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Interdisciplinary Modernism: Ezra
Pound's *Le Testament de Villon* and his
approach to opera

Lydia Hatton Baldwin

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters by
Research in Music

1st September 2018

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Abstract

Best known for his contributions to poetry, Ezra Pound has been long-hailed as a pioneer of modernism. His *Cantos* have been widely studied for their deeper meaning and poetic style, often leading to the neglect of Pound's achievements in other artistic fields.¹ In this thesis, I will be evaluating Pound's style and approach from an interdisciplinary perspective, investigating the consistency with which Pound applied his style across his work in different disciplines. Pound's involvement with the BBC was extremely important to his continued success, so I will explore his relationships within the institution and question the impact these had on him and his longevity. Finally, I will analyse his use of form and media, for which I will primarily be using Pound's first radio opera *Le Testament de Villon* as a case study, with references to his second opera *Cavalcanti*. Pound's operas are by far the least well-known of his works, so serve as useful examples when exploring how effective Pound was as an interdisciplinary modernist.

There are multiple paradoxical elements of both Pound's work and his supporting literature (such as his Imagist manifesto *A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste*). Inconsistencies between theory and practice challenge Pound's credibility in regards to being a consistent and authentic modernist, and this is also something I will be considering in this thesis. I will then be able to tackle the issue of 'Pound's work versus his politics', questioning how the separation of the two, which was allowed to occur by praise from critical texts and chronological distance, has impacted Pound's reception and longevity.

Le Testament de Villon was first broadcast on the BBC in October 1931, making Pound's relationship with the institution a vital part of this thesis. I will be exploring his involvement with the BBC both in terms of the broadcasting of his works, and his employment writing for *The Listener*, using my findings to assess the effect of these relationships on the reception of him and his works. I will also be tackling Pound's work in translation by looking at some examples of his translations and drawing parallels with his approaches and styles in other fields. There are also useful examples of reception to his translations, which will feed into the final section of the thesis.

The topic of reception will be the final issue addressed in this thesis. Public opinion of him and his works have been famously mixed, and I will assess this issue through an interdisciplinary lens by looking at a broader range of sources on reception across his disciplines, rather than a large quantity of sources pertaining to only one artistic field. Pound's operas are arguably the ultimate interdisciplinary works as they incorporate several different disciplines, so by unpicking his approach to them I will be able to create a more well-rounded view of Pound as an artist.

¹ I should note that by 'style', I am referring to Pound's trademark techniques and contents which make the work identifiable as his. When I reference 'approach', I am exploring *how* Pound physically went about creating his operas: his motives, his various collaborations and his innovative use of form and media.

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Introduction

Internationally renowned for his invaluable contribution to poetry, Ezra Pound was far from just a poet. A figurehead of modernism, Pound was working around the turn of the 20th century in multiple artistic fields to change the way art was both perceived and received. Pound and his contemporaries rejected the conventions and ideals held by the Romantics, and rebelled by adopting new methods to create and showcase the arts. He is significant in the histories of literature, poetry, translation and music because of many interweaving, and often contradictory, aspects of his personal views and artistic works. Focusing on Pound's relationships and fascinating use of form and media, with reference to his operas and other works between roughly 1920-1940, I will be examining how his motivation for writing and composing was unique, and how he adapted and repurposed existing conventions to suit his own agenda as an interdisciplinary modernist through his use of language, form and media.

Understanding the motivation behind Pound's operas *Le Testament de Villon* (1920-24) and *Cavalcanti* (c.1931) allows me to evaluate whether Pound's shifts in approach really were innovative, or whether he was in fact just following the broader path in which operatic composition was heading in the early 20th century.² As an interdisciplinary modernist, Pound's approach often seems unique; amongst other motives, Pound is said to have used musical composition as a form of literary criticism.³ 'Interdisciplinary modernist' is not an established term as such, but one I am using to describe Pound due to the nature of his work: simultaneously spanning over, but not confined to, the literary and musical spheres.⁴ Pound was notoriously detailed in his guidelines for 'correct' poetry practice, so comparing this to his musical approach will provide contrasts and parallels between his works in different fields.⁵ It will also aid in assessing the credibility of Pound as a composer; when

² There was a third opera entitled *Collis O Heliconii*, but due to it being unfinished, and being the least well-known/referenced of the 3 operas, I will not be using it as a case study for this dissertation. Pound also wrote musical works for violin, however this dissertation focuses more specifically on his use of the operatic form. For further reading on Pound's 3rd opera, see: Margaret Fisher, *The Recovery Of Ezra Pound's 3rd Opera: Settings Of Poems By Catullus & Sappho*, 1st edn (Emeryville: Second Evening Art Publishing, 2005).

