
Towards the Condition of Painting* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985) 93;
Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1971) 159.

[2] Herbert N. Schneidau, *Ezra Pound: The Image and the Real* (Baton Rouge:
Louisiana State UP, 1969) 64.

[3] Cf. Kenner, *The Pound Era*, 186, where he calls the *Cantos*, *Paterson*, and "the
work of T.S. Eliot...the Symbolist heritage in English." As my inclusion of Olson
and Zukofsky denotes, this "heritage" engendered Objectivism also.

[4] Comprehensively compiled in "A Retrospect," published in *Pavannes and
Divagations* (1918), and at the beginning of Pound's collected essays (LE 3-14)—
though the material therein garnered dates from 1911-1917, with the kernel
doctrine, "A Few Dont's," first appearing in *Poetry*, I, 6 (March 1913).

[5] *See also* ABC, 36, 70, 73-4, 83, 92, 97, 193; LE, 44, 70-2, 92-3, 154, 162,
197, 278, 377, 399-402, 412, 419-20, 238-9, 442; LEP, 49; "Vorticism," GB,
81-94; n.b. 83-6, 88, 90, 93.

[6] William Carlos Williams, remarking "the purpose of art."*Selected Essays of
William Carlos Williams* (New York: Random House, 1954) 120. Williams'
distinct Modernist Imagism is recounted in Chapter 4 of my doctoral dissertation,
"Modernist Image: Imagist Technique in the Work of Pound, Eliot, and Williams"
(Boston College, 1991); and also presented, in more condensed form, in Ethan
Lewis, "The Liberation of Words: Williams' Verbal Imagism," *South Dakota
Review*, 31:3 (Fall 1993): 18-42.

[7] Gage, *In the Arresting Eye: The Rhetoric of Imagism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana
State UP, 1981), draws on related work by Kenneth Burke (*Counter-Statement*

[Chicago, 1957]); Walter Sutton ("The Literary Image and the Reader" [*Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* XVI (Sep. 1957): 112-23; P.N. Furbank (*Reflections on the Word "Image"* [London, 1970]), and others. Similar critiques have been launched against the objective correlative by John Crowe Ransom (*The New Criticism* [New York, 1941]; and Eliseo Vivas ("The Objective Correlative of T.S. Eliot," *American Bookman* 1 (Winter 1944): 7-18; rpt. in Robert Wooster Stallman, ed., *Critiques and Essays in Criticism*, 1919-1948 [New York, 1949] 389-400). In one sense, relegated to a footnote (26) in Chapter 1, the episteme appears defensible, if art aims, as Pound says, to register "in what ways men differ" (LE 47). Yet as mentioned in this Foreword's next sentence, following that route would lead, in Eliot's later words, to "Distract[ion] from distraction by distraction" (CPP 120): to the deconstructive *mise en abysme*.

[8] Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957) 43-44.

[9] From the anthology predating Miss Lowell's, *Des Imagistes* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1914, p. 11), which actually includes Pound.

[10] Such doubt, implicit in Pound's explanatory Note to the poem, is remarked in Chapter One.

[11] "Au Vieux Jardin" likewise pales in contrast to "The Garden" (P 85), an early text notable for experimentation in super-position:

> Like a skein of loose silk blown against a wall
> She walks by the railing of a path in Kensington Gardens,
> And she is dying piece-meal
>   of a sort of emotional anaemia

-wherein Pound treats his subjects (the woman *and* himself) far more objectively than Aldington does his.

[12] Dekker, *Sailing After Knowledge: The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963); Brooker and Bentley, *Reading* The Waste Land: *Modernism and the Limits of Interpretation* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1990). *See* my discussion in Chapter 3, pp. xxx.

[13] For a summary of possibilities as to just who speaks the closing lines of Keats' Grecian Ode, *see* "Note" to *The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 1988) 576. Walter Jackson Bate, arguably the chief authority on Keats, credits all of "Beauty...know." to the expression of the Urn—which interestingly chimes with Pound's Imagist intention to encode emotion into thing. Yet Bate also states that "the general premise involved in the urn's message" and concurrent with the poet's "own personal thinking..., is that the 'greeting of the Spirit' is itself as much a part of nature, or reality, as its object." And *that* formulation rings consistent with Eliot's (via Bradley's) Idealist conception of the union of perceiver and perceived. (W.J. Bate, *John Keats* [Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1964] 517-18.

