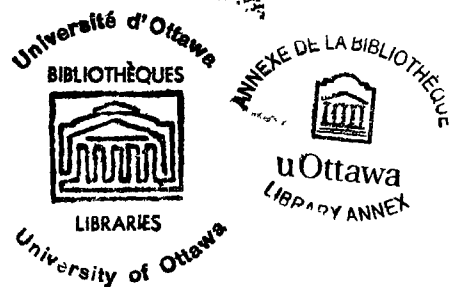


FRENCH SYMBOLIST INFLUENCE IN THE
EARLY POETRY OF EZRA POUND (1908 - 1920)

by

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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

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INTRODUCTION

When the poetry of Ezra Pound is discussed in terms of influences it is usually with a view to the influences on, rather than of, other poetry. From the much repeated story behind Eliot's inscription to "The Wasteland"--"For Ezra Pound--il miglior fabbro"--to the wave of recent studies¹ on the indebtedness to Pound of, for instance, the American "Black Mountain School" of poetry, Pound's work has been approached most often in terms of its effects upon contemporary verse techniques and aesthetics.²

An equally prolific and popular approach to Pound's work has been--and remains--the attempted analyses of and searches for "keys" to his work by examining the life, attitudes and behaviour of the poet. The biographical approach has been practised on Pound's poetry since the

¹Eva Hesse, ed., New Approaches to Ezra Pound (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969).

²Scholarly works of this kind include Donald Davie, Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor (New York, 1951); Donald Gallup, "T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound: Collaborators in Letters" The Atlantic, Vol. 225, No. 1 (January, 1970), pp. 48 - 62; W. M. Frohock, "The Revolt of Ezra Pound" Southwest Review, Vol. XLIV (Summer, 1959), pp. 190 - 199; Eva Hesse, ed., New Approaches to Ezra Pound (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969).

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early period in London.³

G. S. Fraser's study of Pound typifies this critical approach. For example, in a short analysis of the third section of "Near Perigord" Fraser concludes that "The moral question about Bertrans"--the persona of the poem--"is, of course, the moral question about Pound. Is it the muse he has loved, or opinion and self will?"⁴ Fraser's unwillingness to distinguish between Pound the man and Pound's characteristic use of a persona is indicative of the single most prevalent difficulty of the biographical critics of Pound's work.

Barring these two kinds of approach to the poetry of Ezra Pound, which provide by far the greatest number of books and articles on the poet and his work, we are left with a very small number of studies which attempt to analyse critically the evolving aesthetics and techniques of Pound's poetry. Foremost among the works of this kind is an early study--still untranslated--by the French scholar René Taupin, L'influence du symbolisme français sur la

³The biographical approach provides the major point of view for such relatively recent studies as: G. S. Fraser, Ezra Pound (London, 1966), William Van O'Conner, Ezra Pound, (Minneapolis, 1963), Michael Reck, Ezra Pound: A Close-up (London, 1968), Patricia Hutchins, Ezra Pound's Kensington (London, 1965), and Eustace Mullins, This Difficult Individual, Ezra Pound (New York, 1961).

⁴G. S. Fraser, Ezra Pound (London, 1966), p. 51.

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poésie américaine (de 1910 à 1920),⁵ published in 1929.

Taupin devotes the fourth chapter of this work to describing some of the influences of French Symbolist aesthetics and techniques upon Pound's poetry and provides concrete examples by comparisons with the poetry of Gautier, Corbière, Rimbaud and Laforgue, among others, to prove his contention that Pound's work is much more deeply influenced by Symbolist techniques and aesthetics than was previously acknowledged by contemporary critics.

Hugh Kenner, a critic familiar with Taupin's work, published in 1951 the first close textual study in English of Pound's poetry and prose. Kenner made his critical approach clear in his introduction to The Poetry of Ezra Pound:

Because it is about Pound's poetry, this book eschews both his personality and the externals of his biography, which largely depend on his personality. I have had to choose and I have chosen rather to reveal the work than to present the man.⁶

In 1955, J. J. Espey followed Kenner's example and, limiting himself to the close examination of one poem, analysed the sources and techniques of Pound's verse in

⁵René Taupin, L'influence du symbolisme français sur la poésie américaine (de 1910 à 1920) (Paris, 1929), pp. 133 - 159.

⁶Hugh Kenner, The Poetry of Ezra Pound (London, 1951), p. 13.

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Ezra Pound's Mauberly: A Study in Composition.⁷ It should be noted here that the revival of interest in Pound and his work during the 1950's was originally generated by the Bollingen Prize controversy following Pound's acceptance of that award for his Pisan Cantos in 1948 while incarcerated in St. Elizabeth's mental hospital.⁸ Despite the emphasis on biography and politics in the literary commentary of that period, some few scholars persisted in concentrating upon the poetry rather than the poet. In 1957 John Edwards and William Vasse collaborated to provide an extremely useful and much needed reference for the readers of The Cantos with their publication of Annotated Index to The Cantos of Ezra Pound,⁹ and in 1969, K. K. Ruthven elucidated many of the classical and more obscure references in Pound's early poetry in A Guide to Ezra Pound's Personae (1926).¹⁰ Openly expressing her debt to both Taupin and Kenner, Alice Amdur concentrated on tracing to their sources some of the lesser known historical references and influences in

⁷J. J. Espey, Ezra Pound's Mauberly: A Study in Composition (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1955).

⁸W. V. O'Conner and Edward Stone, eds. A Casebook on Ezra Pound (New York, 1959), provides a collection of essays and documents relating to Pound's mental state and legal position and to the Bollingen Prize controversy.

⁹J. Edwards and W. Vasse, Annotated Index to The Cantos of Ezra Pound (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1957).

¹⁰K. K. Ruthven, A Guide to Ezra Pound's Personae (1926) (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969).

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Pound's poetry in The Poetry of Ezra Pound published in 1966.¹¹

Although Ruthven and Amdur acknowledge the French Symbolist influence in Pound's early poetry, they do not examine it closely since they deem it beyond the scope of their topics. Similarly, Kenner's and Espey's studies treat more intensively the internal operations rather than the external sources of Pound's poetic techniques.¹²

Thomas Jackson's study of The Early Poetry of Ezra Pound delineates the influences of such poets as Browning, Swinburne and the Pre-Raphaelites--especially Dante Gabriel Rossetti--but also falls short of an analysis of the French Symbolist influence on his early poetry either indirectly through the English Transition poets or directly from the French Symbolist poets. In her study An Introduction to the Aesthetic Movement in English Literature¹³ Lorraine McMullen distinguishes between the Aesthetic, Decadent and Symbolist trends in fin de siècle English poetry and delineates the manner and matter of French Symbolist influences on the poets of these three schools. Here a

¹¹A. A. Amdur, The Poetry of Ezra Pound (New York, 1966).

¹²This with the exception of Kenner's careful analysis of Pound's use of the Chinese ideogrammatic method in chapters 10, 11 and 12 of The Poetry of Ezra Pound.

¹³Lorraine McMullen, An Introduction to the Aesthetic Movement in English Literature (Ottawa, 1971).

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distinction may begin to be made between the direct influences of French Symbolism in Pound's early poetry and the indirect influences of French Symbolism on his work through the interpretations of the English fin de siècle poets.

Although the present study will broach that distinction in the early poetry of Ezra Pound, it will concentrate primarily upon the direct French Symbolist influences in representative poems from the period 1908 to 1920. The poems selected are taken from the 1926 edition of Personae; The Collected Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound,¹⁴ which includes Personae 1908, 1909, 1910, Ripostes, 1912, Lustra 1913, "Poems from Blast (1914)," "Poems from Lustra, (1915)," and Hugh Selwyn Mauberly (1920).

In order to treat Pound's early poetry in light of the need indicated by the preceding brief review of Pound criticism, two major difficulties must first be overcome. The first involves the perennial problem of delineating the aesthetics and chronology of French Symbolism. A short history of the growth and development in France of the various schools of Symbolist poetry provides the general background from which later will be extrapolated

¹⁴ Ezra Pound, Personae; The Collected Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound (New York, 1926).

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particular Symbolist ideologies, methods and techniques.¹⁵ The following French poets and critics will come under examination throughout the thesis: René Taupin, Théophile Gautier, Remy de Gourmont, Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Tristan Corbière, Laurent Tailhade, Arthur Rimbaud, Jules Laforgue, Stéphane Mallarmé, Henri de Régnier and Francis Jammes.

A review of contemporary English scholarship on nineteenth century French Symbolist ideologies, methods and techniques may help to clarify the meanings of many concepts and phrases associated with the French schools of Symbolism. Of the critical interpretations to be reviewed in this light the works of Cleanth Brooks, Frank Kermode, William York Tindall and Edmund Wilson¹⁶ will provide some of the major focal points for the interpretative analyses of the Symbolist concepts to be discussed.

-
- ¹⁵Ideologies: the fundamental philosophical concepts underlying the aesthetics of Symbolism;
 methods: the particular realization of a fundamental Symbolist concept in a work of art;
 techniques: the specific literary devices used to realize fundamental Symbolist concepts.

¹⁶Cleanth Brooks, Modern Poetry and the Tradition (New York, 1965), Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (New York, 1957), W. Y. Tindall, The Literary Symbol (New York, 1955), Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle, (New York, 1931).

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These works have been selected from the large available Symbolist bibliography because they not only provide a wide cross-section of Symbolist concepts and techniques, but they also present a review of the major critical points of view on the French Symbolist movement.

The second major difficulty to be overcome before advancing to an analysis of the internal evidences of French Symbolist influences in Pound's poetry is the ordering of Pound's own comments and interpretations of the Symbolist aesthetics as they are to be found in his critical essays and letters. Here the previously mentioned adjunct problem of distinguishing between those influences that derive directly from the French Symbolist poets and those influences which appear through the intermediary influences of fin de siècle English poets will be broached.

The primary textual evidences of French Symbolist influences upon Pound's early poetry will be searched and examined in an analysis of his major early poem Hugh Selwyn Mauberly. In addition, since a thesis dealing with such a broad topic as influences cannot be supported by evidences found in one poem alone, several other shorter poems representative of the period 1908 - 1920 will be searched with a view to determining the nature and extent of the Symbolist influence upon the aesthetics and poetry of Pound's formative period.

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It may be noted here that the extent of Pound's work under study in this thesis is limited to the period most often called his "Imagist phase" when the poet spent most of his time in London with occasional visits to New York, Paris and Venice. It was during the period (1908 - 1920) that Pound met, influenced and was influenced by W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, Remy de Gourmont, T. E. Hulme, D. H. Lawrence, Gaudier-Brzeska, James Joyce, Robert Frost and those poets who, under his tutelage, became known as the Imagists.¹⁷ In 1920 Pound published Hugh Selwyn Mauberly as his "farewell to London," moved to Paris, and began to concentrate upon the writing and publication of his Cantos.

In the course of examining Pound's interpretations of French Symbolist aesthetics and in the analyses of his poetry for evidences of French Symbolist influences it will be necessary to elucidate the tenets of the poet's Imagist Credo¹⁸ and its associated literary techniques. Attempts to show the nature of the relationships between Symbolist and Imagist ideologies, methods and techniques will therefore

¹⁷Major Imagist poets include: F. S. Flint, Hilda Doolittle ("H.D."), Richard Aldington, William Carlos Williams, Amy Lowell, John Gould Fletcher, Carl Sandburg, Marianne Moore, and Wallace Stevens.

¹⁸Ezra Pound, Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York, 1954), p. 9.

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be made throughout the course of the body of this thesis. The extent of these similarities and distinctions, of course, will be limited to and determined by the works examined in the early period of Pound's canon. At the same time, they may be taken as general indications of the nature and extent of the influence of French Symbolist aesthetics upon the Imagist movement for the time that it was governed by the literary dictates of Ezra Pound.

CHAPTER ONE

DEVELOPMENT AND CRITICAL HISTORY OF SYMBOLISM

This chapter attempts to accomplish three ends. First, it provides a general review of the background and development of the various schools of French Symbolism; second, it provides an assessment of contemporary English scholarship on nineteenth century French Symbolist aesthetics; third, in conclusion, it will attempt to provide functional explanations of the major Symbolist and Imagist concepts that will be referred to throughout this thesis.

Chapter Two will examine Pound's approach to the Symbolist aesthetic, and will attempt to make a distinction between direct and indirect Symbolist influences in his early work.

Background and Development of French Symbolism

Two major precursors of French Symbolism were Gérard de Nerval and Edgar Allen Poe. Both were influenced by the Gothic style prose poems of the late French Romantic poets. In the 1830's Maurice de Guérin's "La Centaure" and "Le Bacchante," and Aloysius Bertrand's Gaspard de la Nuit, had mingled subjective fantasies with medieval settings in a way that attempted to present an order of reality beyond

the sensible world. A stanza from Bertrand's prose poem

"Le Maçon" exemplifies this characteristic:

Le maçon Abraham Knupfer chante, la truelle à la main
dans les airs échafaudé, si haut que, lisant les vers
gothiques du bourdon, il nivelle de ses pieds et
l'église aux trente arc-boutants, et la ville aux
trente églises.¹⁹

These early attempts to capture a supra-sensible order of reality influenced Nerval in his attempts to create a dream world in his sonnets Les Chimères, which in turn foreshadowed the cosmology presented in Baudelaire's "Correspondances" that was to have such a profound effect on the later Symbolist poets. Nerval had also read Swedenborg, and, with added allusions from his own experiences in mental asylums, he attempted to project a unique order of reality in which matter had a spirit of its own and was mysteriously connected with language. His sonnet "Vers dorés" indicates this connection and provides interesting similarities to Baudelaire's "Correspondances:"

Vers dorés

Homme, libre penseur! te crois-tu seul pensant
Dans ce monde où la vie éclate en toute chose?
Des forces que tu tiens ta liberté dispose,
Mais de tous tes conseils l'univers est absent.