³ The use of composition as a form of literary criticism is one which I will be unpicking in more detail in Chapter 3, cited in:

Margaret Fisher, *Ezra Pound's Radio Operas: The BBC Experiments, 1931-1933*, 1st edn (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 19-20; Robert Hughes and Margaret Fisher, *Cavalcanti: A Perspective On The Music Of Ezra Pound* (Emeryville: Second Evening Art Publishing/ BMI, 2003), p. 1.

⁴ The term 'interdisciplinary modernist' has been used by Christine Froula, mainly in reference to the *Cantos*, but is not a universally accepted term.

⁵ Ezra Pound, "A Few Don'ts By An Imagiste By Ezra Pound", *Poetry Foundation*, 2016 <<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/article/335>> [accessed 30 April 2017].

translating Pound's subversive poetic ideals into a musical context, this model of mismatching method with form and purpose does seem to fit Pound's modernist aesthetic.⁶ Although not the only other example of a composer with an interdisciplinary working method, there are strong parallels between Pound's interdisciplinary approach and Richard Wagner's 'reunification of the arts into *Gesamtkunstwerk*'.⁷ Wagner established this concept much earlier than Pound engaged with it, but the parallels here are still of particular interest because of their shared vision of art and music being united. However, Wagnerian scholar Barry Millington notes that this notion even predates Wagner:

...among those who has previously advocated some sort of unification, either in theory or in practice, were Lessing, Novalis, Tieck, Schelling and Hoffmann, while the idea of the regeneration of art in accordance with Classical ideals can be identified with such writers as Winckelmann, Wieland, Lessing and of course Goethe and Schiller.⁸

This thesis will focus exclusively on Ezra Pound and the bearing of his interdisciplinary work on modernism, but that is not to say that other artists (such as Wagner) did not hold similarities in their approach. There are several artists who employed interdisciplinary elements into their work, however comparing all of them would give way to a far broader topic than can be handled in this thesis.

The discussion of Pound's musical motivations leads to the analysis of his creative processes. As well as using composition as a form of criticism, another interesting element of Pound's methods is the issue of collaboration. Pound's collaborators seem to naturally fit in to two distinct groups: visible and less visible. The first group consisted of 'fashionable' modernists with their own output and social standing, and included poets, writers and/or imagists such as James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Richard Aldington, Hilda Doolittle, Ernest Hemingway and D. H. Lawrence to name a few.⁹ These artists had their own reputations, so

⁶ I will examine in further detail the specifics of why Pound was controversial in his poetic works in chapters 3 and 4.

⁷ Barry Millington, *Wagner*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 42.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Imagism was a sub-genre of modernism which was co-founded by Pound (c.1912) as a reaction against romanticism and Victorian poetic practice. Imagists believed in 'succinct verse of dry clarity and hard outline in

by default helped to endorse Pound's work; this was often the extent of their contribution. The other group of collaborators includes those who were often more involved but remained mostly behind-the-scenes. They remained less publicly visible but were invaluable in helping with the technicalities of Pound's compositions, such as contribution of musical knowledge and editing skills. Collaborators fitting into this category included lesser-known composers such as George Antheil, Agnes Bedford, Murray Schafer, and musicians such as Olga Rudge and Edmund Dulac.¹⁰ One could even argue that his wife Dorothy fits into the less visible group; she was in London for a time during the production of *Le Testament*, and helped by sorting Pound's finances, going to rehearsals, advertising, and writing helpful criticisms which (along with Pound's friend and collaborator Agnes Bedford's) helped Pound adapt his approach to make his second opera more suitable to radio.¹¹

Some of the less visible collaborators were working with Pound through the creation-process and some worked with him after the fact to help edit or re-work his compositions for later performances.¹² Admittedly, the group of less visible collaborators is somewhat broader in that it includes people with vastly different roles, but it is important that they are grouped together to stand in contrast to the perhaps more superficial contribution from Pound's peers in the more visible group of artists. This is not to say necessarily that the second camp were not given credit for their work, but it is interesting how the input from the famous collaborators often seems to have been more well-documented. James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Ernest Hemingway were all in attendance at the stage premiere of Pound's first opera *Le Testament de Villon* at Salle Pleyel, Paris in 1926, but there is no mention of either attendance or absence of the majority of Pound's less well-known colleagues (with the exception of Antheil, who played harpsichord in the

which an exact visual image made a total poetic statement.": "Imagist | English Literature", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2018 <<https://www.britannica.com/art/Imagists>> [Accessed 26 May 2018].