CHAPTER ONE

SUPER-POSITION:
INTERPRETIVE METAPHOR

> The poet…must prepare for new advances along the lines of true metaphor, that is interpretive metaphor, or image…
>
> The image is itself the speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language.
>
> —Ezra Pound

Modernist authors of recondite works tend paradoxically to place clarity among their highest values. "Poetry," Pound wrote Harriet Monroe, "must be *as well written as prose*. Its language must be a fine language, departing in no way from speech save by a heightened intensity (i.e. simplicity)" (LEP 48). And in the *ABC of Reading*, Pound describes "good writers" as "those who keep the language efficient. That is to say, keep it accurate, keep it clear….Language is the main means of communication" (ABC 32). The emphasis here and elsewhere in Pound is on the clarity and simplicity *of the language*, not necessarily of what the language expresses. And the importance Pound ascribes to "meaning" somewhat surprisingly reinforces this distinction. "Great literature is language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree"— "charged," it might be glossed, in inverse proportion to the "degree" to which the language may be explicated. For as has often been observed,[1] "meaning" for Pound and his contemporaries was by nature intuitive, communicated in words pared of discursive language ("rhetoric" is Pound's term) that only obstructs meaning. "Meaning" and "talk about the matter" (SE 29) are at odds, like the "intensive" and "extensive manifolds" of intuition and analysis in T.E. Hulme's adaptation of Bergson.

"We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*," T.S. Eliot acknowledged, adding that the poet must "force," even "dislocate if necessary, language into

meaning" (SE 248). But "dislocat[ed]" language is not itself complex. Severed from "civilization, as it exists at present," it is for that reason perspicacious. Eliot observed that the language of the Metaphysical Poets (whose own times were sufficiently complex to make them "difficult") is "as a rule simple and pure….The *structure* of the sentences, on the other hand, is sometimes far from simple, but this is not a vice; it is a fidelity to thought and feeling,….inducing variety of music" (SE 245).

Few words sound so simple and pure as these:

> Because I do not hope to turn again
> Because I do not hope
> Because I do not hope to turn
> Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
> I no longer strive to strive towards such things
> (Why should the agéd eagle stretch its wings?)
> Why should I mourn
> The vanished power of the usual reign?
> (CPP 60)

Without more context, the sense of the last line slightly perplexes. But the words themselves are very simple—regardless of whether one discerns the Shakespearean allusion—and the eagle metaphor is limpid.   The *structure* of the sentence, on the other hand—three Because-clauses overloading the beginning; parenthetical question changing the sentence's direction from apparent statement to apparent rhetorical question (note too that our wavering on the sincerity of the question comes less from the sardonic connotation of the words than from the cadence "induced by the fidelity to thought and feeling")—the *structure* of the sentence is far from simple. One can induce a similar effect by altering the pattern somewhat:

> Polyphiloprogenitive
> The sapient sutlers of the Lord
> Drift across the window-panes.   (CPP 33)

Tacking on the first word complicates the sentence-structure; but a simple inversion ("The polyphiloprogenitive sapient sutlers…") indicates that structure is not the problem. Here, language impedes coherence. The combination of variables is thus subject to change, but the Modern intention is invariable: clarity and opacity ought never to be mutually exclusive (though they must of course remain conceptually distinct). "Never, never, never a simple statement. It has no effect," Hulme declared[2]– probably too simply for Williams' tastes.