Respecte dans la bête un esprit agissant;
Chaque fleur est une âme à la Nature éclosé;
Un mystère d'amour dans le métal repose;
"Tout est sensible!" Et tout sur ton être est puissant.

¹⁹Aloysius Bertrand, "Le Maçon" from Gaspard de la nuit, The Penguin Book of French Verse, 3, ed. Anthony Hartley (Harmondsworth, 1957), p. 89.

Crains, dans le mur aveugle, un regard qui t'épie:
 A la matière même un verbe est attaché . . .
 Ne la fais pas servir à quelque usage impie!

Souvent dans l'être obscur habite un Dieu caché;
 Et comme un oeil naissant couvert par ses paupières,
 Un pur esprit s'accroît sous l'écorce des pierres!²⁰

Like Nerval, Poe entered the French poetic consciousness of the last half of the nineteenth century through Baudelaire. In 1852 Baudelaire published his translation of Poe's tales. The translations influenced French poets in three major ways: they stressed indefiniteness as an element in "the true music of poetry"; they emphasized the existence of the Swedenborgian imaginary world,²¹ and they sought entry into that world through synaesthesia and hallucination.²²

In the 1850's French poets were reacting to the decline of Romanticism in two general ways. They either extended the influence of Poe, Nerval and Swedenborg to a level where poetic vision became highly mystical or they grouped themselves together in an effort to remove the subjective excesses and fanciful imagery of the earlier Romantic poets from French verse.

²⁰Gérard de Nerval, "Vers dorés," The Penguin Book of French Verse, 3, pp. 107 - 108.

²¹Swedenborg taught that there was an exact parallelism between the earthly and heavenly worlds--a doctrine not unlike the neo-Platonism of the sixteenth century.

²²Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (New York, 1931), pp. 12 - 13. Both Coleridge and de Quincy influenced Poe.

In 1854, Les Félibres, a group dedicated to this latter end, organized themselves along the lines of the medieval French troubadours and attempted to revive the Provençal poetic conventions. Their leader, Frédéric Mistral, achieved moderate and short-lived success with his poems--"Le Poème de Rhône," "Calendal" and "Mireille"--by combining southern French legends and the fixed forms of Provençal poetry.

The largest group of poets to react to the excesses of the Romantic period were the Parnassians. Between 1866 and 1876 they published three anthologies of poetry under the general title of Le Parnasse contemporain. Among the contributors were José-Maria de Heredia, Stéphane Mallarmé, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Leconte de Lisle, Sully-Prudhomme, Paul Verlaine, François Coppée and Catulle Mendès. Their ideals were orderliness, exactness of form, and objectivity. Guided by a materialistic philosophy, they attempted to present descriptively the phenomena of the external world and to suppress undue personal emotion. Théophile Gautier's Emaux et Camées (1852) provided the poetic manifesto of Parnassianism:

L'Art

Oui, l'oeuvre sort plus belle
D'une forme au travail
Rebelle,
Vers, marbre, onyx, émail.

Point de contraintes fausses!
 Mais que pour marcher droit
 Tu chausses,
 Muse, un cothurne étroit.

Fi du rythme commode,
 Comme un soulier trop grand,
 Du mode
 Que tout pied quitte et prend!

Statuaire, repousse
 L'argile que pétrit
 Le pouce
 Quand flotte ailleurs l'esprit;

Lutte avec le carrare,
 Avec le paros dur
 Et rare,
 Gardiens du contour pur;

Emprunte à Syracuse
 Son bronze où fermement
 S'accuse
 Le trait fier et charmant;

D'une main délicate
 Poursuis dans un filon
 D'agate
 Le profil d'Apollon.

Peintre, Fuis l'aquarelle,
 Et fixe la couleur
 Trop Frêle
 Au four de l'émailleur;

Fais les sirènes bleues,
 Tordant de cent façons
 Leurs queues,
 Les monstres des blasons;

Dans son nimbe trilobe
 La Vierge et son Jésus,
 Le globe
 Avec la crois dessus.

Tout passe.--L'art robuste
 Seul a l'éternité:
 Le buste
 Survit à la cité.

Et la médaille austère
 Que trouve un laboureur
 Sous terre
 Révèle un empereur.

Les dieux eux-mêmes meurent.
 Mais les vers souverains
 Demeurent
 Plus forts que les airains.

Sculpte, lime, cisèle;
 Que ton rêve flottant
 Se scelle
 Dans le bloc résistant!²³

Here Gautier urges poets to avoid the easy rhythms and forge hard, clear lines in their poetry; to create in forms that are as firm as marble, onyx and enamel. He demands poetry that eschews false restraints and clichés of both rhythm and vocabulary and ends with the apparently paradoxical image of the poet's floating dream sealed in the hard block of the poem's form. The emphasis in "L'Art" is on form rather than imagination, and it was this emphasis on aestheticism that most sets the Parnassians apart from their Romantic predecessors and the later Symbolists in both France and England.²⁴

But there were those among the Parnassians who could not content themselves with Gautier's objective/realistic approach and who, in their development along more

²³Théophile Gautier, "L'Art," The Penguin Book of French Verse, 3, pp. 137 - 139.

²⁴See Frank M. Tierney, "The Revival of the Rondeau in the Years Following 1860, and the Leadership of Sir Edmond Gosse in This Revival" (diss. University of Ottawa, 1969), p. 75.

spiritual lines, became the inspiration in 1866 for a new kind of poetry which has since been called "Symbolism." The two former Parnassians responsible were Verlaine and Mallarmé--both of whom were by that time admirers of Charles Baudelaire.

Baudelaire's Les Fleurs de mal was published in 1857. In these poems he struck the note that was to echo through Symbolism--and Imagism--a note of modernism well illustrated in his poem "Correspondances:"

Correspondances

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
--Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.²⁵

Baudelaire's influence on Symbolism was pervasive and is well documented by such critics as Anna Balakian,

²⁵Charles Baudelaire, "Correspondances," The Penguin Book of French Verse, 3, p. 155.

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C. M. Bowra and Kenneth Cornell.²⁶ It was, however, his emphasis upon the intellectual and sensual elements of poetry that most strongly affected Verlaine and Mallarmé. Balakian summarized Baudelaire's contribution to the Symbolist movement in general--and in particular to the poetry of Verlaine and Mallarmé--when she stated:

Baudelaire makes poetry an intellectual rather than an emotional activity, and in this light the poet assumes the character of a sage or seer, rather than of a bard. With his superior network of senses and perceptions, he is bent on deciphering, rather than conveying or communicating, the enigma of life.²⁷

It was essentially this poetic stance that Verlaine and Mallarmé later adopted and extended in their own fashion. Baudelaire's use of synaesthesia; the relationship between poetry and music; the imagery of decadence, and indirect discourse also provided powerful influences on both younger poets.

Verlaine's "Art poétique," composed in 1874 and published in 1882, extended Baudelaire's aesthetic and became another of the manifestos for Symbolist poets on both sides of the English Channel.²⁸

²⁶Anna Balakian, The Symbolist Movement: a critical appraisal (New York, 1967); C. M. Bowra, The Heritage of Symbolism (London, 1943); Kenneth Cornell, The Symbolist Movement (New Haven, 1958).

²⁷Balakian, The Symbolist Movement, p. 47.

²⁸Ibid., p. 70.

Art poétique

De la musique avant toute chose,
Et pour cela préfère l'Impair
Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air,
Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose.

Il faut aussi que tu n'aïlles point
Choisir tes mots sans quelque méprise:
Rien de plus cher que la chanson grise
Où l'Indécis au Précis se joint.

C'est des beaux yeux derrière des voiles,
C'est le grand jour tremblant de midi,
C'est, par un ciel d'automne attiédi,
Le bleu fouillis des claires étoiles!

Car nous voulons la Nuance encor,
Pas la Couleur, rien que la nuance!
Oh! La nuance seule fiancée
Le rêve au rêve et la flûte au cor!

Fuis de plus loin la Pointe assassine,
L'Esprit cruel et le Rire impur,
Qui font pleurer les yeux de l'Azur,
Et tout cet ail de basse cuisine!

Prends l'éloquence et tords-lui son cou!
Tu feras bien, en train d'énergie,
De rendre un peu la Rime assagie.
Si l'on n'y veille, elle ira jusqu'où?

O qui dira les torts de la Rime?
Quel enfant sourd ou quel nègre fou
Nous a forgé ce bijou d'un sou
Qui sonne creux et faux sous la lime?

De la musique encore et toujours!
Que ton vers soit la chose envolée
Qu'on sent qui fuit d'une âme en allée
Vers d'autres cieux à d'autres amours.

Que ton vers soit la bonne aventure
Éparse au vent crispé du matin
Qui va fleurant la menthe et le thym . . .
Et tout le reste est littérature.²⁹

²⁹Paul Verlaine, "Art poétique," The Penguin Book of French Verse, 3, pp. 224 - 226.

Anti-Parnassian in spirit, the poem eschews the fixed forms, rhetoric, and rhythmic devices of earlier poets and insists upon both musicality and chiaroscuro. Fluidity of form is achieved by inclusion of Verlaine's technique of l'impair--uneven lines of seven, nine or eleven syllables, rather than the conventional eight, ten or twelve syllable lines. Verlaine's lack of respect for conventional scansion, syntax, and imagery and his insistence upon the musical elements of language brought French poetry a freedom that led to the vers libre of later Symbolist poets such as Laforgue and Régnier.

Verlaine's recommended joining of the "undecided" with the "precise" and his preference for nuance and shading over bright (delimiting and separating) primary colours reflects the Baudelairean influence and foreshadows one of the major controversial distinctions between the aesthetics of Symbolism and Imagism.³⁰

Mallarmé's "Toute l'âme résumée . . ." reiterates Verlaine's preference for nuance and provides one of the most popular objective correlatives for the Symbolist aesthetic in the relationship between the cigar, its ash, fire and smoke. This poem approximates Pound's later

³⁰The problem of the Symbolist distinction between the abstract and the precise, and the Imagist insistence upon concreteness and the avoidance of abstractions is examined in Chapter Two, pp. 38 - 44.

Imagist method of presenting a single image which provides an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.

Toute l'âme résumée . . .

Toute l'âme résumée
Quand lente nous l'expirons
Dans plusieurs ronds de fumée
Abolis en autres ronds

Atteste quelque cigare
Brûlant savamment pour peu
Que la cendre se sépare
De son clair baiser de feu

Ainsi le choeur des romances
A la lèvre vole-t-il
Exclus-en si tu commences
Le réel parce que vil

Le sens trop précis rature
Ta vague littérature.³¹

Mallarmé's best known work, "L'Après-midi d'un faune," is often commented upon as a "poets' poem" because of the technical virtuosity exhibited in combining musicality with the endless series of images, allusions and suggestions presented by means of the internal rhymes, onomatopoeia and assonances. The use of these devices reveals several layers of "sound sense" within the ostensible framework of rhyming couplets of uneven line lengths. Here Mallarmé in part achieved the "absolute rhythm" that Pound later called for in his Imagist "Credo" of March, 1913, and

³¹Stéphane Mallarmé, "Toute l'âme résumée . . .," The Penguin Book of French Verse, 3, p. 203.

which he defined as "a rhythm which corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed."³²

"L'Après-midi d'un faune" also stands as an excellent example of the late nineteenth century Symbolist tendency to literally blend the arts. Illustrations for the poem were drawn by Manet and Debussy set the poem to music.³³ Mallarmé virtually created a new language of poetry, and together with Verlaine's concepts of l'impair and vers libéré (traditional metres loosely handled), made possible a poetic language in which words acquired new meanings; phrases and sentences, new shapes; and rhythms, new interpretations. In some of his later works, such as "Un coup de des jamais n'abolira le hasard," Mallarmé departed even further from conventional poetic language and attempted to express concepts by special printing devices that foreshadowed the techniques now being used by the Concretist poets.

As much as Verlaine and Mallarmé contributed to the techniques and methods of Symbolism of the 1870's and 1880's, Arthur Rimbaud provided the personal experimental flourishes that later led him to be considered as the

³²Ezra Pound, Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York, 1954), p. 9.

³³When informed of Debussy's desire to set the poem to music, Mallarmé exclaimed, "But I've already done that!"

exemplar of Baudelairean sensuality. He agreed with Baudelaire's idea of the poet as visionary/seer, but went further than Baudelaire ever did with hashish in a thorough-going and deliberate attempt to consciously disturb his senses. In insisting upon the actual physical disruption of his senses, Rimbaud made every human activity a fair topic for poetry, and considerably broadened the subject area of Symbolist poetry. Despite this contribution and the prose poems of Les Illuminations, it is difficult to allot him a place of equal importance in the movement with Verlaine and Mallarmé. Anna Balakian emphasizes this point in her chapter "Verlaine, not Rimbaud" in The Symbolist Movement:

What Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Mallarmé have in common is the fact that they produced their major works at about the same time, in the early 1870's, although Mallarmé's principal poems had already been worked out in the latter part of the 1860's. The character of the works of these three poets remains quite different; if it is true that Verlaine and Mallarmé are directly related to the Symbolist school, each in his distinctive fashion, Rimbaud's name belongs in the Symbolist ranks by personal association only. One might say that he is a member of the Symbolist family as an "in-law," through his personal relationships with Verlaine.³⁴

In 1886 the word "symbolism" was first used as a rallying point for poets of the new order, and the leader of the organization--as well as the inventor of the name--was

³⁴Balakian, The Symbolist Movement, p. 56.

Jean Moréas. In close association with him were Paul Adam and Gustave Kahn--the latter a pioneer of vers libre.