¹⁰ Antheil contributed significantly to theatre and music himself, and his work in Germany in the 1920s is particularly interesting. See: Elise K. Kirk, "American Opera: Innovation And Tradition", in *The Cambridge Companion To Twentieth-Century Opera*, ed. by Mervyn Cooke, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 197-208 <<https://doi-org.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/10.1017/CCOL9780521780094>> [Accessed 19 July 2018].

¹¹ Robert Hughes and Margaret Fisher, *Cavalcanti: A Perspective On The Music Of Ezra Pound* (Emeryville: Second Evening Art Publishing/ BMI, 2003), pp. 42-43.

I will discuss the suitability of Pound's operas to the medium of radio further in chapters 3 and 5.

¹² Fisher, *Ezra Pound's Radio Operas*, pp. 3-4; 84.

performance).¹³ The culture of self- and shared-importance between peers fits the modernist aesthetic, and Pound's collaborative approach shows the direction in which art was headed – away from the Romantic fashion for the individual hero or genius. The spectrum of contribution from Pound's collaborators spans from simply sharing Pound's ideology and vision to much more technical advice and assistance, and it is notable that the visible group fit in almost perfectly at the former end, and the less-visible in the latter.

Although the actual contributions of those in the two groups varies hugely, they all played a part in either the construction or promotion of *Le Testament*. The challenging question is: can both groups of collaborators be deemed as having an equal contribution? If one group are established in their own right, but their contribution is superficial, does this make their input any more or less valuable than a lesser-known artist with a larger technical contribution? Viewing these two groups of collaborators as equals does seem a little unjust for those less visible associates who did much more work towards the production of *Le Testament*, however I would argue that this is not the case. The famous group worked hard to establish their own names, and it was their reputations which contributed to the promotion of the work. Both groups put in valuable work which added to Pound's success, the main difference being that the less-visible group directed their efforts specifically towards *Le Testament*.

Le Testament is a fascinating opera for so many reasons but before exploring all the aspects surrounding it, the music itself must first be considered. The most striking features of the opera are its complex rhythms, unrelenting dissonance and incredibly emotive singing style. The complete 1923 score, edited by George Antheil, depicts constant changes in time signature, being as often as every bar at some points.¹⁴ This feature gives the work an unpredictable quality, providing momentum and keeping it ungrounded. The relatively thin texture and the use of chorus are reminiscent of medieval song, which reflects Pound's own admission of Troubadour influence. The accompanying chamber orchestra frequently doubles the vocal line which itself is often stepwise and lacking in identifiable harmony, but

¹³ J Eimont, "The 3rd Page", *Emptymirrorbooks.Com*, 2003

<<http://www.emptymirrorbooks.com/thirdpage/eimont.html>> [accessed 29 April 2017].

¹⁴ Ezra Pound and George Antheil, "Le Testament: Opera After Francois Villion By Ezra Pound" (New Haven, 1920-1923), Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Ezra Pound Papers. An example of this can be seen on the first line of figure 3.1.

both the sung melody and the accompaniment doubling it are heavily articulated with tight rhythms and accents. Percussion is used very effectively, both in the introductions of songs, and as a tool to punctuate certain parts of the melody line. The entire opera runs for just shy of an hour and in that time, it takes us through a whole range of situations and emotions. The vocal style employed by the singers (under Pound's direction) is harsh and at times unmusical (in the classical sense). There are sections where the vocalists adopt a style similar to speaking or shouting, which contrast moments of more classically sung melody. Overall, the work is a fascinating example of Pound's interdisciplinary nature; the music is at times challenging but conveys, without inhibition, Francois Villon's poetry with passion and stark emotion.