Clarity is the word. That is the power of it, as a whole—not the humanity, not the this, the that, but as a whole it stands outside and—is clear. A clean wind through the chaff of truth. Alive again: ….It comes of full and straight and plain statement (but not outside the words) (never) whose justice is in the meaning more than in the words. Life that flared in and fills them out like collapsed balloons. That all that is written has been lies.[3]

Williams might have protested were his formula construed as a cross of Eliot's methods shown above. Yet the comparison is apt.
Among the best examples of Modern clarity without forfeit of complexity, is this little statement: "The 'one image' poem is a form of super-position, that is to say, it is one idea set on top of another." Twenty-two simple words surround one abstract term (compound parts of which are simple in themselves) in a syntactically precise arrangement—reinforced (mirrored, really) by a similarly clear little poem:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
    Petals on a wet, black bough.   (GB 89)

No obscurity here—yet how does the poem work? What does the statement mean?
This chapter examines Pound's Imagist method, in theory (as articulated mainly in his essay "Vorticism"), and practice (in several poems published between 1912 and 1915). Regarding his Imagist years, Pound is his own best critic, for the principal devices in his method elucidate more obscure, somewhat mysterious remarks about the Image. *Interpretive metaphor* lends imagery within the Image an extra concreteness, the "hard light" and "clear edges" Pound required (L 38). *Super-position*, which integrates this metaphor into an Image-structure, makes manifest the Image as "speech" and as "word beyond formulated language" (GB 88). We shall see that the metaphor created through super-position presents two literal "things" ("ideas"), rather than one literal and one figurative thing; and that the Image for Pound is not these things presented, but the process of presenting them as they interact. In its activity and essentials (including not only the "ideas," but the very structure of the poem also), the Pound Image paradoxically segregates the objects that it joins. Thus it embodies Pound's version of the emphasis on clarity with which his *oeuvre*, and his Age, were imbued.

The Reality of Figure

Pound's most cohesive explication of the Image is the "Vorticism" essay,[4] and its crux is the passage cited above. The Image as "itself the speech" and "the word beyond formulated language" inheres in a special type of metaphor, wherein the figure has an added dimension of concreteness.

> All poetic language is the language of exploration. Since the beginning of bad writing, writers have used images as ornaments. The point of Imagism is that it does not use images *as ornaments*….I once saw a small child go to an electric light and say, "Mamma, can I *open* the light?" She was using the age-old language of exploration, the language of art. It was a sort of metaphor, but she was not using it as ornamentation. (GB 88)

Pound interprets "ornament" in its conventional sense, as "adornment," i.e. something that may lend grace and beauty to the object adorned but is accessory to that object. Hence, "the great gulf" he cites between Petrarch's "fustian" and Cavalcanti's "precise interpretative metaphor." "In Guido the 'figure,' the strong metamorphic or 'picturesque' expression is there with purpose to convey or to interpret a definite meaning. In Petrarch it is ornament, the prettiest ornament he could find, but not an irreplaceable ornament, or one that he couldn't have used just about as well somewhere else" (LE 153-54). From this, one could deduce that a figure which was not "ornamental" would prove essential to the presentation of its tenor. It would be as *actually perceivable* as the tenor; seemingly as *real* as that for which it was a figure; "*there* with purpose," "permanent," "absolute" in itself (GB 84, 85). To apply Hulme's expression, it could not be interpreted as a "counter" with which "to pass to conclusions without thinking."[5]

Thus, when the child in Pound's anecdote, perhaps instinctively "feeling back along the ancient lines of advance,"[6] asked if she could "open the light," she used the words *literally*. We can approach her understanding if we equate a 'closed light' (and its attendant darkness) with closed eyes; or if we picture "opening a light switch" by virtue of the flip-up motion used to open a bottle. In either case, her metaphor is essential in conveying her thought, which to be fully known requires that the figure be construed as a reality.

Consistent with his emphasis on the *real*ization of figures, Pound considered allegory among the lowest forms of expression (GB 84; "if a man use 'symbols' he must so use them that the symbolic function does not obtrude; so that[,] for instance, a hawk is a hawk" [LE 9]).

Nevertheless, one might read the child's experience—given the context in which Pound records it—as an allegory for writing "great literature," i.e. "language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree" (ABC 28; LE 23). The child submits a literal report of her thought. Ideally, the artist does the same, differing only in his awareness that he employs metaphor. Hence, "the language of exploration" plied precisely (i.e. not in search of "ornaments") is the language of Imagism.