The avowed purpose of Moréas' Symbolists was to combat the realistic materialism of the typical Parnassians and to free French poetry from the tyranny of conventional form. They did not repudiate the objective method of presentation, but they tried to give their images of externality a spiritual, symbolic value. They opposed description for its own sake and replaced literal directness with suggestive indirectness rooted in an objective method of presentation. They favoured individuality, but not the excessively emotional subjectivity of the earlier Romantics. As Moréas stated in his Symbolist manifesto of 1886:

Enemy of explanation, of declamation, of false sensibility, of objective description, symbolist poetry tries to clothe the Idea in a palpable form which, nevertheless, is not an end in itself, but which, while serving to express the Idea, remains subject to it. The Idea in its turn does not let itself be seen without sumptuous trains of exterior analogies; for the essential character of symbolic art consists in never going to the conception of the Idea in itself. Thus in the art, pictures of nature, actions of men, concrete phenomena are not there for their own sake, but as simple appearances destined to represent their esoteric affinities with primordial Ideas.³⁵

From 1886 to 1900 Symbolism was the dominant force in French poetry, and practically every poet of ability who wrote during those years came under the

³⁵Jean Moréas, "Manifesto," in F. R. Karl and Marvin Magalaner, A Reader's Guide to Great Twentieth Century English Novels (New York, 1959), p. 18.

influence of its ideals. Parallel movements in France such as Decadence overlapped with and were submerged by Symbolism. So general was the Symbolist doctrine and so varied were the characteristics of its adherents that the significance of the term became extremely vague, and a restatement of principles became inevitable.

It was in the 1880's--and still is--impossible to unite all the Symbolists under one credo. The gulf was particularly wide between the experimentalists--Corbière, Laforgue and Rimbaud--and the classicists, like Moréas, who favoured in the early 1890's a return to the objective methods of presentation that the Parnassians had previously championed.

But despite the aesthetic distance between experimentalists like Rimbaud and classicists like Moréas, both extremes (and those between) could usually find some common ground in the works of Baudelaire, Verlaine or Mallarmé.

The first official announcement of a regrouping came in 1891 when the classicists issued a manifesto. Their spokesman was again Jean Moréas. Those who aligned with him were Raymond de la Tailhède, Charles Maurras, Maurice de Plessys and Ernest Raynaud. They called themselves the "Ecole Romane" and dedicated their efforts to the recovery of the discipline, formality and restraint of Greek and

Roman masters as interpreted by the eighteenth century French poets. So effective was their approach that many other Symbolists reacted to it and modified their style. Henri de Régnier, Laurent Tailhade and Paul Claudel were three important poets who turned to the neo-classical "Ecole Romane" and rejected the freer poetic approaches of Rimbaud, Kahn, Laforgue and Corbière.

The radicals went their own way after 1890 evolving one "ism" after another, tending always toward greater freedom of form and novelty of content. There were the "cubists"--Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Jacob, André Salmon--the "fantasists"--Tristan Dérème, Franc Nohain, Vincent Muselli, Francis Carco--the "unanimists"--Jules Romains, George Duhamel, Charles Vidrac--the "dadaists"--Tristan Tzara, Jean Cocteau, André Breton, Louis Aragon, François Soupault--and, in the 1920's, the "sur-realists."

In their own way each of these groups may be considered forerunners of the English and American Imagists. Through them, and the earlier major French Symbolists, English and American poets were alerted to every conceivable poetic ideal--old and new--and the Imagists were the first to take advantage of their influence in the twentieth century. Spurred on by Pound's enthusiastic admiration for French Symbolist poetry, many of the Imagist poets based their own work on the successes of the French experiments

and interpreted for English and American readers much of the spirit and many of the techniques underlying those successes.

The second part of this chapter will attempt to provide explanations of Symbolist concepts that influenced Pound and the Imagists by means of an analytical review of contemporary English critical works on the French Symbolist movement. The chapter will conclude with an assessment of French Symbolism and an attempt to relate the central concepts of French Symbolism and Poundian Imagism.

Contemporary Critics and Symbolism

In 1931 Edmund Wilson remarked in the introductory chapter of Axel's Castle that "in spite of the English 'aesthetics' and 'decadents,' who for the most part imitated the French without very much originality, the battle of symbolism has never been properly fought out in English."³⁶

In the remaining seven chapters he discusses the artistic heritage and techniques of Proust, Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, Valery, Stein and Rimbaud in terms of their indebtedness to French Symbolism. In so doing, Wilson distinguishes between what he calls the "serious-aesthetic" branch of Symbolism typified by Verlaine and Mallarmé, and the

³⁶Wilson, Axel's Castle, p. 23.

"conversational-ironic" branch typified by Laforgue and Corbière. For Wilson, the "serious-aesthetic" branch sustains a certain grandeur of tone, is classically oriented, and varies imagery rather than feeling. The "conversational-ironic" branch, he maintains, is characterized by a new variety of vocabulary, a new flexibility of feeling, and a modernistic ironic tone.³⁷

Wilson notes that the primary aims of French Symbolism were to "intimate things rather than state them plainly . . . to approximate the indefiniteness of music . . . and to make poetry even more a matter of the sensations and emotions of the individual than had been the case with Romanticism." He then goes on to formulate his doctrine of Symbolism:

Every feeling or sensation we have, every moment of consciousness, is different from every other; and it is, in consequence, impossible to render our sensations as we actually experience them through the conventional and universal language of ordinary literature. Each poet has his unique personality; each of his moments has its special tone, its special combination of elements. And it is the poet's task to find, to invent, the special language which will alone be capable of expressing his personality and feelings. Such a language must make use of symbols: what is so special, so fleeting and so vague cannot be conveyed by direct statement or description, but only by a succession of words, of images, which will serve to suggest it to the reader. The Symbolists themselves, full of the idea of producing with poetry effects like those of music, tended to think of these images as possessing an abstract value like musical notes and chords. But the

³⁷Ibid., p. 96.

words of our speech are not musical notation, and what the symbols of Symbolism really were, were metaphors detached from their subjects--for one cannot, beyond a certain point, in poetry, merely enjoy color and sound for their own sake: one has to guess what the images are being applied to. And Symbolism may be defined as an attempt by carefully studied means--a complicated association of ideas represented by medley of metaphors--to communicate unique personal feelings.³⁸

Eight years later, in Modern Poetry and the Tradition, Cleanth Brooks modified Wilson's definition in what he claimed were "far less prejudicial" terms:

(Wilson's) phraseology implies that the symbolist poet is deliberately trying to exclude the mass of people from participation in his poetry--the view which Max Eastman plumps for in his account of the symbolist poets as members of a "Cult of Unintelligibility." But a more accurate statement would be this: The Symbolist poet refuses to sacrifice the subtlety and complexity of his total vision of reality. Such a poetry will undoubtedly result in a limitation of the audience, but the limitation will be an unfortunate necessity conditioned by the nature of the poetry, not the effect of the poet's personal snobbery.³⁹

Brooks concludes that all poetry is to some extent Symbolist poetry, "for all poetry characteristically seeks its symbols--its 'objective correlatives'--for the experience to be communicated."⁴⁰

In his introduction to The Heritage of Symbolism (1943), C. M. Bowra only slightly modifies Wilson's

³⁸Ibid., pp. 21 - 22.

³⁹Brooks, Modern Poetry and the Tradition, p. 59.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 60.

definition when he proposes that the Symbolist tradition is apparent in all those poets who "attempted to convey a supernatural experience in the language of visible things, and therefore almost every word is a symbol and is used not for its common purpose but for the association which it evokes of a reality beyond the senses."⁴¹

In The Literary Symbol (1955), W. Y. Tindall attempts to define the symbol in terms of its component parts by breaking it down into "image" and "context." He first proposes that "no constituent image is without context, and every image owes context part of what it bears." He then argues that "by reciprocal limitation and expansion, image and context, two interacting components of what they create, carry feelings and thoughts at once definite and indefinite." He concludes: "This composite of image and context constitutes the symbol."⁴²

In a later chapter, entitled "The Stuffed Owl,"⁴³ Tindall asserts his definition of the image and begins with the premise that "Among symbolic parts the image is principal." He seeks his authority in the earlier definitions of T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats.

⁴¹Bowra, The Heritage of Symbolism, p. 5.

⁴²Tindall, The Literary Symbol, pp. 9 - 10.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 102 - 144

From T. E. Hulme's "Notes on Language and Style," Tindall takes the definition of image as an analogy, offered to the senses, expressing vision. From Pound's Gaudier-Brzeska he recalls the definition of image as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." Tindall finds Eliot's definition of the objective correlative⁴⁴ "amounts to a definition of image; is a verbal formula outside poet and reader for presenting something inside them but to neither alike."⁴⁵ Tindall is perplexed by Yeats' two apparently contradictory statements "I have no speech but symbol," and "I have but images, analogies," and resolves "Since in his essay on Swedenborg he identifies correspondences with symbols, and correspondences are analogies, he appears to identify image and symbol."⁴⁶

Tindall concludes this analysis with his composite definition of the image:

⁴⁴T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet" (1919) cited in The Modern Tradition, Richard Ellman and Charles Feidelson, eds. (New York, 1965), p. 134. "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion, such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."

⁴⁵Tindall, The Literary Symbol, p. 104.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 104.

Applauding the insights of Hulme, Eliot, and Yeats, and the example of Pound, we are now in a position to reconsider the image. My approach to definition, though based upon example, welcomes authority. The image, like the symbol of which it is a principal kind, appears to be a verbal embodiment of thought and feeling. An analogy ranging in scale from the relative assignment of metaphor to the unassigned, the image presents what it carries. The word image may refer to the symbolic whole or to an element depending for part of its burden upon context--like that stuffed owl on Mr. Bloom's mantelpiece. It is to image in its capacity of functioning part, however, that I shall confine myself in this chapter; for my image, less than the whole, is a constituent symbol.⁴⁷

Tindall's definition is the first of those quoted that attempts to define image and symbol in terms of their inter-relationships and it marks an important change of point of view in the difficult question of defining and distinguishing the functions of image and symbol.

Two years later, in 1957, Frank Kermode in Romantic Image promulgated Tindall's original concept of image as constituent symbol when he called the "product" of his "Romantic images" works of art, and then defined the work of art as a symbol; an "aesthetic monad."⁴⁸ It is with Tindall and Kermode that we begin to come full circle back to the Symbolist doctrine that the product, the work of art, the poem, the artifact, is itself symbol. And it is with this concept that the Imagist and Symbolist poems

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 105.

⁴⁸Kermode, Romantic Image, p. 44.

come into focus as products rather than processes.

It is from this point of view that William Pratt, editor of The Imagist Poem, 1963, makes his comparison of Imagist and Symbolist poetry.⁴⁹ His authorities are Ezra Pound and René Taupin, and by returning to two of the most knowledgeable critics of the poetry of the period under study, Pratt has provided a valuable cross-reference for the conclusions of Tindall and Kermode. Pratt concludes:

If "Imagisme is not symbolism," as Pound insisted, it is a direct descendant: given the different native traditions and the different historical moments, the "Image" and the "Symbol" are at their best aesthetic equivalents, the difference being, as Taupin admirably stated it, "a difference only of precision."⁵⁰

Pound's insistence that "the natural object is always the adequate symbol"⁵¹ is more fully expressed in his "Credo" of 1912:

I believe that the proper and perfect symbol is the natural object, that if a man use "symbols" he must so use them that their symbolic function does not obtrude; so that a sense, the poetic quality of the passage, is not lost to those who do not understand the symbol as such, to whom, for instance, a hawk is a hawk.⁵²

⁴⁹William Pratt, The Imagist Poem (New York, 1963), p. 32.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 35.

⁵¹Pound, Literary Essays, p. 9.

⁵²Ibid., p. 9.

This statement along with Pound's definition of the image as "an intellectual and emotional complex" corresponds with Tindall's definition of image as constituent symbol and recalls Taupin's comment that the difference between image and symbol is a matter only of precision.

When Pound would have us discard the emblematic--or previously established--symbolic function of "a hawk" in favour of its function as an image of a "natural object" in a poem, it appears that he is then relying upon its constituent qualities to convey symbolic value(s) to the image in the context of the poem. Exactly where the transformation of the image/natural object to symbol takes place--if at all--is a different matter of precision in each poem, and depends to a large extent upon the context and reiteration of the particular image.⁵³

Summary and Conclusions

In light of the above historical and critical review of French Symbolism certain conclusions about the nature of both Symbolist and Imagist aesthetics may be drawn. The most apparent characteristic of the French Symbolist movement is that it is a heterogeneous continuum.

⁵³Pound's interpretations of French Symbolist concepts and techniques are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, pp. 38 - 46.

As each poet responded to the central ideology of giving visible phenomena a transcendent reality, he contributed to and furthered the techniques and methods of Symbolism.

Gautier provided the movement with its aesthetic orientation by insisting upon precision of language and the "hard, clear line." Baudelaire supplied the theory of "correspondances" that gave the movement its neo-platonic cosmology. Mallarmé attempted to create an autonomous poetic language comparable to musical notations. Verlaine also proclaimed--in less complex fashion--"De la musique avant toute chose," and furthered the techniques of indirect discourse and suggestiveness fostered by Baudelaire and Mallarmé. Rimbaud extended the subject matter of the movement and provided stark, concrete details in his poetry which, when juxtaposed, became as suggestive as Mallarmé's smoke-rings. Jules Laforgue added an ironic tone to Symbolism in free verse that later greatly influenced both Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. Tristan Corbière's major contribution lay in his clear cut imagery and intense irony. Henri de Régnier contributed new rhythmical techniques; Laurent Tailhade, a tone of anger and invective. The list of particular contributions is virtually endless, and no two Symbolists were agreed upon a doctrinal canon beyond the central concept of the symbol as the best means of showing forth an eternal, supra-

sensible order in and through temporal, physical phenomena.