Pound dedicated much of his time to the art of translation, and he translated *The Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti* before writing his second opera *Cavalcanti*.¹⁵ The opera is comprised of eleven of Cavalcanti's poems set to music and was written specifically for broadcast over radio at the request of Edward A. F. Harding, Assistant Head of Drama Dept. at the BBC, who worked closely with Pound when broadcasting *Le Testament de Villon*.¹⁶ Although Pound's opera was intended to be sung in the original Italian, his initial engagement with Cavalcanti's work began in translation. Pound was not the first to translate Cavalcanti's work but it is clear that his fascination with his work was deeply rooted:

Already in the Introduction to the 1912 edition of his poems, reprinted in Translations, [Pound] had said, "Than Guido Cavalcanti no psychologist of the emotions is more keen in his understanding, more precise in his expression." Two important criteria - precision in language and acuteness in observation were thus observable in Cavalcanti's work.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ming Xie, "Pound As Translator", in *The Cambridge Companion To Ezra Pound*, 1st edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) pp. 204-23.

¹⁶ Margaret Fisher, "Ezra Pound's Philosophical Opera: Cavalcanti" (unpublished thesis, UCB, 2000); Fisher, *Ezra Pound's Radio Operas*, p. 2 - note that *Cavalcanti* was never broadcast in its entirety in Pound's lifetime.

¹⁷ James J. Wilhelm, "Guido Cavalcanti As A Mask For Ezra Pound", *PMLA*, 89.2 (1974), 332 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/461456>>.

The comment Pound makes on the precision and keen observation in Cavalcanti's work resonates in his own manifesto *A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste*, published a year after this statement was made.¹⁸ The profound effect translating Cavalcanti's poetry had on Pound's own artistic identity is undeniable, thus it is no mystery why this particular subject matter was to make up his second opera. Pound was a prolific translator with a unique approach.¹⁹ Pound generally believed in translating the meaning of a text rather than its musical beauty (although there are of course exceptions to this trend).²⁰ Particularly in the case of translating Cavalcanti, Pound enjoyed literally translating the words and meaning, rather than re-setting the images in a musical poetry similar to the original. In viewing correspondence about Pound's work at the BBC Written Archive Centre (BBC WAC), I have identified significant sources on the reception of Pound's other translations which will be discussed in detail throughout this dissertation.²¹

Publishing his manifesto so early in his artistic career arguably hindered Pound in that any influence taken from previous artistic 'greats' could be viewed as contradictory to Pound's forward-looking, modernist aesthetic. Music cannot exist outside of its historiographical context because what precedes it must have a direct impact on it.²² Whether it is in the form of development, adaptation, or rejection, all works have an undeniable and intrinsic link to those which came before, through social and political context. Therefore, considering this link between music and its context raises questions surrounding the consistency of Pound's modernist aesthetic because he published literature on the subversion of pre-existing literary and musical convention while not practicing this ideal himself; by rejecting what came before his work, Pound is therefore acknowledging it.²³ As a co-founder of the sub-genre of imagism, he is often put on a pedestal and praised

¹⁸ Pound, *A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste*. – This manifesto highlights several paradoxical elements of Pound's works and ideals, which will be addressed throughout this thesis.

¹⁹ As noted by several scholars – there are some interesting examples of attitudes to Pound's approach in: David Anderson, *Pound's "Cavalcanti": An Edition Of The Translation, Notes, And Essays* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983).

²⁰ Fisher, *Ezra Pound's Radio Operas*, p. 30.

²¹ From now on, the BBC Written Archive Centre, Caversham, UK will be referred to as 'BBC WAC'.

²² Lawrence Kramer, *Interpreting Music*, 1st edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 63-64.

²³ I should not think that he did not actively reject all historical practice; Pound always displayed great admiration for medievalism and ancient Greece, but most overtly rejected Impressionism, which came almost immediately before, and during the start of, when he began to produce his own work.

for his pioneering contribution to literature and music, particularly by early scholars and peers such as Eliot and Joyce, but this kind of misalignment between his written values and his actual artistic output, challenges the authenticity of Pound's work in the context of his social position.