This reality of figure is what Pound seeks in his incessant emphasis on presentative rather than descriptive language, on interpretation over depiction.   To interpret, of course, is not to describe but rather, reconstruct: to re-conceive with added perspective; or re-present in other terms. Reality of figure, further, elucidates Pound's demand for concrete imagery. For Pound, it is not enough that an Image's "ideas" be set one atop another *as if* each were perceptible; each must be presented *as* a perceptible, and thus *distinct* entity, for (as shall be shown) they are not to coalesce to form a unified impression.

To speak of figurative reality is another way of saying that the subjective is as real as its objective correlate. This notion could scarce be set apart enough from a concept Pound abhorred, namely that reality is *by nature* subjective. Pound's faith in intuition, in the existence of facts accessible to all via "accurate," "clear" reporting, denotes a world outside the self to which separate selves have access. Art is just that science which affirms that selves are separate. It provides the data for determining "that one man differs from another. That men differ among themselves as leaves from a tree differ. That they do not resemble each other as do buttons from a machine" (LE 42). Among the facts art registers is that men perceive reality in different ways; and the artist's task involves preserving these distinctions. "The serious artist is scientific in that he presents the image of his desire, of his hate, of his indifference...as precisely the image of his own desire, hate or indifference. The more precise his record, the more lasting and unassailable his work of art" (LE 46). Subjective impressions are realities to be objectively recorded. The Imagist poem—demanding "direct treatment of the thing whether *subjective* or objective"—is the register:

> In a poem of this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective. (GB 89)

The syntax, foregrounding "thing," makes it clear: the interpretive metaphor presents a *thing* as real in its "inward and subjective" state as a "thing outward and objective."

In the Image of "Metro"

At times, this reality can be tested, as in Pound's most famous Image:

In a Station of the Metro
The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.

The absence of a connective term creates, as Robert Kern notes, "a sense of fusion, or even confusion, between the ideas, which leads Pound to speak of the 'one image poem.'"[7] In other words, it is impossible to tell simply from reading the poem, that the second line is in fact a figure for the first. We must be provided an anecdote:

> Three years ago in Paris I got out of a "metro" train at La Concorde, and saw suddenly a beautiful face, and then another and another, and then a beautiful child's face, and then another beautiful woman, and I tried all that day to find words for what this had meant to me, . . . (GB 86-7)

Omit this, and one is at a loss as to whether "The apparition of these faces in the crowd" is being compared to a figure of "Petals on a wet, black bough," or if in fact the poem presents the converse. The title of the poem and the specifying adjective in the first line might sanction the correct reading. But titles can of course mislead (consider Pound's "Amities" or "Ancient Music" [P 102, 120]); and in any case, the poem as it appears in "Vorticism" has no title. "These," meanwhile, may be used in a figurative expression (cf. "These are your riches, your great store," in "Portrait D'Une Femme" [P 57]). Notice too that the order of the lines cannot resolve the uncertainty. Because the Image captures the "*precise instant* when a thing outward and objective…darts into a thing inward and subjective," it presents a moment in a process of energies—a process one might fancifully imagine to occur *between* the lines. Quite simply, to identify the line depicting "the outward and objective thing," we would need to know *what darts into what*. Without a context, this is unknowable.

Circumstantial factors indeed favor a misreading. The tenor of a metaphor tends to be construed as more substantial than its vehicle, in that the tenor signifies an actuality and the vehicle does not. (That Pound would refute this very principle would not affect as yet *untutored* reading.) Since a colon may weight emphasis on the second of the statements it divides, this tipping of the scales might encourage one to take the first line as a figure for "Petals" actually perceived. Reference to the "*apparition* of

these faces in the crowd" might also cast doubt on the reality of the image in line one (again circumstantially, for the line may depict a real apparition). So, too, might familiarity with the Japanese *hokku*—the form this poem adopts—in which the tenor can follow the vehicle (*vide* another adaptation, "Alba" [P 112]).