There is considerable value in comparing the methods of Symbolism and Imagism in a study of this kind, for it is in their general characteristics that the two groups are similar; much more than they are dissimilar in the Imagist reaction to particular Symbolist concepts.

René Taupin's study of the influence of French Symbolism on American poetry provides the basis for a comparison of the two movements. It was Taupin's contention that the Imagists thought of an image as a complete poem whereas the Symbolists considered the image to be only a part of a poem.⁵⁴ The poem, to the Symbolists, was often a complete symbol. The Imagist poem may or may not be symbolic, depending upon the relationship of image to context. For the Symbolists, the image did not provide an end in itself, but rather a point of departure to further mysteries:

Pourtant chez certains symbolistes, l'image est partielle; c'est un élément dans la synthèse que fait le lecteur; c'est par une succession d'images que se forment peu à peu les contours de l'objet évoqué. Pour les imagistes, souvent le procédé diffère: l'image est la synthèse elle-même; l'image, mot neuf, vision toute neuve, surgie de la sensation qui est à la base de tout, est cette sensation directement communiquée. Pour beaucoup de symbolistes, l'image n'était pas un aboutissement, mais un départ vers de lointains

⁵⁴Taupin, L'influence du symbolisme français sur la poésie américaine (de 1910 à 1920), p. 98.

mystères.⁵⁵

But Taupin concluded that the difference between the image of the Imagists and the symbol of the Symbolists remained "a difference only of precision." Pratt's commentary on this point is helpful: "This is the crucial distinction, for Imagism was chiefly a movement toward making the poetic figure--be it simple metaphor or complex symbol--more definite and more real."⁵⁶

Imagism can therefore be viewed in this respect as an extension and refinement of the French Symbolist tradition that has been reviewed in this chapter. Chapter Two will begin with an attempt to examine Ezra Pound's reaction to several of the Symbolist concepts discussed in this chapter and then proceed to a distinction between those influences in his aesthetic which derive directly from the French Symbolist tradition, and those which he acquired indirectly through the English poets and critics of the Transition period (1880 - 1920).

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 98 - 99.

⁵⁶Pratt, The Imagist Poem, p. 33.

CHAPTER TWO

EZRA POUND'S APPROACH TO SYMBOLISM

Pound and Symbolist Aesthetics

Any attempt to order and examine Pound's critical attitudes towards Symbolist aesthetics must necessarily contend with his most controversial statement on the distinction between Imagism and Symbolism published in 1914 under the title of "Vorticism" in the Fortnightly Review:

Imagisme is not symbolism. The symbolists dealt in "association," that is, in a sort of allusion, almost of allegory. They degraded the symbol to the status of a word. They made it a form of metonymy. One can be grossly "symbolic," for example, by using the term "cross" to mean "trial." The symbolist's symbols have a fixed value, like numbers in arithmetic, like 1, 2, and 7. The imagiste's images have a variable significance, like the signs a, b, and x in algebra.

Moreover, one does not want to be called a symbolist, because symbolism has usually been associated with mushy technique.⁵⁷

This statement appears to stand in direct contradiction to the majority of Pound's comments on particular Symbolist poets whom he admired. It also raises the essential question of what Pound meant by the "symbolism" that "has usually been associated with mushy technique."

⁵⁷Ezra Pound, Gaudier-Brzeska (New York, 1970), p. 84 - 85.

To deal with the latter problem first: Pound's two definitive statements on the nature of the symbol⁵⁸ seem to indicate that he considered "the symbol" to have a previously established and particular denotation--"a fixed value." Further, in his "Credo," Pound requires that "if a man use 'symbols' he must so use them that their symbolic function ('fixed value') does not obtrude."⁵⁹ It is clear that Pound in both passages is referring to those images in literature that have acquired, through constant reiteration, an emblematic value that permits them to stand alone outside the context of the poem. "Cross," "rose," "crown" and "hawk" for example, all have fixed metonymical values that are easily recognized. The essence of the emblem is metonymy and its domain is allegory. Pound then appears to use the word "symbol" to mean "emblem" and the process of degradation of "the symbol to the status of a word" was definitely "mushy technique" to him.

William Pratt's commentary on these passages provides additional insight into Pound's attitude towards Symbolism of the "mushy technique" variety:

Pound seems to have made the same distinction between the image and the symbol, then, that is usually made between symbolism and allegory: that the symbolic meaning must have its source in the literal meaning, and not be imposed upon it. He seems to have regarded

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 89, and Pound, Literary Essays, p. 9.

⁵⁹Pound, Literary Essays, p. 9.

French Symbolism as tending toward the allegorical, and wanted Imagism to be directed toward the realistic. Believing that Symbolism suffered from too much vagueness, he was willing to let Imagism suffer, if it must, from too much concreteness: to be purely descriptive was better than to be purely "symbolic."⁶⁰

Pound nowhere specifically names the Symbolist practitioners of "mushy technique" but it is reasonably safe to assume that he is making a general statement about those Symbolist poets whose chief aim lay in obscuring rather than revealing their cosmological insights. Pound, clearly, was not referring to those poets of the Symbolist tradition whose specific techniques and methods of presentation he praises in his articles and letters.

In 1928 Pound wrote to René Taupin in response to a request to assess the influence of French Symbolist tradition on his work up to 1920. Pound replied that Gautier, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Corbière and Laforgue had been his major influences and that "presque toute l'expérimentation, technique en poésie de 1830--jusqu'à moi--était faite en France."⁶¹ Further in the same letter he states:

Je crois que la poésie française soit très difficilement racine d'une bon poésie anglaise ou américaine, mais que la technique des poètes français était certainement en état de servir d'éducation aux poètes de ma langue--du temps de Gautier, jusqu'à 1912.

⁶⁰Pratt, The Imagist Poem, p. 34.

⁶¹Ezra Pound, The Letters of Ezra Pound, ed. D. D. Paige (New York, 1951), p. 292.

Que les poètes essentiels, à cette étude, se réduisent à Gautier, Corbière, Laforgue, Rimbaud.⁶²

In addition, Pound's articles on French Symbolist poets and poetry published during the same period that he made the statement on the distinction between Imagisme and Symbolism show that his admiration for the methods and techniques of many Symbolist poets far outweighed his disdain for those practitioners of "mushy technique" among them.⁶³

In the same "Vorticism" article of 1914, Pound comments upon his earlier belief in an "absolute rhythm" and relates that belief to both vers libre and Symbolist ideology:

I said in the preface to my Guido Cavalcanti that I believed in an absolute rhythm. I believe that every emotion and every phase of emotion has some toneless phrase, some rhythm-phrase to express it.

This belief leads to vers libre and to experiments in quantitative verse.

To hold a like belief in a sort of permanent metaphor is, as I understand it, "symbolism" in its profounder sense. It is not necessarily a belief in a permanent world, but it is a belief in that direction.⁶⁴

William Pratt's comments on this passage bear quoting at length because they illustrate a contemporary willingness to accept Taupin's view that Pound's Imagist theories owe a great deal more to the French Symbolist

⁶²Ibid., p. 292.

⁶³See especially "The Hard and Soft in French Poetry" and "Irony, Laforgue and Some Satire," in Pound, Literary Essays.

⁶⁴Pound, Gaudier-Brzeska, p. 84.

aesthetic than was previously expressed:

He recognized that to believe in "absolute rhythm" and "permanent metaphor" was tantamount to believing in "a permanent world"--an ideal world, in other words, beyond or within the world of appearances, which is the basis for all true symbolism. Since the Imagist poem aimed at being an exact equivalent in rhythm and image for the poet's experience, it may properly be viewed as an advanced stage of the tradition that began with Baudelaire's famous "Correspondances"--the touchstone of French Symbolism--and that later received critical expression in Eliot's idea of the "objective correlative": a tradition in which every effort at realism was also an effort at symbolism, since in a poem no object ever exists for itself alone, but is an "intellectual and emotional complex" as well.⁶⁵

A summary of the aesthetic tenets that Pound held during the period under study might now provide a clearer focus for his attitudes towards French Symbolist concepts and techniques. In the spring of 1912, Pound, Richard Aldington and "H.D." (Hilda Doolittle) agreed upon the three major tenets of Imagism:

1. Direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.⁶⁶

In the same March, 1913 issue of Poetry Pound also published "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" which begins with his famous definition of the image:

⁶⁵Pratt, The Imagist Poem, pp. 34 - 35.

⁶⁶Cited in Pound's Literary Essays, p. 3.

A Few Don'ts

- An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. . . . It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.
- It is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works.
- Use no superfluous word, no adjective which does not reveal something.
- Don't use such an expression as 'dim lands of peace'. It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer's not realizing that the natural object is always the adequate symbol.
- Go in fear of abstractions.
- Don't imagine that the art of poetry is any simpler than the art of music. . . .
- Use either no ornament or good ornament.
- It is not necessary that a poem should rely on its music, but if it does rely on its music that music must be such as will delight the expert.
- Don't be 'viewy'--leave that to the writers of pretty little philosophic essays. Don't be descriptive; remember that the painter can describe a landscape much better than you can, and that he has to know a deal more about it.
- Don't chop your stuff into separate iambs. Don't make each line stop dead at the end, and then begin every next line with a heave. Let the beginning of the next line catch the rise of the rhythm wave, unless you want a definite longish pause. In short, behave as a musician, a good musician, when dealing with that phase of your art which has exact parallels in music. The same laws govern, and you are bound by no others.

EZRA POUND'S APPROACH TO SYMBOLISM

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- Don't mess up the perception of one sense by trying to define it in terms of another. This is usually only the result of being too lazy to find the exact word. To this clause there are possibly exceptions.⁶⁷

It may be noted here that the majority of Pound's "don'ts" are injunctions against the philosophical and rhetorical excesses of the Romantic and Symbolist poets of both France and England.

Pound's "Credo" was first published in the February, 1912, issue of Harold Munro's Poetry Review:

Credo

- Rhythm.--I believe in an 'absolute rhythm', a rhythm, that is, in poetry which corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed. A man's rhythm must be interpretative, it will be, therefore, in the end, his own, uncounterfeiting, uncounterfeitable.
- Symbols.--I believe that the proper and perfect symbol is the natural object, that if a man use "symbols" he must so use them that their symbolic function does not obtrude; so that a sense, and the poetic quality of the passage, is not lost to those who do not understand the symbol as such, to whom, for instance, a hawk is a hawk.
- Technique.--I believe in technique as the test of a man's sincerity; in law when it is ascertainable; in the trampling down of every convention that impedes or obscures the determination of the law, or the precise rendering of the impulse.
- Form.--I think there is a 'fluid' as well as a 'solid' content, that some poems may have form as a tree has form, some as water poured into a vase. That most symmetrical forms have certain uses. That a vast number of subjects cannot be precisely,

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 4 - 7.

and therefore not properly rendered in symmetrical forms.⁶⁸

Pound's assertions on vers libre emphasize his general aesthetic concept of "organicism" in poetry:

Re Vers Libre

I think one should write vers libre only when one 'must', that is to say, only when the 'thing' builds up a rhythm more beautiful than that of set metres, or more real, more a part of the emotion of the 'thing', more germane, intimate, interpretative than the measure of regular accentual verse; a rhythm which discontents one with set iambic or set anapaestic.

Eliot has said the thing very well when he said, 'No vers is libre for the man who wants to do a good job.'⁶⁹

Pound had learned from French poets and critics that vers libre demanded at least as much critical responsibility on the part of the poet himself as poetry written in form and that free verse must be kept by every possible technical means, from becoming monotonous or flaccid. The lack of regular meter and rhyme should not result merely in pieces of disguised prose. This early insistence on the formal elements of free verse is interesting in the light of future developments. The early contribution of Pound and the Imagists to the establishment, in free verse, of responsible poetic standards should not be underestimated.

Pound's continued experiment with freer forms from 1912 to 1916 (when the volume Lustra was published)

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 12.

finally resulted in a formal vers libre in English which was at once flexible and severe, and capable of dignity and poignancy. Pound's condensation, his attention to the matter at hand, his lack of literary dilution and confusion, brought a clarity to poetry compared to which "magazine verse" of the time seemed both soft and poorly crafted. By the time that formal metrics were again brought into use by Pound working with Eliot in the Mauberly period (1916 - 1920) the years of free verse experimentation had changed conventional English poetic procedures for good. The former insistent iambic beat was varied; the high pitch of poetic tone had been lowered; and a healthy fusion between light and serious verse had taken place.

Herbert Read assessed Pound's contribution to the development of free verse in The Tenth Muse, "Pound did not invent free verse--he reformed free verse, gave it a musical structure, and to that extent we may say paradoxically that it was no longer free."⁷⁰

Direct French Symbolist Influences

These principles, then, comprised the essential aesthetic that Pound had developed up to and including the

⁷⁰ Herbert Read, "Ezra Pound," in The Tenth Muse (London, 1957), pp. 264 - 265.

time that he was associated with the Imagist movement.⁷¹ Pound, however, constantly revised his aesthetic principles, and by 1918 had created a formulation that included all of his previous tenets and, in addition, served to distinguish between three different kinds of poetry. In How to Read, Pound enunciated his final statement of the poetic principles that had first begun with his three-part Imagist manifesto of 1913.

If we chuck out the classifications which apply to the outer shape of the work, or to its occasion, and if we look at what actually happens, in, let us say, poetry, we will find that the language is charged or energized in various manners.

That is to say, there are three 'kinds of poetry': MELOPOEIA, wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning. PHANOPOEIA, which is a casting of images upon the visual imagination.