Le Testament de Villon and the issues surrounding Pound's credibility as an interdisciplinary modernist provide continuing threads throughout this dissertation, which is organised into chapters on the most important factors surrounding Pound and his works between 1920-1940. Firstly, I will be considering Pound's involvement with the BBC and issues of collaboration and legacy surrounding it. I will also be assessing the reception of Pound's multifaceted output within the BBC. I will then be exploring Pound's innovative use of form, media, and genre, focusing particularly on the use of radio as a platform to not only broadcast his works, but also his political views. It would be dismissive to discuss Pound from an interdisciplinary perspective and not acknowledge his contribution to the field of translation, so I will explore his work in the field and link it to the same issues which arise from the other elements of this dissertation. Finally, I will be exploring the reception of Pound and the effect it had on the production of both his and others' subsequent works. This chapter will combine sources in order to build a more well-rounded image of Pound's reception by his peers, the public, and his collaborators. It will also shed light on how much control Pound had on the reception of his own works, and how, if at all, reception impacted upon Pound's work and methods. I will be considering these topics between 1920-1940 because Pound's first radio opera was completed in 1924 and was broadcast on the BBC's National Programme on 26th October 1931.²⁴ As *Le Testament* will be my central case study, using this timeframe means that I can explore a cross section of Pound's life and work surrounding the production of this opera, thus gaining a better insight into Pound's creative processes.²⁵

²⁴ Richard Sieburth, "From Rossetti To Radio: Pound's Opera *Cavalcanti*", in *Ezra Pound And Referentiality* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003), p. 152.

²⁵ Although *Le Testament* is an interesting case study of Pound's resurrecting long-dead work, he is not the first to have revived Villon – Debussy composed *Trois Ballades de Francois Villon*, cited in: Ezra Pound and R. Murray Schafer, *Ezra Pound And Music* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), p. 70.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

As with any controversial historical figure, Pound has been subject to fierce debate due not only to his innovative use of translation and musical form, but also his fascist political beliefs. Opinions surrounding his works, and indeed the man himself, have been hugely divided, but are made most often from subject-specific standpoints. Critics with roots in distinct fields tend to evaluate Pound's whole artistic output based upon their judgement of his work in the particular discipline in which they specialise.²⁶ A literary critic reviewing Pound's poetry could hold a potentially polar-opposite view to another literary critic, but these two opinions could then be worlds away from a music critic reviewing the musicianship of Pound's operas. Or critics of Modernism could critique Pound's entire outward aesthetic while supporters of it could write adamantly supporting the opposing view. Pound being an interdisciplinary modernist, spanning different disciplines simultaneously, makes the task of mapping an overall trajectory of reception somewhat more difficult than someone who perhaps stuck to only one or two creative fields. This being the case, however, provides scope for cross-examination of his works, and their reception, from a perspective which does not hold bias in any one of the creative fields in which Pound indulged. This approach provides an important indication about Pound's entire oeuvre, and therefore about the authenticity and credibility of Pound's outward modernist aesthetic.

After contemporary reviews of Pound and his work, there was a slight lull in the discussions surrounding Pound until a significant number of critical works surfaced from the late 1950s-1970s. From the sheer volume of discourse produced in this short time, alongside the re-emergence of many of Pound's works in BBC broadcasts in the 1960s, it seems logical

²⁶ A few examples of this (but by no means all) are:

Art - Ezra Pound and Harriet Zinnes, *Ezra Pound And The Visual Arts* (New York: New Directions, 1980).

Music - Robert Hughes and Margaret Fisher, *Cavalcanti: A Perspective On The Music Of Ezra Pound* (Emeryville: Second Evening Art Publishing/ BMI, 2003)

Ezra Pound and Raymond Murray Schafer, *Ezra Pound And Music* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978)

Poetry – Hugh Witemeyer, *The Poetry Of Ezra Pound: Forms And Renewal, 1908-1920*, 1st edn (London (2 Brook St., W1Y 1AA); Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

Michael Reck, *Ezra Pound, A Close-Up*, 1st edn (London: R. Hart-Davis, 1968). p.153.