But in fact, 'The apparition of these faces in the crowd; by that I really mean petals on a wet black bough' would inaccurately gloss. "Metro"'s effect, even if we know the context, was alluded to by Kern. Gage comments similarly that

> The relation between the parts of Pound's poem appears to be an ambiguous relation between the figure and the ground, so that one may choose to consider the faces in terms of the petals, or vice versa. Although it is evidently a poem about "faces," the use of the colon, in place of the words "are like," is what makes the ambiguity possible and gives the poem a richness it would not have if it were a simile.[8]

We have come to the matter's core, to "the radiant gist" in Pound's lexicon. The poem may be about "faces," but it is not an Image of them, conveyed *via* metaphor. The ambiguity fostered by the colon forces us to experience each image as an actuality, as a potential tenor for which the apposite term is the vehicle. The Image is of the "faces" *and* the "petals" jointly. It is, really, neither one construed "in terms of" the other, nor the "fusion" of the two into a unified whole. Thus, though Kern and Gage point us in the right direction, it is, I think, preferable to label this effect *a simultaneity of terms*—keeping in mind the relative imprecision of this phrase inasmuch as presentation in language permits at best an illusion of simultaneity.[9]   Yet remembering Pound's allusion to the Image as "*that which presents* …" so as to "record the precise instant…," we must further qualify our definition. An Image—I have, and shall henceforth designate the poem by a capital "I," as distinguished from its components—is evidently *of* its images only when it posits an interaction between them. Pound fastidiously indexes "complex" to its "technical" meaning "employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart" (LE 4). His usage, therefore, as Schneidau points out, denotes a "system of 'emotionally toned' ideas."[10] The Image is then *of* a system or process of images. "It does not appease itself by reproducing what is seen, but by setting some other seen thing in relation."[11] Scanning the lines, the mind appears to mime this interaction: "darting" from the line just read to the subsequent line, back to the initial line, to the second line again in the attempt to fathom their relation. In "Vorticism," Pound has this to say: "The 'one

image poem' is a form of super-position,…it is one idea set on top of another" (GB 89).

Before proceeding to connect this statement with its corollary, I must comment on the other printings of "Metro," and their negligible effect on the interpretation here proposed. In *Personae* and *Selected Poems* (London, 1948), the colon is replaced by a semi-colon. It is improbable, however, that this change would influence one's reading. Like a colon, the semi-colon isolates two statements. And though, in contrast to a colon, what usually *precedes* the semi-colon is of more import than what follows, both forms of punctuation *make the reader focus most on the second statement*. Americans employ a colon to emphasize a fact: (e.g., that) the punctuation underscores what follows. We use a semi-colon to emphasize the details surrounding the fact; (at this juncture one might include such a detail as) "the British, however, conventionally read these markings to signify the converse of American grammar's dictates." In other words, though a semi-colon and a colon function differently, *they affect the reader similarly*. That Pound changed the punctuation might further attest to the intensity with which he felt both subjective and objective realities. For a semi-colon would (in England) suggest the objectivity of the second idea; a colon, the actuality of the first, preceding a figurative illustration. By altering the cipher (or *cypher*, depending on the lexicon) Pound allows us (on either side of the Atlantic) to think that he is not sure, or that he has second thoughts as to which thing he really did see with his "outward eye."

The other revision—the shift to conventional spacing—has more of an impact. Pound originally printed "Metro" accordingly:

The apparition   of these faces   in the crowd:
Petals   on a wet, black bough.   (P 251)

This arrangement of "two lines, five phases of perception" does not fundamentally alter the central interaction of the two "ideas," each circumscribed within one line. Nevertheless, it complicates, even obscures, that interaction by foregrounding relations within the lines. According to Kenner, the decision to normalize the typeset was not Pound's. Yet I think it revealing that Pound never insisted "Metro" be *re*-set in its original form; nor himself re-set the type when (presumably) he had the galleys of *Personae* and *Gaudier-Brzeska* before him. He may well have felt the conventional typing more suited to his primary purpose.

The original version, also, is comparatively static. If, as Kenner suggests, Pound needed to wean himself from "his flirtation with a poetic of stasis," it makes sense that he would have preferred "Metro" normally spaced.[12]