LOGOPOEIA, 'the dance of the intellect among words', that is to say, it employs words not only for their direct meaning, but it takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its own acceptances, and of ironical play. It holds the aesthetic content which is peculiarly the domain of verbal manifestation, and cannot possibly be contained in plastic or in music. It is the latest come, and perhaps most tricky and undependable mode.⁷²

It is interesting to note the genesis of Pound's final tripartite distinction. The first two items of

⁷¹Pound's association with Imagism falls into three periods. 1) 1909, Pound met T. E. Hulme, 2) 1912-1914. Pound published Ripostes and became the champion of Imagism, and 3) 1915-1917, Pound disassociated himself from Amy Lowell's "Amygists" and began "Vorticism."

⁷²Pound, Literary Essays, p. 25.

his original manifesto (direct treatment and no superfluous word) became phanopoeia--poetry wherein the feelings of painting and sculpture are predominant. The third injunction (to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase) becomes melopoeia--poetry which moves by its music. Logopoeia--the dance of the intelligence among words--while it does not spring directly from the Imagist manifesto, has its roots in the highly ironic badinage and intellectual word play of the poetry of Laforgue and Corbière. Pound often later used "logopoeia" to describe Eliot's early poetry, when referring to the same verbalistic qualities.

There can be little doubt that the musical qualities that Pound admired in the poetry of Verlaine and Mallarmé⁷³ had an important effect in his concept of melopoeia. It is even more of a certainty that Gautier's injunctions in "L'Art" to "fuis l'aquarelle" and "sculpte, lime, cisèle" provided a basis for phanopoeia and Pound's central concepts of Imagism.⁷⁴

In The Pound Era, Hugh Kenner notes the importance that Pound placed on Gautier's aesthetic principles, and at the same time raises the distinction between the Imagist insistence for direct statement as opposed to the Symbolist

⁷³Taupin, L'influence de symbolisme français sur la poésie américaine (de 1910 à 1920), pp. 112 - 113.

⁷⁴Pound, The Letters of Ezra Pound, p. 292.

preference for indirect discourse:

Commencing from the post-Symbolist nineties, Pound worked his way clear of systematized suggestiveness until his chief point of contact with nineteenth century French verse was Théophile Gautier of the direct statement ("Carmen is thin") and his most Symbolist procedure an isolating of single words, not necessarily English.⁷⁵

Gautier has often been excluded from the Symbolist tradition because of his injunctions in "L'Art" to create precise images by means of direct discourse; the principle of exclusion being the erroneous assumption that indirect discourse is the sine qua non of admission to the Symbolist cénacle. Rimbaud, too, is often excluded on the same grounds.⁷⁶ Pound, however, realized that the precision of an image lies in its direct presentation--after the fashion of Gautier and Rimbaud--and provides the very "pigment of poetry." Pound stated further that "The image is the furthest possible remove from rhetoric,"⁷⁷ and one of the major Symbolist aims was to rid poetry of the rhetorical excesses of Romanticism. Even Verlaine, possibly the most undisputed "Symbolist" of Symbolism, required in "Art

⁷⁵Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971), p. 133.

⁷⁶Balakian, The Symbolist Movement--Ch. 4, "Verlaine, not Rimbaud."

⁷⁷Pound, Gautier-Brzeska, p. 83.

poétique" that the "Undecided" be rendered in terms of the "Precise."⁷⁸

Pound's central concern was the instantaneous presentation of an intellectual and emotional complex by means of direct discourse. That many Symbolist poets achieved the same goal by means of indirect discourse meant only to Pound that they took the long way around to reach the same end. Deliberate obscurity, insistence upon abstractions, synaesthesia, rhetoric, and ornamentation all contradicted Pound's concept of "direct treatment of the 'thing', whether subjective or objective," and he considered those devices to be faulty technique in any poetry.

For Pound, the aim was to strip down the perceptual image to the point where the essence constitutes a conceptual image. Much Symbolist doctrine aimed at revealing the essence of the perceptual image by building up a discursive, ineffable aura around it that revealed the essence by association. In "Poetry as Incantation," Mallarmé inquired:

Why should we perform the miracle by which a natural object is almost made to disappear beneath the magic waving wand of the written word, if not to divorce that object from the direct and the palpable, and so conjure up its essence in all purity?

⁷⁸Paul Verlaine, "Art poétique," The Penguin Book of French Verse, 3, pp. 224 - 226.

When I say: "a flower!" then from that forgetfulness to which my voice consigns all floral form, something different from the usual calyces arises, something all music, essence, and softness: the flower which is absent from all bouquets. . . . Then we realize, to our amazement, that we had never truly heard this or that ordinary poetic fragment; and, at the same time, our recollection of the object thus conjured up bathes in a totally new atmosphere.⁷⁹

The goal is the same for both Pound and Mallarmé. In Pound's case it is achieved by direct statement; Mallarmé's method is indirect.

The close similarity between the aims of Imagism and Symbolism, and Joyce's doctrine of "epiphany" is apparent. All three doctrines attempt to reveal the essence of an emotion, object or circumstance by presenting it with the precise registration that will manifest its uniqueness. As noted above, Eliot's doctrine of the "objective correlative" also follows the fundamental aims of both Symbolism and Imagism in their attempts to "reveal the essence."⁸⁰

In his letter to René Taupin, Pound proclaims that he has made a more or less systematic aesthetic out of that which Rimbaud achieved by intuition and genius. In the February issue of Little Review for 1918, Pound praises Rimbaud's ability to present directly a precise image:

⁷⁹Stéphane Mallarmé, "Poetry as Incantation," The Modern Tradition, p. 112.

⁸⁰Cf. Chapter Two, pp. 42 - 43.

"In Rimbaud, the image stands clean, unencumbered by unfunctioning words; to get anything like this directness of presentation, one must go back to Catullus."⁸¹ The description echoes Pound's prescriptions for poets in "A Few Don'ts": "no superfluous words," "no adjective which does not reveal something," and "direct treatment of the thing."

In the same article, Pound admits the influence of Rimbaud, Gautier, Corbière and Laforgue, and assesses them collectively and individually in these terms:

After Gautier, France produced as nearly as I can understand, three chief and admirable poets: Tristan Corbière, perhaps the most poignant writer since Villon, Rimbaud, a vivid and indubitable genius, and Laforgue--a slighter, but in some ways a finer artist than either of the others. I do not mean that "he writes better" than Rimbaud, and Eliot has pointed out the wrongness of Symons's phrase: "Laforgue the eternal adult; Rimbaud the eternal child." Rimbaud's effects seem often to come as the beauty of certain silver crystal produced by chemical means, Laforgue always knows what he is at, Rimbaud, the "genius" in the narrowest and deepest sense of the term, "the most modern" seems, almost without knowing it, to hit on the various ways in which the best writers were to follow him, slowly, Laforgue is the "last word" out of infinite knowledge of all the ways of saying a thing he finds the right way. Rimbaud, when right, is so because he cannot be bothered to exist in any other modality.⁸²

Pound examines Laforgue's methods of irony and satire in the November, 1917, issue of Poetry and in so

⁸¹Pound, Literary Essays, p. 33.

⁸²Ibid., p. 36.

doing, places Laforgue's methods in that arena of poetry which he was to call, a year later, logopoeia:

I do not think one can too carefully discriminate between Laforgue's tone and that of his contemporary French satirists. He is the finest wrought; he is most 'verbalist'. Bad verbalism is rhetoric, or the use of cliché unconsciously, or a mere playing with phrases. But there is good verbalism, distinct from lyricism or imagism, and in this Laforgue is a master. He writes not the popular language of any country but an international tongue common to the excessively cultivated, and to those more or less familiar with French literature of the first three-fourths of the nineteenth century.⁸³

In the same article, Pound calls Laforgue "perhaps the most sophisticated of all the French poets," "an incomparable artist," and expresses his belief that "he marks the next phase after Gautier in French poetry."⁸⁴

Although it is well known that Pound derived his concept of personae from the Noh theatre and Browning's dramatic monologues, it is quite likely that Laforgue's ironic technique of identifying with an obnoxious socialite or poseur, and then slicing through the persona with a few trenchant phrases, contributed to Pound's more devastatingly satirical personae. Pound's use of personae in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly" and the figures in "Moeurs Contemporaines" undoubtedly owe something to Laforgue's technique. Laforgue's

⁸³Pound, Literary Essays, p. 283.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 281 - 282.

capacity to blend irony with sincerity is a refinement that Pound also used successfully in much of his poetry and will be examined more closely in the next chapter. Pound comments on this capacity in his article on Laforgue:

He is, nine-tenths of him, critic--dealing for the most part with literary poses and clichés, taking them as his subject matter; and--and this is the important thing when we think of him as a poet--he makes them a vehicle for the expression of his own very personal emotions, of his own unperturbed sincerity.⁸⁵

Pound recommends Corbière for his "poignance," in the article on Laforgue and praises him for the "hard-bitten" quality of his poetry--"in very much Villon's manner." In comparing Hugo, Tailhade, Laforgue and Corbière Pound states "Laforgue was a better artist than any of these men save Corbière."⁸⁶ High praise from Pound considering his opinion of Laforgue. In "The Hard and the Soft in French Poetry," Pound admires Corbière for following the techniques prescribed by Gautier in Emaux et Camées in these terms: "Since Gautier, Corbière has been hard, not with a glaze or parian finish, but hard like weather-bit granite."

In defining the terms "hard" and "soft" Pound reiterates his own predilection for the sculptural qualities of Gautier's verse:

By 'hardness' I mean a quality which is in poetry nearly always a virtue--I can think of no case where

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 282.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 282.

it is not. By softness I mean an opposite quality which is not always a fault. Anyone who dislikes these textural terms may lay the blame on Théophile Gautier, who certainly suggests them in Emaux et Camées; it is his hardness that I had first in mind. He exhorts us to cut in hard substance, the shell and the Parian.⁸⁷

Pound notes also that Tailhade is "hard in his satire," and admires him for the same "sharp edge" that he found in the poetry of Petronius, Catullus and Villon. Taupin makes the comment that Pound's poem "Our Respectful Homage to M. Laurent Tailhade" contains the same condensed images, clean, harsh style, and original sensibilities of Tailhade's satirical poetry.⁸⁸

The four major direct sources of influence from French Symbolist poetry on Pound's early aesthetic appear to be then, as Pound stated in his letter to Taupin: Gautier, Rimbaud, Laforgue and Corbière--with a nod to Tailhade.

A summarized assessment of Pound's "France" section of How to Read provides his own conclusions on the four French Symbolist poets who most directly affected his Imagist aesthetic:

- Departing from Albertus, Gautier developed the medium we find in the Emaux et Camées. England in the 'nineties had got no further than the method of the Albertus.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 285.

⁸⁸ Taupin, L'influence du symbolisme français sur la poésie américaine (de 1910 à 1920), p. 145.

- If Corbière invented no process he at any rate restored French verse to the vigour of Villon and to an intensity that no Frenchman had touched during the intervening four centuries. There is in Corbière something one finds nowhere before him, unless in Villon.
- We must almost say that Laforgue invented logopoeia observing that there had been a very limited range of logopoeia in all satire. At any rate Laforgue found or refounded logopoeia. Laforgue is not like any preceding poet. He is not ubiquitously like Propertius.
- And Rimbaud brought back to phanopoeia its clarity, and directness. In Rimbaud the image stands clean, unencumbered by non-functioning words; to get anything like this directness of presentation one must go back to Catullus.
- All four of these poets, Gautier, Corbière, Laforgue, Rimbaud, redeem poetry from Stendhal's condemnation.⁸⁹

One other major French influence on Pound cannot be ignored. Remy de Gourmont profoundly impressed Pound in a philosophically aesthetic and ideological fashion. Not a poet himself, Gourmont could not provide the technical virtuositities that Pound derived from the French poets, but he affected Pound's thinking and general aesthetics to the point where Pound declared simply, "Gourmont prepared our era." The year before Gourmont's death, Pound was in constant correspondence with him about contributing to international journals. Gourmont replied that he was too ill, and doubted that Americans were "capable of enough mental liberty to read my books." He was however willing

⁸⁹Pound, Literary Essays, pp. 32 - 33.

to help Pound educate them to the point where they might respect "French individualism and the sense of liberty some of us have in so great degree."⁹⁰

In his essay on Gourmont in Instigations (1920) Pound finds that Gourmont had his beginning in the Symbolist tradition and that,

He was an intelligence almost more than an artist; when he portrays, he is concerned with hardly more than the permanent human elements. His people are only by accident of any particular era. He is poet, more by possessing a certain quality of mind than by virtue of having written fine poems.⁹¹

Further in the same essay Pound says of Gourmont's essays, "they are a portrait of the civilized mind. I incline to think them the best portrait available, the best record that is, of the civilized mind from 1885 - 1915."⁹² Pound finds Gourmont essential to arouse the imagination and "prepare the mind for receptivities."

Perhaps the strongest indication of Pound's admiration for Gourmont (as it was for Rimbaud, Laforgue, Corbière and Gautier) is the fact that he translated several of his works--that is, he "rendered" them into English.

The major philosophical debt that Pound owed to

⁹⁰Pound, The Letters of Ezra Pound, p. 186.

⁹¹Pound, Literary Essays, p. 340.

⁹²Ibid., p. 344.

Gourmont was that concepts were merely dessicated images and that language can be brought back to life by poets who create fresh visual images and redeem dead metaphors.

Taupin suggests that T. E. Hulme also derived this knowledge from Gourmont's Le Problème du Style but there is no proof that Hulme ever read Gourmont's book. Hulme did, however, derive essentially the same concept from Bergson: "abstract concepts are insufficient to copy the subtleties of experience, and vital knowledge is communicated intuitively by means of images."⁹³ Given this fundamental similarity of concept, it is no wonder that many of Pound's and Hulme's pronouncements on the relative values of image and concept are confused and attributed falsely to one other.