Modernism – Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Charles Ferrall, *Modernist Writing And Reactionary Politics*, 1st edn (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

to conclude that there was something of a Pound revival around this period, following a gap of a few decades since the original broadcast of *Le Testament*.²⁷ Pound died in 1972, so this revival began not as a posthumous memorial to his work, but as a living appreciation; Pound's work naturally came back round to the public platform. The revival was also not likely to have been in response to his incarceration from 1945-1958, as there were still approximately 10 years between the end of his confinement and the start of the revival. Pound was somewhat ahead of his time in his transcendence of convention, so this surge of literature could merely be marking that the literary and critical world had 'caught up' with him, although this is not an established school of thought.²⁸

In order to understand this revival, I first want to look at the BBC and Pound's involvement with them. As a popular and broad-reaching cultural institution, for the BBC to re-use a lot of his works would have been huge in terms of exposure, ensuring longevity for Pound's works in case they had been missed or indeed dismissed the first time around. The BBC has historically been an influential institution, so understanding Pound's relationship with it will aid in building a fundamental understanding of his creative processes. I want to look at the BBC in relation to Pound following two main strands: Pound's personal involvements/employment; and the benefits of having access to cutting-edge technical radio equipment. Margaret Fisher's book *Ezra Pound's Radio Operas: The BBC Experiments, 1931-1933* (2002) provides a very useful and thorough account of Pound's engagement with the BBC, and his work in radio. This book is a shining contribution to Poundian scholarship, and much of the information Fisher presents clarifies aspects of Pound's operas. It will act as an invaluable foundation on which to base this thesis, and by applying Fisher's findings to my interdisciplinary model, I am able to create a more accurate and insightful account of Pound as an interdisciplinary modernist.

Pound was employed by the BBC to write for *The Listener* magazine in 1935/1936. Although his writings for the magazine were limited and his employment short, it is too significant a relationship to ignore given the overall significance of Pound's relationship with the BBC. Pound found himself involved in writing for *The Listener* because the BBC

²⁷ 'New Wave Pound criticism' is mentioned in George Kearns (Rutgers University), so the resurgence of literature has not gone unnoticed, but 'Pound Revival' is not a universally accepted term.

²⁸ I will elaborate more in this point, with reference to the 'horizon of expectations' further in chapter 5.

magazine's music editor Daniel Ferguson Aitken sympathised with some of Pound's iconoclasms (if only for a short period).²⁹ Correspondence found at the BBC WAC shows common ground between Pound and Aitken, for example in attacking well-respected and established pillars of musical history such as Gregorian chant. These ideological parallels with not only Aitken, but also other collaborators such as Olga Rudge and Agnes Bedford will be discussed further in Chapter 2. The BBC is often thought of as a relatively conservative institution, which makes this relationship all the more significant: sympathising with such a controversial figure as Pound suggests a shift in attitudes towards musical convention and constraints.³⁰

With regard to the second strand of Pound's involvement with the BBC, Pound was one of the first to use technological advances in media to electronically manipulate recordings using BBC equipment, in collaboration with Archibald F. Harding.³¹

[Le Testament] was one of the first electronically enhanced operas to be broadcast in Europe. It featured the use of artificial echo throughout the performance to distinguish scenic location, and the operation of an electronic audio mixing board to combine pre-recorded passages with live performances.³²

This practical collaboration will also be discussed further in Chapter 2. Louis Niebur discusses the emergence of electronic music by the BBC in *Special Sound* (2010) from 1958-1998 at the BBC's electronic music studio, the *Radiophonic Workshop*.³³ Although he acknowledges electronic music dating back from the 1940s in France and Cologne, he does not go into any detail about the BBC's history in the field, which is an area I will be looking into further in Chapter 2.

²⁹ "The Listener Archives – Thetls", *Thetls*, 2017 <<http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tag/the-listener/>> [accessed 30 April 2017].

³⁰ There is repeated reference to the historical conservatism of the BBC in: Hugh Chignell, "British Radio Drama And The Avant-Garde In The 1950s", *Historical Journal Of Film, Radio And Television*, 37.4 (2016), 649-664 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2016.1258841>>.

³¹ Fisher, *Ezra Pound's Radio Operas*, pp. 2-3.

