

EZRA POUND



PERSONÆ

THE SHORTER POEMS

*A REVISED EDITION PREPARED BY
LEA BAECHLER & A. WALTON LITZ*

P E R S O N Æ

**THE SHORTER POEMS OF
EZRA POUND**

A Revised Edition Prepared by
Lea Baechler and A. Walton Litz

A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK

THIS BOOK IS FOR
MARY MOORE
OF TRENTON, IF SHE
WANTS IT

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THE TREE

I stood still and was a tree amid the wood,
Knowing the truth of things unseen before;
Of Daphne and the laurel bow
And that god-feasting couple old
That grew elm-oak amid the wold.
'Twas not until the gods had been
Kindly entreated, and been brought within
Unto the hearth of their heart's home
That they might do this wonder thing;
Nathless I have been a tree amid the wood
And many a new thing understood
That was rank folly to my head before.

THRENOS

No more for us the little sighing.
No more the winds at twilight trouble us.

Lo the fair dead!

No more do I burn.
No more for us the fluttering of wings
That whirred in the air above us.

Lo the fair dead!

No more desire flayeth me,
No more for us the trembling
At the meeting of hands.

Lo the fair dead!

No more for us the wine of the lips,
No more for us the knowledge.

Lo the fair dead!

No more the torrent,
No more for us the meeting-place
(Lo the fair dead!)
Tintagoel.

LA FRAISNE

For I was a gaunt, grave councillor
Being in all things wise, and very old,
But I have put aside this folly and the cold
That old age weareth for a cloak.

I was quite strong—at least they said so—
The young men at the sword-play;
But I have put aside this folly, being gay
In another fashion that more suiteth me.

I have curled 'mid the boles of the ash wood,
I have hidden my face where the oak
Spread his leaves over me, and the yoke
Of the old ways of men have I cast aside.

By the still pool of Mar-nan-otha
Have I found me a bride
That was a dog-wood tree some syne.
She hath called me from mine old ways
She hath hushed my rancour of council,
Bidding me praise

Naught but the wind that flutters in the leaves.

She hath drawn me from mine old ways,
Till men say that I am mad;
But I have seen the sorrow of men, and am glad,
For I know that the wailing and bitterness are a folly.
And I? I have put aside all folly and all grief.
I wrapped my tears in an ellum leaf
And left them under a stone

And now men call me mad because I have thrown
All folly from me, putting it aside
To leave the old barren ways of men,
Because my bride
Is a pool of the wood, and
Though all men say that I am mad
It is only that I am glad,
Very glad, for my bride hath toward me a great love
That is sweeter than the love of women
That plague and burn and drive one away.

Aie-el!' Tis true that I am gay
Quite gay, for I have her alone here
And no man troubleth us.

Once when I was among the young men ...
And they said I was quite strong, among the young men.
Once there was a woman ...
... but I forget ... she was ...
... I hope she will not come again.

... I do not remember

I think she hurt me once, but ..

That was very long ago.

I do not like to remember things any more.

I like one little band of winds that blow
In the ash trees here:
For we are quite alone
Here 'mid the ash trees.

CINO

Italian Campagna 1309, the open road

Bah! I have sung women in three cities,
But it is all the same;

And I will sing of the sun.

Lips, words, and you snare them,
Dreams, words, and they are as jewels,
Strange spells of old deity,
Ravens, nights, allurements:
And they are not;
Having become the souls of song.

Eyes, dreams, lips, and the night goes.
Being upon the road once more,
They are not.
Forgetful in their towers of our tuning
Once for Wind-runeing
They dream us-toward and
Sighing, say, "Would Cino,
Passionate Cino, of the wrinkling eyes,
Gay Cino, of quick laughter,
Cino, of the dare, the jibe,
Frail Cino, strongest of his tribe
That tramp old ways beneath the sun-light,
Would Cino of the Luth were here!"