Despite these similarities, Pound upbraided Hulme "for wasting time on crap like Bergson"⁹⁴ and seldom lost an opportunity to downgrade Hulme's importance in Pound's own Imagist aesthetic. In this light, a sarcastic note may be read into Pound's publication of "The Complete Poetical Works of T. E. Hulme" as an appendix to his own Ripostes in 1912. Pound's prefatory note adds weight to this impression when he states, "I refrain from publishing

⁹³T.E. Hulme, Speculations (London, 1924), pp. 156-8.

⁹⁴Pound, "This Hulme Business," Townsmen, II, 5 (January, 1939), p. 15.

my proposed Historical Memoir of (Hulme's School of Imagists) because Mr. Hulme has threatened to print the original propaganda."⁹⁵

All this serves to show that Pound was more likely influenced by Gourmont directly than by Bergson, either directly or through Hulme, in his formulation of the concept of the image.⁹⁶

Indirect French Symbolist Influences

A certain degree of authority is possible when tracing the primary or direct influences of the French Symbolist tradition on Pound's early canon through his own statements. The authority tends to dissipate when an attempt is made to distinguish between those Symbolist influences that derive directly from France and those which Pound assimilated through the intermediary influences of fin de siècle English poets.

Pound himself, however, has left some indications of secondary or indirect French Symbolist influences in his prose writings and correspondence. In addition, Lorraine McMullen's An Introduction to the Aesthetic Movement in

⁹⁵Pound, Personae, p. 251.

⁹⁶Thomas H. Jackson, The Early Poetry of Ezra Pound, (Cambridge, Mass., 1968). pp. 108 - 116.

English Literature provides, in considerable detail, the necessary evidences of French Symbolist influences on the English poets of the Transition period. Thomas H. Jackson's The Early Poetry of Ezra Pound in turn provides an analysis of Pound's ties to such poets as Browning, D. G. Rossetti, W. B. Yeats, A. C. Swinburne and Lionel Johnson.

Where the lines of influence are clear, and documented by Pound's own writings, authority is maintained. Much interesting, but speculative, material must be ignored--for the time being--in the interests of accuracy and space.

Pound's 1928 letter to Taupin again provides the starting point. He asserts in the letter that he was influenced by Arthur Symon's studies of "Baudelaire, Verlaine, etc." and that his idea of the image owes--"as the bread owes to the winnower of grain"--something to the Symbolists via Yeats' appreciation of Symons and Mallarmé.

Two poets in particular of the Transition period--W. B. Yeats and A. C. Swinburne--fulfill the requirements and illustrate some of the indirect sources of French Symbolist influence in his work.

The most powerful indirect Symbolist influences in Pound's early poetry appear through W. B. Yeats who was admittedly strongly influenced by Mallarmé's Symbolist concepts.⁹⁷ Pound learnt much from Yeats' concept and

⁹⁷ McMullen, An Introduction to the Aesthetic Movement in English Literature, p. 52.

practice of Symbolism while he was his literary secretary during the summer of 1910.

Yeats' distinction between intellectual and emotional symbols, which he derived in part from Mallarmé,⁹⁸ undoubtedly influenced Pound in his formulation of the "intellectual and emotional complex" part of his definition of the image. Pound's adaptation of Yeats' theory of Symbolism is analysed at length in both Thomas Jackson's The Early Poetry of Ezra Pound, and N. Christoph de Nagy's The Poetry of Ezra Pound: The Pre-Imagist Stage.⁹⁹

In his essay on "The Later Yeats," first published in the May, 1914, issue of Poetry, Pound specifically speaks of his indebtedness to Yeats:

There have always been two sorts of poetry which are, for me at least, the most 'poetic'; they are firstly, the sort of poetry which seems to be music just forcing itself into articulate speech, and secondly, that sort of poetry which seems as if sculpture or painting were just forced or forcing itself into words. The gulf between evocation and description, in this latter case, is the unbridgeable difference between genius and talent. It is perhaps the highest function of art that it should fill the mind with a noble profusion of sounds and images, that it should furnish the life of the mind with such accompaniment and surrounding. At any rate Mr. Yeats' work has done this in the past and still continues to do so.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸N. Christoph de Nagy, The Poetry of Ezra Pound: The Pre-Imagist Stage (Berne, 1968), pp. 92 - 95.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁰⁰Pound, Literary Essays, p. 380.

It is most significant that the difference between "evocation" and "description" to which Pound refers is exactly parallel to the difference between the aims of Gautier's Parnassianism and the later Symbolism of Mallarmé which so influenced Yeats. (It is also the difference between melopoeia and phanopoeia) So it appears that by 1914 (at the latest), Pound was clearly sensitive and responsive to the technical development of the French Symbolist tradition through his association with W. B. Yeats

In the March, 1918, issue of Poetry, Pound reviewed Gosse's Life of A. C. Swinburne and while deprecating what he called "the attempt of a silly and pompous old man to present a man of genius" inadvertently reveals Swinburne's influences on his own work. It seems that Swinburne's predilection for musicality, his use of evocative imagery, and the incantatory tone in much of his poetry derive from his literary relationship with Mallarmé¹⁰¹ and his appreciation of these techniques in the poetry of Baudelaire and Verlaine. Pound notes affirmatively that "Swinburne recognized poetry as an art, and as an art of verbal music. . . . He neglected the value of words as words, and was intent on their value as sound."¹⁰² Apart from showing Swinburne's influence

¹⁰¹ McMullen, An Introduction to the Aesthetic Movement in English Literature, pp. 50 - 51.

¹⁰² Pound, Literary Essays, p. 292.

in terms of melopoeia, the review also emphasized Pound's increasing tendency to favour direct over indirect discourse and to eschew synaesthesia:

There are times when this last is not, or need not be ipso facto a fault. There is an emotional fusion of the perceptions, and a certain kind of verbal confusion has an emotive value in writing; but this is of all sorts of writing the most dangerous to an author, and the unconscious collapse into this sort of writing has wrecked more poets in our time than perhaps all other faults put together.¹⁰³

Throughout this article, Pound shows his awareness of both the defects and attributes of French Symbolist poetic techniques as they applied to Swinburne's poetry.

In his conclusion of the assessment of Swinburne's influence on Pound, Thomas Jackson reviews Pound's indebtedness to Swinburne for the techniques of melopoeia that led to Pound's formulation of the theory of "absolute rhythm" and indicates the direction that Pound's poetry in fact later took: "What remained for Pound was to learn how to connect pleasing sounds with felt emotions, to use them in their proper place in a total expressive medium rather than to depend on their isolated magic."¹⁰⁴

The respect which Pound held for many English fin de siècle poets seems proportionate to the degree they, in turn, exercised the techniques and concepts of which

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 294.

¹⁰⁴ Jackson, The Early Poetry of Ezra Pound, p. 129.

Pound approved in the poetry of the French Symbolist tradition. Although both Yeats and Swinburne chiefly influenced Pound's concept of melopoeia through their appreciation of Verlaine and Mallarmé, Pound's eclectic capacity for absorbing influences is shown in his appreciation of Gautier's aestheticism in his 1915 assessment of Lionel Johnson:

One thinks that he had read and admired Gautier, or that at least, he had derived similar ambitions from some traditional source. One thinks that his poems are in short hard sentences. The reality is that they are full of definite statement. For better or worse they are doctrinal and nearly always dogmatic. He had the blessed habit of knowing his own mind, and this was rare among writers of his decade.

The 'nineties' have chiefly gone out because of their muzziness, because of a softness derived, I think, not from books but from impressionist painting. They riot with half decayed fruit.

The impression of Lionel Johnson's verse is that of small slabs of ivory, firmly combined and contrived. There is a constant feeling of neatness, a sense of inherited order. Above all he respected his art.¹⁰⁵

Summary and Conclusions

The combined evidence of Pound's own critical comments on French Symbolist poets and the Symbolist-rooted direction in the formulation of his own aesthetic canon show the particular influences of individual French poets in both his poetic and critical development. Remy de Gourmont's pervasive philosophical influence contributed

¹⁰⁵Pound, Literary Essays, p. 363.

to Pound's doctrine of the image, and Yeats' and Swinburne's interpretations of Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarmé improved and refined Pound's concept of melopoeia.

It is, however, the primary influences of Gautier, Rimbaud, Laforgue and Corbière that resonate most strongly in Pound's early poetry.

Chapter Three will attempt to show evidences of these influences in Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly" and illustrate in that work, and other shorter poems, both the general and particular influences of French Symbolist concepts and techniques that have been examined in the first two chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

EVIDENCES OF SYMBOLIST METHODS

The first part of this chapter begins with a general review and explication of Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly" and moves directly into an examination of those parts of the poem that show either direct or indirect French Symbolist influences. In particular the influence of Laforgue, Corbière, Gautier and Rimbaud will be examined closely.

The second part of this chapter will reveal corroborative evidences of French Symbolism in representative poems of the period under study selected from the 1926 edition of Personae.

"Hugh Selwyn Mauberly"

"Hugh Selwyn Mauberly" is in two main sections and contains a total of eighteen poems. The first section runs from the opening "Ode" through "Envoi" (poems I - XIII). The second section runs from "Mauberly 1920" through the final "Medallion" (poems I - IV plus "Medallion").

The entire poem may be seen as Ezra Pound's ironic and wistful farewell to the purely aesthetic attitude towards poetry. In the poem he juxtaposes the aesthetic

idea of the cult of beauty and pleasure with his vision of a greedy, corrupt and violent society in London during the First World War.

Mauberly, the protagonist of the poem, has often been identified with Pound in much the same way as Stephen Dedalus has been associated with James Joyce.¹⁰⁶ This biographical approach to the poem, however, is insufficient to serve as a vehicle for understanding the work. Mauberly is not Pound, although he is a real aspect of Pound in some respects.

The ironic subtitle "Life and Contacts" and the title page footnote¹⁰⁷ provide the perspective for the first of the eighteen poems, "E. P. Ode pour l'election de son sepulchre."

His true Penelope was Flaubert,
He fished by obstinate isles;
Observed the elegance of Circe's hair,¹⁰⁸
Rather than the mottoes on sun-dials.

For Pound, Flaubert was representative of the aesthetic, disciplined, self-sacrificing artist. Mauberly then ought to have returned to his Penelope but instead spent his time fishing by the islands of pleasure, like those of Circe in the Odyssey, which prevented him from

¹⁰⁶Hugh Kenner, The Poetry of Ezra Pound (London, 1951), "Mauberly," p. 168.

¹⁰⁷" . . . distinctly a farewell to London."

¹⁰⁸Pound, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly", Personae, p. 187.

reaching his artistic goal. The hedonistic aesthetic attitude to female beauty in the third line absorbed Mauberly so much that he had not noticed "mottoes on sundials" such as tempus fugit.

Hugh Kenner points out an added dimension to this verse by recalling that the tribunal at Flaubert's trial over Madame Bovary complained that "he had spent pains on the elegance of his Circe's hair that might better have been directed to honest causes."¹⁰⁹

Mauberly, the pseudo-aesthete, recognizes that he has lacked sufficient artistic concentration because he has not, so far, been sufficiently aware of the power and pervasiveness of the "shoddy cheapness" of his age:

The age demanded an image
Of its accelerated grimace. . . .
The "age demanded" chiefly a mould in plaster
Made with no loss of time,
A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster
Or the "sculpture" of Rhyme (p. 188)

The "prose kinema" stands in direct opposition to the aesthetic values of the careful craftsman Gautier called for in "L'Art," in virtually the same language.

Pound wrote "Mauberly" during World War I and his reflections on the standards of contemporary civilization led him to ask what it was that "a myriad, and of the best among them" were dying for: "For two gross of broken

¹⁰⁹Kenner, The Poetry of Ezra Pound, p. 170.

statues, / For a few thousand battered books." (p. 191)

As in Rimbaud's early poetry, the attitude expressed here towards society is one of disgust and frustration, and the statues and books represent for Pound the artistic and literary heritage of the past that has been guarded by only a few cognoscenti.

In the "Yeux Glaugues" poem Pound uses historical personages as emblems of something much wider than themselves. This device is neither Symbolism nor Imagism. It is the use of an historical proper name, or one from myth or legend, to stand for a cluster of attitudes rather than an abstract idea. Its success depends on the reader's ability to share Pound's historical knowledge and either sympathize with or adjust himself to the poet's attitudes. This evocation of connotative significance recalls the lists of names in Rimbaud's Les illuminations and usually occurs in a sequence. It is most apparent in the "Yeux Glaugues" section:

Gladstone was still respected
When John Ruskin produced
"King's Treasuries"; Swinburne
And Rosetti still abused.

Foetid Buchanan lifted up his voice
When that faun's head of hers
Became a pastime for
Painters and adulterers. . . . (p. 192)

Gladstone here epitomizes the pompous politician; Ruskin, the noble but pathetic attempt to combine the values of

art and society, and Swinburne and Rosetti the "martyred" artists. "Foetid Buchanan" author of "The Fleishy School of Poetry"¹¹⁰ stands for Victorian philistinism. And for the typical Philistine 'artist' of the Edwardian age, "Mr. Nixon" (Arnold Bennett), the examples of the Decadents and Oscar Wilde provide warnings which he passes on to Mauberly:

And no one knows, at sight, a masterpiece.
And give up verse, my boy,
There's nothing in it. (p. 194)

Nixon also advises Mauberly to

Butter reviewers. From fifty to three hundred
I rose in eighteen months . . . (p. 194)

These allusions to cultural history throughout "Mauberly" have a double entendre. On the one hand, Pound is saying that in an age dominated by material concerns, even people with some capacity for art--like Bennett--betray the best that is in them. On the other hand, Pound deprecates the decadent attitude of Mauberly--who turns away from his society, destroys himself, and sustains himself during the immolative process with fantasies:

(He) Told me how Johnson (Lionel) died
By falling from a high stool in a pub.