³² *Ibid.* p. 2

³³ Louis Niebur, *Special Sound*, 1st edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Throughout this thesis, I will reference several different productions of *Le Testament* so for clarity, have produced a table of the key productions which will be discussed, or are referred to in BBC WAC sources (see figure 1.1). This table is not a complete list of all productions in the last century because of limitations of available data, however does detail all relevant productions:

Table 1.1 - Summary of all relevant productions of 'Le Testament de Villon'

Date	Person Responsible for Production (commissioner/producer)	Production Type	Platform / Location (actual or proposed)	Extra Info	Score used	Did it go ahead?
1926	Ezra Pound	Stage premiere	Salle Pleyel (Paris)	Antheil played harpsichord and Pound played Kettle drums	Original in Bedford's hand; Antheil's 1923 edition	Yes ³⁴
1931	Archibald A. F. Harding/ Ezra Pound	BBC broadcast, UK radio premiere	BBC Radio	Pound wrote adaptations for radio directly onto the master copy of the 1923 score ³⁵	Antheil's 1923 edition (with amendments by Pound)	Yes ³⁶
c.1959	D. G. Bridson	BBC revival	BBC Radio - Third Programme	Full production deemed too expensive, so	Antheil's 1923 edition (with amendments by Pound)	No - budgetary constrictions ³⁷

³⁴ J Eimont, "The 3rd Page", *Emptymirrorbooks.Com*, 2003 <<http://www.emptymirrorbooks.com/thirdpage/eimont.html>> [accessed 29 April 2017]; Anthony David Moody, *Ezra Pound, Poet: The Epic Years, 1921-1939*, 1st edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 24.

³⁵ Fisher, *Pound's Radio Operas*, p. 89.

³⁶ Fisher, *Pound's Radio Operas*, pp. 2; 4-5; 24-5; 88-139.

³⁷ See next entry (1962) for outcome of the reduced production proposed instead, which went ahead in 1962. Revision from full production to selection of solo excerpts cited in:

BBC WAC - RCONT1 Ezra Pound – Scriptwriter (1953-1962), costing sheet from Peter Crossley-Holland (Third Programme Music Organiser) to Bridson, 12 January 1960 [accessed 8 March 2017]; BBC WAC - R19/2271/1 Villon – Ezra Pound (1959-1961), letter from Bridson to Matyas Seiber, 8 April 1960 [accessed 8 March 2017].

				broadcast was revised		
1962 (in pipeline from 1959)	D. G. Bridson	BBC Revival	BBC Radio - Third Programme	Matyas Seiber asked to conduct	Reduced selection of solo excerpts with accompaniment	Yes ³⁸
c.1959	Domenico di Paoli (Italian composer)	RAI broadcast (Assumed to be Italy's international broadcaster)	RAI	Di Paoli proposed that the words should be translated into Italian; he wrote in 1959: 'I cannot see the chorus of the Rai singing in French.'	Di Paoli stated that they might use recording of BBC 1962 production (above) if 'very good'	Unknown ³⁹
c.1960	Murray Schafer	CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) broadcast	CBC's French Network	When proposed to management at CBC, Schafer received a	Schafer asked Bridson for a copy of their score	Unknown ⁴⁰

³⁸ BBC WAC, RCONT1, Villon – Ezra Pound (1959-1961), R19/2271/1, Letter from Bridson to Agnes Bedford, 16 September 1959 [accessed 8 March 2017]; BBC WAC, RCONT1, Villon – Ezra Pound (1959-1961), R19/2271/1, Letter from Bridson to Matyas Seiber, 8 March 1959 [accessed 8 March 2017]; BBC WAC, RCONT1, Villon – Ezra Pound (1959-1961), R19/2271/1, Letter from Bridson to Matyas Seiber, 8 April 1959 [accessed 8 March 2017].

³⁹ BBC WAC, RCONT1, Villon - Ezra Pound (1959-1961), R19/2271/1, Letter from Domenico di Paoli (addressee unknown), 5 October 1959 [accessed 8 March 2017].

⁴⁰ BBC WAC, R19/2271/1, Villon – Ezra Pound (1959-1961), letter from Schafer to Bridson, 15 July 1960 [accessed on 8 March 2017].

				'favourable' reply		
2015	Igor Toronyi-Lalic (London Contemporary Music Festival)	London Contemporary Music Festival	London	Excerpts performed alongside UK premiere of Stockhausen's 'Pieta' from <i>Dienstag aus Licht</i> and others	Excerpts from Antheil's 1923 edition	Yes ⁴¹

⁴¹ LCMF, "15 December - To A New Definition Of Opera II", *lcmf.co.uk*, 2015 <<https://lcmf.co.uk/15-December-To-A-New-Definition-Of-Opera-II>> [Accessed 19 December 2018].