Once, twice, a year—
Vaguely thus word they:
"Cino?" "Oh, eh, Cino Polnesi
The singer is't you mean?"
"Ah yes, passed once our way,
A saucy fellow, but ...
(Oh they are all one these vagabonds),
Peste! 'tis his own songs?
Or some other's that he sings?
But *you*, My Lord, how with your city?"

But you "My Lord," God's pity!
And all I knew were out, My Lord, you
Were Lack-land Cino, e'en as I am,
O Sinistro.

I have sung women in three cities.
But it is all one.
I will sing of the sun.
... eh? ... they mostly had grey eyes,
But it is all one, I will sing of the sun.

"Polio Phoibee, old tin pan, you

Glory to Zeus' aegis-day,
Shield o' steel-blue, th' heaven o'er us
Hath for boss thy lustre gay!

'Polio Phoibee, to our way-fare
Make thy laugh our wander-lied;
Bid thy 'fulgence bear away care.
Cloud and rain-tears pass they fleet!

Seeking e'er the new-laid rast-way

To the gardens of the sun ...”

.

I have sung women in three cities
But it is all one.

I will sing of the white birds
In the blue waters of heaven,
The clouds that are spray to its sea.

NA AUDIART

Que be-m vols mal

Note: Anyone who has read anything of the troubadours knows well the tale of Bertran of Born and My Lady Maent of Montagnac, and knows also the song he made when she would none of him, the song wherein he, seeking to find or make her equal, begs of each preeminent lady of Langue d'Oc some trait or some fair semblance: thus of Cembelins her “esgart amoros” to wit, her love-lit glance of Aelis her speech free-running, of the Vicomtesse of Chalais her throat and her two hands, Roacoart of Anhes her hair golden as Iseult's; and even in this fashion of Lady Audiart “although she would that ill come unto him” he sought and praised the lineaments of the torse. And all this to make “Una dompna soiseubuda” a borrowed lady or as the Italians translated it “Una donna ideale.”

Though thou well dost wish me ill
Audiart, Audiart,

Where thy bodice laces start
As ivy fingers clutching through
Its crevices,

Audiart, Audiart,
Stately, tall and lovely tender

Who shall render

Audiart, Audiart,

Praises meet unto thy fashion?

Here a word kiss!

Pass I on

Unto Lady “Miels-de-Ben,”

Having praised thy girdle’s scope

How the stays ply back from it;

I breathe no hope

That thou shouldst ...

Nay no whit

Bespeak thyself for anything.

Just a word in thy praise, girl,

Just for the swirl

Thy satins make upon the stair,

’Cause never a flaw was there

Where thy torse and limbs are met

Though thou hate me, read it set

In rose and gold.¹

Or when the minstrel, tale half told,

Shall burst to liling at the phrase

“Audiart, Audiart” ...

Bertrans, master of his lays,

Bertrans of Aultaforte thy praise

Sets forth, and though thou hate me well,

Yea though thou wish me ill,

Audiart, Audiart.

Thy loveliness is here writ till,

Audiart,

Oh, till thou come again.²

And being bent and wrinkled, in a form

That hath no perfect limning, when the warm

Youth dew is cold

Upon thy hands, and thy old soul

Scorning a new, wry’d casement,

Churlish at seemed misplacement,

Finds the earth as bitter
As now seems it sweet,

Being so young and fair
As then only in dreams,

Being then young and wry’d,
Broken of ancient pride,

Thou shalt then soften,

Knowing, I know not how,
Thou wert once she

Audiart, Audiart

For whose fairness one forgave

Audiart,

Audiart

Que be-m vols mal.

¹ *I.e.* In illumed manuscript.

² Reincarnate.

VILLONAUD FOR THIS YULE

Towards the Noel that morte saison
(*Christ make the shepherds' homage dear!*)
Then when the grey wolves everychone
Drink of the winds their chill small-beer
And lap o' the snows food's gueredon
Then makyth my heart his yule-tide cheer
(Skoal! with the dregs if the clear be gone!)
Wining the ghosts of yester-year.