But showed no trace of alcohol
At the autopsy, privately performed--
Tissue preserved--the pure mind
Arose toward Newman as the whiskey warmed.
(p. 193)

¹¹⁰A pamphlet accusing the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood--Rosetti especially--of disguising sensuality as spirituality.

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Pound balances Mauberly's difficulties as a minor poet between philistinism and dilletantism. Mauberly contends not only with the crass commercialism of his age but also with the fashionable, patronizing interest in literature of the English aristocracy as found in Pound's passage on Lady Valentine:

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

A hook to catch Lady Jane's attention,
A modulation towards the theatre . . . (p. 196)

Mauberly's weaknesses and the qualities Pound finds lacking in "the age" are synonymous. Pound implies that Mauberly might have transformed his age if he had more talent and the "right" attitude:

Firmness,
Not the full smile,
His art, but an art
In profile;

Colourless Pier Francesca,
Pisanello lacking the skill
To forge Achaia. (P. 198)

The concentration required for even his narrow and minor art is lost by Mauberly when he entangles himself in a love affair and passively drifts through life towards a final and completely hedonistic state. When his mistress leaves him he is, "Unable in the supervening blankness / To sift TO AGATHON (the beautiful) from the chaff." (p. 199)

Mauberly's tragedy is the pathetic tragedy of the pure decadent for whom the effort to create, apart from the effort to act existentially, finally becomes an unnecessary disturbance of the delights of pure, passive contemplation. Mauberly attains an illusory earthly paradise:

A pale gold, in the aforesaid pattern,
The unexpected palms
Destroying, certainly, the artist's urge,
Left him delighted with the imaginary
Audition of the phantasmal sea-surge. (p. 202)

Although Mauberly does manage to write one small poem, imitative of Gautier, Pound at the end of the poem presents Mauberly's epitaph on an oar washed up on "the unforecasted beach,"

"I was
"And I no more exist;
"Here drifted
"An hedonist." (p. 203)

The epitaph concludes Mauberly's attempts to "resuscitate the dead art of poetry" and reminds the reader of the theme of futility in the opening poem: "The pianola replaces Sappho's barbitos," "Caliban casts out Ariel," and "A tawdry cheapness shall outlast our days." Mauberly's epitaph also ironically fulfills the subtitle of the first poem: "E. P. ode pour l'élection de son sepulchre."

"Hugh Selwyn Mauberly" is a vision of the fragmentation and alienation of man in contemporary society and forecasts the later spirit of disillusionment in

T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland." Eliot recognized the quality of Pound's poetic craftsmanship in "Mauberly" when he stated in the introduction to Pound's Selected Poems:

This seems to me a great poem. I know very well that the apparent roughness and naivety of the verse and rhyming of "Mauberly" are inevitably the result of many years of hard work: if you cannot appreciate the dexterity of "Altaforte" you cannot appreciate the simplicity of "Mauberly". . . . I am sure of "Mauberly" whatever else I am sure of.¹¹¹

In 1928 Pound wrote to Taupin: "que les poètes essentiels (as texts for English poets to study) se redusient à Gautier, Corbière, Laforgue, Rimbaud. Que depuis Rimbaud, aucun poète en France n'a invente rien de fondamental." Insofar as "Mauberly" is concerned Pound followed his own injunctions, for the influence of Corbière and Laforgue are evidenced by the poem. Gautier's metrics and aesthetics are abundant, and Rimbaud's influence is present, though not as clearly nor as particularly evident as the other three.

The subtitle "E. P. Ode Pour L'Election de Son Sepulchre" derives directly from Ronsard's Odes (Book IV) "L'Election de son Sepulchre" and relates in sense and feeling to both Corbière's "Epitaphe" and Mallarmé's "Le Tombeau de Edgar Poe." Obviously, "E. P." also stands for Ezra Pound, and Mallarmé's poem contains the famous

¹¹¹Pound, Selected Poems, "Introduction," p. xxiii.

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line "Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu" which Eliot paraphrased in "Little Gidding" as "To purify the dialect of the tribe." Pound and Eliot both shared this aim simultaneously and it was given expression by Pound throughout "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly" and particularly in the first three parts of the poem.

Hugh Kenner's comment on the subtitle provides the key to an understanding of the origins of irony that Pound used so persuasively throughout "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly" in addition to tracing the important cross relationships shared between Eliot, Pound, Laforgue, Corbière and Gautier during the period of composition and editing of "The Wasteland." Kenner footnotes the epitaph:

A line of Ronsard, connected by Pound with the "Épithaphe" of Corbière, to whose procedures "Mauberly" is related as early Eliot is related to Laforgue. At the time when "Mauberly" was written, Eliot was getting rid of Laforgue and in collaboration with Pound assimilating Corbière and Gautier. The Corbière reverberations are functional in Pound's poem, relating it to still more complex modes of self-knowledge than we have opportunity to go into here. At its deepest levels, the poem is still virtually unread.¹¹²

Although Kenner attaches more importance to the influences of Corbière than of Laforgue in "Mauberly" justifiably, the Laforguan techniques of creating ironic tones are apparent throughout the poem. In addition, Pound's publication of "Irony, Laforgue and Some Satire" in Poetry (November, 1917), was concurrent with his

¹¹² Kenner, The Poetry of Ezra Pound, p. 151.

creation of the first section of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly."
In that article, Pound notes one technique of Laforgue's
which he borrowed for "Mauberly":

He is an incomparable artist. He is, nine-tenths
of him, critic--dealing for the most part with liter-
ary poses and clichés, taking them as his subject
matter; and--and this is the important thing when we
think of him as a poet--he makes them a vehicle for the
expression of his own very personal emotions, of his
own unperturbed sincerity.

Je ne suis pas ce 'gaillard-là' ni Le Superbe!
Mais mon âme, qu'un cri un peu cru exacerbe,
Est au fond distinguée et franche comme une herbe.

I do not think one can too carefully discriminate
between Laforgue's tone and that of his contemporary
French satirists. He is the finest wrought; he is
the most 'verbalist'. Bad verbalism is rhetoric,
or the use of cliché unconsciously, or a mere playing
with phrases. But there is good verbalism, distinct
from lyricism or imagism, and in this Laforgue is the
master. He writes not the popular language of any
country but an international tongue common to the
excessively cultivated, and to those more or less
familiar with French literature of the first three-
fourths of the nineteenth century.¹¹³

In "Mauberly," Pound deflates the literary poses of the
preceding generation of Pre-Raphaelites, aesthetes and
decadents, by turning their clichés and high blown literary
rhetoric against them:

Unaffected by "the march of events,"
He passed from men's memory in l'an trentiesme
De son eage; the case presents
No adjunct to the Muses' diadem. (p. 187)

Pound has smoothly built two clichés into the first two
lines and then reinforced their capacity for ironic tone
with the final literary diagnosis.

¹¹³Pound, *Literary Essays*, p. 282.

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The following stanza serves as an example of Pound's version of Laforguan irony induced by what René Taupin calls "des successions de mots internationales" and what Pound calls--with tongue in cheek--"an international tongue common to the excessively cultivated":

Incapable of the least utterance or composition,
Emendation, conservation of the "better tradition,"
Refinement of medium, elimination of superfluties,
August attraction or concentration. (p. 202)

The use of polysyllabic words in sequence for ironic effect is found throughout "The Age Demanded" section. Excluding the "-tion" words in the quoted stanza, there are seventeen other "-tion" polysyllabics shared among eight stanzas. Further evidence that this device is Laforguan may be found in Pound's translation of Laforgue's poem "Pierrots" where the "-tion" words are translated directly from the original in the third stanza:

My soul's antennae are prey to such perturbations,
Wounded by your indirectness in these situations
And your bundle of mundane complications. (p. 247)

In another instance (poem XII, stanza 6) Pound has borrowed the ironic opening line of Laforgue's poem "Complainte des Pianos": "Menez l'âme que les Lettres ont bien nourrie," and translated it--"conduct, on the other hand, the soul / 'which the highest cultures have nourished' / To Fleet St. where / Dr. Johnson flourished." (p. 196) In the following stanzas Pound uses the literary

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pose and cliché as "a vehicle for the expression of his own very personal emotions and unperturbed sincerity":

--Given that is his "fundamental passion,"
This urge to convey the relation
Of eye-lid and cheek-bone
By verbal manifestations . . . (p. 200)

and

Knowing my coat has never been
Of precisely the fashion
To stimulate, in her,
A durable passion . . . (P. 196)

It would appear that Pound's admiration for Laforgue, if anything, increased during the composition period of "Mauberly," for in February, 1918, he wrote in Little Review, "Laforgue is the 'last word'--out of infinite knowledge of all the ways of saying a thing he finds the right way."

In order to bring what Kenner calls "the Corbière reverberations" in "Mauberly" under closer scrutiny it is appropriate first to present a representative work of Corbière's and review some of Pound's comments about this poet made at the time of composition of "Mauberly."

Vénerie

O Vénus, dans ta Vénerie,
Limier et piqueur à la fois,
Valet-de-chiens et d'écurie,
J'ai vu l'Hallali, les Abois! . . .

Que Diane aussi me sourie! . . .
A cors, à cris, à pleine voix
Je fais le pied, je fais le bois;
Car on dit que: bête varie . . .

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--Un pied de biche: Le voici,
 Cordon de sonnette sur rue,
 --Bois de cerf: de la porte aussi;
 --Et puis un pied: un pied-de-grue! . . .

O Fauve après qui j'aboyais,
 --Je suis fourbu, qu'on me relaie!--
 O Bête, es-tu donc une laie?

.
 Bien moins sauvage te croyais!¹¹⁴

This poem depends on a series of puns and extended connotations which are impossible to translate into English. The result is an extended metaphor which plays on the parallels between hunting a wild beast and hunting a woman. For example, in the third stanza "pied de biche" can mean either a buck's track or the bell-pull of a door. "Pied-de-grue" means "hanging around" and the slang "grue" means "whore." In the fourth stanza "laie" means a wild sow, but the homophone "Lais" means "courtezan." The ambiguity of the title suggests both hunting and sexual indulgence.

Despite the ambiguity in meaning, the images of this poem are clear, hard, short, and arranged so as to produce a kind of staccato impact on the reader.

Taupin relates that Pound admired Corbière and found him to have "'clear cut images,' l'absence de rhétorique, les mouvements brusques, les mots qui déchirent,

¹¹⁴Tristan Corbière, "Vénerie," The Penguin Book of French Verse, 3, p. 234.

les calembours, et l'ironie intense."¹¹⁵ In the February issue of Poetry, 1918, Pound discussed the "hard and the soft in French poetry" and praised Corbière for being "hard, not with a glaze or parian finish, but hard like weather-bit granite."¹¹⁶ In the November issue of Poetry the year before, Pound had said of Corbière: "Corbière is hard-bitten, perhaps the most poignant poet since Villon, in very much Villon's manner."¹¹⁷ His admiration for Corbière's style was long-standing as his comments in the December, 1913, issue of The New Age (seven years before "Mauberly") indicate: "The quintessence of style is precisely that it should be swift and mordant (like Corbière's)," and "He is more real than the 'realists' because he still recognizes that force of romance which is a quite real and apparently ineradicable part of our life."¹¹⁸

Pound's use of the pun, extended metaphor and melopoeia (which he says cannot be translated "save by divine accident") serve as vehicles for both irony and satire in "Mauberly" in the same way that they served Corbière.

¹¹⁵Taupin, L'influence du symbolisme français sur la poésie américaine (de 1910 à 1920), p. 138.

¹¹⁶Pound, Literary Essays, p. 288.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 282.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 18.

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In a more particular sense, Pound has used the staccato phrasing of Corbière (see the third stanza of "Vénerie" above) to accelerate the pace of his phrasing so that the effect of the final ironic lines of the passage slam into the reader just as he reaches full stride. Sections IV and V of "Mauberly" employ this device:

.....
 Daring as never before . . .
 fortitude as never before
 frankness as never before
 disillusion as never told in the old days,
 hysterias, trench confessions,
 laughter out of dead bellies. (p. 190)

and directly following:

There died a myriad,
 And of the best among them,
 For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
 For a botched civilisation. (p. 191)

Pound has delivered the irony with the last two lines, but the final, terrible coup de grâce remains in the last two stanzas:

Charm, smiling at the good mouth,
 Quick eyes gone under earth's lid,

 For two gross of broken statues,
 For a few thousand battered books. (p. 191)

In noting Corbière's influence, it is interesting to compare the third stanza of section II of "Mauberly" with the language that Pound used in his prose criticism to describe Corbière.

Pound described Corbière's style variously as:

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"hard," "like weather-bit granite," "more real than the 'realists'" and "swift and mordant."

In the third stanza of section II he makes this distinction:

The "age demanded" chiefly a mould in plaster,
 Made with no loss of time,
 A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster
 Or the "sculpture" of rhyme. (p. 188)

In the Cantos Pound has made the two arts symbolize anti-thetical states of mind: the cut stone is associated with clarity of ideas; the moulded or modeled, with fuzziness and muddled thinking. It is not unfair to assume that the lament for the disappearing "'sculpture' of rhyme" is directly related to the poet's concern to "resuscitate the dead art of poetry"; and especially the art of Laforgue, Corbière and Gautier.