Ask ye what ghosts I dream upon?
(*What of the magians' scented gear?*)
The ghosts of dead loves everyone
That make the stark winds reek with fear
Lest love return with the foison sun
And slay the memories that me cheer
(Such as I drink to mine fashion)
Wining the ghosts of yester-year.
Where are the joys my heart had won?
(*Saturn and Mars to Zeus drawn near!*)¹
Where are the lips mine lay upon,
Aye! where are the glances feat and clear
That bade my heart his valour don?
I skoal to the eyes as grey-blown mere
(Who knows whose was that paragon?)

Wining the ghosts of yester-year.

Prince: ask me not what I have done
Nor what God hath that can me cheer
But ye ask first where the winds are gone
Wining the ghosts of yester-year.

¹ *Signum Nativitatis.*

A VILLONAUD: BALLAD OF THE GIBBET

Or the Song of the Sixth Companion

SCENE: “*En ce bourdel où tenons nostre estat.*”

It being remembered that there were six of us with Master Villon, when that expecting presently to be hanged he writ a ballad whereof ye know: “*Frères humains qui après nous vivez.*”

Drink ye a skoal for the gallows tree!
François and Margot and thee and me,
Drink we the comrades merrily
That said us, “Till then” for the gallows tree!

Fat Pierre with the hook gauche-main,
Thomas Larron “Ear-the-less,”
Tybalde and that armouress
Who gave this poignard its premier stain
Pinning the Guise that had been fain
To make him a mate of the “Haulte Noblesse”
And bade her be out with ill address
As a fool that mocketh his drue’s disdeign.

Drink we a skoal for the gallows tree!
François and Margot and thee and me,
Drink we to Marianne Ydole,
That hell brenn not her o’er cruelly.

Drink we the lusty robbers twain,
Black is the pitch o’ their wedding dress,¹
Lips shrunk back for the wind’s caress
As lips shrink back when we feel the strain

Of love that loveth in hell's disdeign,
And sense the teeth through the lips that press
'Gainst our lips for the soul's distress
That striveth to ours across the pain.

Drink we skoal to the gallows tree!
François and Margot and thee and me,
For Jehan and Raoul de Vallerie
Whose frames have the night and its winds in fee.

Maturin, Guillaume, Jacques d'Allmain,
Culdou lacking a coat to bless
One lean moiety of his nakedness
That plundered St. Hubert back o' the fane:
Aie! the lean bare tree is widowed again
For Michault le Borgne that would confess
In "faith and troth" to a traitoress,
"Which of his brothers had he slain?"

But drink we skoal to the gallows tree!
François and Margot and thee and me:

These that we loved shall God love less
And smite alway at their faibleness?

Skoal!! to the gallows! and then pray we:
God damn his hell out speedily
And bring their souls to his "Haulte Citee."

¹ Certain gibbeted corpses used to be coated with tar as a preservative; thus one scarecrow served warning for considerable time. See Hugo, *L'Homme qui Rit*.

MESMERISM

"And a cat's in the water-butt."—Robert Browning

Aye you're a man that! ye old mesmerizer
Tyin' your meanin' in seventy swadelin's,
One must of needs be a hang'd early riser
To catch you at worm turning. Holy Odd's bodykins!

“Cat’s i’ the water butt!” Thought’s in your verse-barrel,
Tell us this thing rather, then we’ll believe you,
You, Master Bob Browning, spite your apparel
Jump to your sense and give praise as we’d lief do.

You wheeze as a head-cold long-tonsilled Calliope,
But God! what a sight you ha’ got o’ our in’ards,
Mad as a hatter but surely no Myope,
Broad as all ocean and leanin’ man-kin’ards.

Heart that was big as the bowels of Vesuvius,
Words that were wing’d as her sparks in eruption,
Eagled and thundered as Jupiter Pluvius,
Sound in your wind past all signs o’ corruption.

Here’s to you, Old Hippety-Hop o’ the accents,
True to the Truth’s sake and crafty dissector,
You grabbed at the gold sure; had no need to pack cents
Into your versicles.

Clear sight’s elector!

FAMAM LIBROSQUE CANO

Your songs?

Oh! The little mothers
Will sing them in the twilight,
And when the night
Shrinketh the kiss of the dawn
That loves and kills,
What times the swallow fills
Her note, the little rabbit folk
That some call children,
Such as are up and wide,
Will laugh your verses to each other,
Pulling on their shoes for the day’s business,
Serious child business that the world
Laughs at, and grows stale;
Such is the tale
—Part of it—of thy song-life.

Mine?

A book is known by them that read
That same. Thy public in my screed
Is listed. Well! Some score years hence
Behold mine audience,
As we had seen him yesterday.

Scrawny, be-spectacled, out at heels,
Such an one as the world feels
A sort of curse against its guzzling
And its age-lasting wallow for red greed
And yet; full speed
Though it should run for its own getting,
Will turn aside to sneer at
'Cause he hath
No coin, no will to snatch the aftermath
Of Mammon
Such an one as women draw away from
For the tobacco ashes scattered on his coat
And sith his throat
Shows razor's unfamiliarity
And three days' beard;

Such an one picking a ragged
Backless copy from the stall,
Too cheap for cataloguing,
Loquitur,

“Ah-eh! the strange rare name ...
Ah-eh! He must be rare if even *I* have not ...”
And lost mid-page
Such age
As his pardons the habit,
He analyses form and thought to see
How I 'scaped immortality.

PRAISE OF YSOLT

In vain have I striven,

to teach my heart to bow;

In vain have I said to him

“There be many singers greater than thou.”

But his answer cometh, as winds and as lutany,

As a vague crying upon the night

That leaveth me no rest, saying ever,

“Song, a song.”

Their echoes play upon each other in the twilight

Seeking ever a song.

Lo, I am worn with travail

And the wandering of many roads hath made my eyes

As dark red circles filled with dust.

Yet there is a trembling upon me in the twilight,

And little red elf words crying “A song,”

Little grey elf words crying for a song,

Little brown leaf words crying “A song,”

Little green leaf words crying for a song.

The words are as leaves, old brown leaves in the spring time

Blowing they know not whither, seeking a song.

White words as snow flakes but they are cold,

Moss words, lip words, words of slow streams.

In vain have I striven

to teach my soul to bow,

In vain have I pled with him:

“There be greater souls than thou.”

For in the morn of my years there came a woman

As moonlight calling,

As the moon calleth the tides,

“Song, a song.”

Wherefore I made her a song and she went from me

As the moon doth from the sea,

But still came the leaf words, little brown elf words

Saying “The soul sendeth us.”

“A song, a song!”

And in vain I cried unto them “I have no song

For she I sang of hath gone from me.”

But my soul sent a woman, a woman of the wonderfolk,

A woman as fire upon the pine woods

crying “Song, a song.”

As the flame crieth unto the sap.

My song was ablaze with her and she went from me

As flame leaveth the embers so went she unto new forests

And the words were with me

crying ever "Song, a song."

And I "I have no song,"

Till my soul sent a woman as the sun:

Yea as the sun calleth to the seed,

As the spring upon the bough

So is she that cometh, the mother of songs,

She that holdeth the wonder words within her eyes

The words, little elf words

that call ever unto me,

"Song, a song."

In vain have I striven with my soul

to teach my soul to bow.

What soul boweth

while in his heart art thou?

DE ÆGYPTO

I, even I, am he who knoweth the roads

Through the sky, and the wind thereof is my body.

I have beheld the Lady of Life,

I, even I, who fly with the swallows.

Green and gray is her raiment,

Trailing along the wind.

I, even I, am he who knoweth the roads

Through the sky, and the wind thereof is my body.

Manus animam pinxit,

My pen is in my hand

To write the acceptable word....

My mouth to chant the pure singing!

Who hath the mouth to receive it,

The song of the Lotus of Kumi?

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