The ironic tone and techniques of Laforgue and Corbière were used throughout "Mauberly" and were continued to be used by Pound throughout the Cantos.

The influence of Théophile Gautier's poetry and aesthetics deeply pervades "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly," and is also apparent in the Cantos. Taupin notes that the first poem of section two carefully paraphrases Gautier:

'His true Penelope
 Was Flaubert,'
 And his tool
 The engraver's.

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Firmness,
Not the full smile,
His art, but an art
In profile. (p. 198)

Compare those two stanzas with this from Gautier's "L'Art":

D'une main délicate
Poursuis dans un filon
D'agate
Le profil d'Apollon.

Gautier's injunction to poets to behave as sculptors and engravers is further echoed in both the manner and matter of Mauberly's only artistic creation--the final poem of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly"--"Medallion."

Medallion

Luini in porcelain!
The grand piano
Utters a profane
Protest with her clear soprano.

The sleek head emerges
From the gold-yellow frock
As Anadyomene in the opening
Pages of Reinach.

Honey-red, closing the face-oval,
A basket-work of braids which seem as if they
were

Spun in King Minos' hall
From metal, or intractable amber;

The face-oval beneath the glaze
Bright in its suave bounding-line, as,
Beneath half-watt rays,
The eyes turn topaz. (p. 204)

This is "wrought" in four four-line stanzas after the style of Gautier, and deals with the description of an etched cameo figure of the head of Aphrodite. The

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irony implicit in using Gautier's techniques to describe an unsuccessful English aesthete at once indicates Pound's rejection of pseudo-aestheticism and his respect for Gautier's technical perfections. The pronounced rhythms and the short line stanzas of most of the poems of "Mauberly" reflect this irony implicitly.

The sculptured effect of the "Yeux Glauques" poem in particular shows Gautier's influence:

Thin like brook-water,
With a vacant gaze.
The English Rubaiyat was still-born
In those days. (p. 192)

The directness of presentation, the sharp, clear imagery, and the isolation of single images, were all techniques used by Gautier in Emaux et Camées to render the same "hard" effects achieved in "Mauberly" that Pound spoke of so highly in his essay "The Hard and the Soft in French Poetry." The depth of Pound's interest in Gautier is further illustrated by the fact that during the period Pound was writing "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly" (1917 - 1920) he was also directing T. S. Eliot to the subtleties of Gautier's techniques in Emaux et Camées.¹¹⁹

The final major direct influence from the French Symbolists on "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly" is Rimbaud. Like Gautier, Rimbaud's influence in this poem is pervasive,

¹¹⁹Donald Gallup, "T. S. Eliot & Ezra Pound," The Atlantic, Vol. 225, No. 1, (January, 1970), p. 52.

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although not as easily identified as that of Laforgue and Corbière.

In his prose works, Pound lauded Rimbaud for "bringing back phanopoeia" with the use of clear, direct images; for re-energizing poetry with a realistic vitality; and for his use of vivid and imaginative juxtapositions of images. These elements are all apparent in "Mauberly." The description of the lost generation in part five of section one recalls the vivid, shocking and bitter images of Rimbaud's "Le Bateau Ivre,"

V

There died a myriad,
And of the best, among them,
For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
For a botched civilization,

Charm, smiling at the good mouth,
Quick eyes gone under earth's lid,

For two gross of broken statues,
For a few thousand battered books. (p. 191)

The "old bitch gone in the teeth" is reminiscent of Rimbaud's contemporary society in "Le Bateau Ivre," and the description of dead youth in "Charm, smiling at the good mouth / Quick eyes gone under earth's lid," is paralleled in Rimbaud's "Le Dormeur du Val" with the lines describing the dead young soldier as "Souriant comme / Sourirait un enfant malade, il fait un somme."¹²⁰ In his "Yeux Glauques" poem

¹²⁰ Arthur Rimbaud, "Le Dormeur de Val," French Poetry from Baudelaire to the Present (New York, 1962), pp. 99-100.

Pound refers to the Pre-Raphaelite model's "Faun's head" and echoes Rimbaud's imagery in "Tête de faune." (The faun figure also makes images of Mallarmé's "L'Après midi d'un faune" reverberate throughout the passage.)

The synecdoche and juxtaposition of images (or transferred epithets) of section five are typical of the influence of Rimbaudian technique in the poem. Not just the use of such devices, but the manner in which Pound presents his images, is most reminiscent of Rimbaud's style. It is, as Pound stated in his comments on Rimbaud, "an absorbed influence."

Personae

Several other poems in the 1926 edition of Personae corroborate the Symbolist influences already noted in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly" and indicate in addition Pound's operating knowledge of particular techniques and concepts not apparent in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly."

In "The Return" (1912), for example, Pound crystallizes his knowledge of the strophe and marries the rhythms of the lines precisely to their meanings. Although both free verse and absolute rhythm are clearly apparent in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly," "The Return" is derivative of the rhythms of Henri de Régnier's introductory poem in

Médailles d'Argile (1900). Pound cuts his lines at the same intervals and uses the same sort of expression and repetition:

Régnier: Une à une, vous les comptiez en souriant,
Et vous disiez: Il est habile;
Et vous passiez en souriant.¹²¹

Pound: See, they return, one, and by one,
With fear, as half-awakened;
As if the snow should hesitate
And murmur in the wind,
and half turn back . . .¹²²

Every line in the poem has a definite expressive rhythm, but no two lines are exactly alike and it is the rhythm itself that defines much of the meaning. For example, the shift in tense from present to past in the fourth strophe is introduced by three lines of similarly emphatic rhythmic value:

Gods of the wingèd shoe!
With them the silver hounds,
sniffing the trace of air!
(p. 74)

Each line contains a dactyl, iamb and single stressed syllable and so asserts and repeats a rhythmic pattern that establishes the hesitant nature of the old gods' return. This, and other combinations of rhythms, refine Régnier's attempt to assert what Pound called "absolute rhythm" and make the explicit statement that the gods are

¹²¹Cited in Taupin, L'influence de symbolisme français sur la poésie américaine (1910-1920), p. 143.

¹²²Pound, "The Return," Personae, p. 74.

thing."¹²⁴

René Taupin found strong French influences throughout the Lustra poems and especially noted the influence of Tailhade in "The Garden" and "Les Millwin." The technique of deliberate, direct insult in these poems derives from Tailhade's "Vendredi Saint" and "Place des Victoires."¹²⁵ Even the subjects of the insults are the same. Old women, the disillusioned, the bourgeoisie and poetasters receive the brunt of both Tailhade's and Pound's attacks. In the first of four cruel portraits of dying love in "Ladies" Pound attacks with Tailhade's method of direct insult:

Agathas

Four and forty lovers had Agathas in the old
days,
All of whom she refused;
And now she turns to me seeking love,
And her hair also is turning. (p. 102)

In "Epitaph" Pound uses the same method to characterize the failing Leucis:

Epitaph

Leucis, who intended a Grand Passion,
Ends with a willingness-to-oblige. (p. 99)

In "The Bellaires" Pound attacks the bourgeoisie's lack of ability to handle their own business affairs and takes the

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 191.

¹²⁵ Taupin, L'influence du symbolisme français sur la poésie américaine (1910 - 1920), p. 146.

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opportunity to insult the legal sycophants attached to the family:

Nine lawyers, four counsels, etc.
Met to discuss their affairs,
But the sole result was bills
From lawyers to whom no one was indebted,
And even the lawyers
Were uncertain who was supposed to be indebted
to them. (p. 98)

In "Simulacra" Pound uses the same technique to impale the period poetaster:

Simulacra

Why does the horse-faced lady of just the
unmentionable age
Walk down Longacre reciting Swinburne to
herself, inaudibly? (p. 114)

The imagery, tone, vocabulary and method of Tailhade's direct invective may be found throughout the Lustra poems and make later appearances in the Cantos.

The influence of Francis Jammes' Existences is apparent in Pound's "Moeurs Contemporaines" poems. Although Taupin finds Jammes' influence to be a minor one, he records that Pound wrote him concerning Existences: "peut-être la meilleure des oeuvres écrites par un auteur français vivant."¹²⁶ The same sketches of contemporary scenes and personalities; short glimpses of everyday life that revealed the mores of the period are the fundamental subject matter of both works. In "Moeurs Contemporaines" Pound uses the

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 146.

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same methods as Jammes of revealing a contemporary attitude by juxtaposing snatches of dialogue with personal commentary:

And he said:
 "Oh! Abelard!" as if the topic
 Were much too abstruse for his comprehension,
 And he talked about "the Great Mary,"
 And said: "Mr. Pound is shocked at my levity."
 When it turned out he meant Mrs. Ward. (p.181)

In the eighth poem of the series, Pound characterizes an old lady of aristocratic fashion in the same manner:

VIII

And she said:
 "You remember Mr. Lowell,
 "He was your ambassador here?"
 And I said: "That was before I arrived."
 And she said:
 "He stomped into my bedroom. . . .
 (By that time she had got on to Browning.)
 ". . . stomped into my bedroom. . . .
 "And said: 'Do I,
 "'I ask you, Do I
 "'Care too much for society dinners?"
 "And I wouldn't say that he didn't.
 "Shelly used to live in this house."

She was a very old lady,
 I never saw her again. (P. 182)

Summary and Conclusion

Although this is only a representative examination of the French Symbolist influence in Personae, the examples cited show that Pound was considerably more influenced by Symbolist methods and techniques than is generally acknowledged by contemporary critics. This is true to the extent

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that a comprehensive analysis of any one of the major influences--Gautier, Rimbaud, Laforgue or Corbière--through the 1926 edition of Personae, would occupy a full-length critical study. The evidencing of all the minor influences of French Symbolists would probably provide a work of similar length; as would a general study of the influence of Remy de Gourmont on Pound's early poetic development.

CONCLUSION

Although particular conclusions on the nature and extent of French Symbolist influence on Pound's early poetry are contained in the summaries at the end of each chapter, a few general comments may now provide some useful perspectives on the study as a whole.

It should first be noted that Pound derived poetic concepts and techniques from a very great many sources. Chinese, Japanese, Medieval French, Anglo-Saxon, German, Latin, and Greek literatures all served to influence him in their own fashion to much the same degree as the French Symbolist poets. It is within this general context and understanding that the present exclusive study was undertaken.

The delineation of the chronology of the French Symbolist movement is rather longer than most because it is clear that Pound himself included the Parnassian movement in the Symbolist tradition as evidenced by his comments on Théophile Gautier in his prose writings. Pound viewed the Symbolist movement itself as he later came to view world literature in the Cantos--as a heterogeneous continuum. It was undoubtedly because of this point of view that Pound more readily accepted literary techniques and concepts from other cultures than did many of his contemporaries.

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The French Symbolist influences implanted in Pound's early poetry remain, with occasional refinements, throughout his entire canon and have been noted, though not closely analysed, in Vasse and Edwards' Annotated Index to the Cantos of Ezra Pound.

The pioneer work of René Taupin provides the initial stimulus for this thesis. For the most part his work has been ignored by the majority of Pound's critics. Its general unavailability and the fact that it has not yet been translated into English may account for much of the critical neglect of French Symbolist influences in Pound's early poetry.

Pound's essays and articles provide the initial evidences of influence and indicate, in their statements on particular Symbolist poets, the specific concepts and techniques that most interested Pound during the period under study. Where these initial clues are corroborated by Pound's utilization and adaptation of Symbolist methods and techniques, it is safe to assume that influence is present. This study has attempted to show enough of these corroborative instances to conclude that the French Symbolist influence on Pound's aesthetics and poetry from 1908 to 1920 was both a powerful and pervasive one.

The ordering of Pound's comments and analyses of Symbolist methods--and their evident presence in his early

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poetry--opens four major directions for further research. First, a close textual analysis of the Cantos in light of the French Symbolist influences disclosed in the early poetry might reveal further levels of meaning in that already complex and difficult work. Second, as mentioned in the Summary and Conclusions of Chapter Three, a thorough analysis of the influence of any one of Gautier, Rimbaud, Corbière or Laforgue throughout the 1926 edition of Personae would provide a fruitful study in comparative literature. Third, in the same direction, a thorough examination of the influence of Remy de Gourmont on Pound's canon would also undoubtedly bear interesting and useful results. A final possible direction for further study might be the thorough analysis of French Symbolist influences derived by Pound through the medium of the English poets of the Transition period.

Each of these areas of examination would require a full-length critical study (as do many other aspects of Pound's poetry and criticism) well beyond the scope of this thesis. The attempt to contend with virtually any aspect of Pound's universal and eclectic intelligence recalls his introductory poem to Lustra:

And the days are not full enough
 And the nights are not full enough
 And life slips by like a field mouse
 Not shaking the grass.

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ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is an exploration of the relationships between the concepts and methods of French Symbolism and the early poetry of Ezra Pound.

The first chapter begins with a description and analysis of the French Symbolist movement and then examines representative contemporary English critical points of view on the basic nature of Symbolism. This chapter concludes with an attempt to provide functional explanations of the major Symbolist and Imagist concepts used throughout the thesis.

Chapter Two examines Ezra Pound's approach to particular French Symbolist concepts and methods, and attempts to compare direct French Symbolist influences in his work with indirect influences from France which he derived from such fin de siècle English poets as A. C. Swinburne and W. B. Yeats. The major French Symbolists analysed in this chapter are Gautier, Rimbaud, Laforgue, and Corbière. The influence of Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Remy de Gourmont is also examined.

The third chapter begins with an analysis of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly" and attempts to show how the above French Symbolist influences operate in that and other shorter poems from Personae (1926).

The final portion of this thesis provides some

ABSTRACT

Conclusions on the nature and extent of French Symbolist influence in the early poetry of Ezra Pound, and indicates further directions for study.