I visited BBC WAC again in July 2017 to view the score of *Le Testament* edited by Murray Schafer (retrieved from BBC Perivale), however due to their Data Protection policies, was unable to gain any history of anyone who could have used the score to put on their own production. It is reasons such as these which mean that this table is not by any means an exhaustive list of the productions of Pound's *Le Testament*, but these are all the performances referred to in the bank of sources I am using in this thesis.

The use of radio as a platform to transmit Pound's work is another interesting direction which I will be exploring in order to better understand Pound's creative processes. The obvious angle from which to approach this would be looking at his radio opera *Le Testament*, on which Margaret Fisher has written about in extensive detail. It was the first 'radio opera' and so by nature is an interesting case to examine, but I will also be exploring his second radio opera, as well as Pound's other uses of radio and alternative media by outside the context of *Le Testament*.⁴² Pound controversially used radio as a platform to preach fascist political ideals, making several broadcasts, most notably in Mussolini's Italy. During the rise of radio as an accessible public platform, a culture emerged surrounding the advancing technologies, which can be measured by other transgressive artists such as Bertolt Brecht.⁴³ Most famous for his ground-breaking methods of acting and his innovative style of writing plays, Brecht also provided an important commentary on the importance of radio becoming communication rather than just the cold distribution of information:

...the radio should step out of the supply business and organize its listeners as suppliers. Any attempt by the radio to give a truly public character to public occasions is a step in the right direction.⁴⁴

I will be addressing the importance of radio as a cultural and political platform further in chapter 3, comparing briefly the different ways in which Pound employed the use of radio, along with how his contemporaries used the medium. Pound's 'disastrous' political

⁴² Fisher, *Ezra Pound's Radio Operas*, p. 2.

⁴³ Stephen Unwin, *A Guide To The Plays Of Bertolt Brecht*, 1st edn (London: Methuen, 2005), p. 35.

⁴⁴ Bertolt Brecht, "The Radio As An Apparatus Of Communication", 1964.

broadcasts controversially ‘alienated Allied opinion’, so I will be examining the use of form and media further in relation to its impact on the reception of Pound in chapter 3.⁴⁵

Further to this, Pound’s use of radio superficially suggests a forward-looking, progressive approach to transmitting his artwork, but the authenticity of this ‘pioneering’ work is called into question by the fact that *Le Testament* was originally intended for traditional concert-setting.⁴⁶ Genre is the other issue I will address in Chapter 3, specifically the rapid progression Pound took through the various sub-genres of modernism. Miranda B Hickman highlights this movement through modernism in her book *The Geometry of Modernism: The Vorticist Idiom in Lewis, Pound, H.D., and Yeats*. In the case of Vorticism, Hickman argues that although the movement grows and finds its own significance, its foundations are ‘forged out of expediency’; she details how ‘its initial meaning is transformed and superseded, even after the “movement” itself dies. It changes as artists use it, inhabit it, remember it, strive to recover it, reject it, remain haunted by it, and evoke it once again’.⁴⁷ The salient point here is that no matter one’s intention, putting an idea or a notion out into the world absolves the maker of the responsibility of its future. Therefore, inconsistencies or paradoxes between a movement’s ideals and the maker’s works could stem from the movement taking on a life of its own. In Chapter 3 I will explore Pound’s personal movement through modernism in further detail, looking not only at Pound’s use of media, but also the implications that it made in terms of Pound’s credibility as an interdisciplinary modernist. As well as being a reaction against Impressionism, Imagism was itself a rejection of F.T. Marinetti’s Futurism, which many credit with being one of the first transitions into true modernism.⁴⁸ In 1914, Pound labelled Futurism ‘a sort of accelerated impressionism’, and Peter Nicholls argues that Pound’s difficulty in subscribing to Marinetti’s manifesto stems from Pound’s personal identification with ‘that older, Latin culture’ which Marinetti ‘sought to destroy’.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Michael Alexander, *The Poetic Achievement Of Ezra Pound*, 1st edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979), p. 17.

⁴⁶ Hughes & Fisher, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Miranda B Hickman, *The Geometry Of Modernism: The Vorticist Idiom In Lewis, Pound, H.D., And Yeats* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2005), p. 252 - In the case of Imagism and Vorticism, there is only a year between the founding of the former and the emergence of the latter.

⁴⁸ Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), p. 172.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Although not the main focus of this dissertation, an undeniably significant part of Pound's output is his work in translation. Not only is this work relevant to *Le Testament* and *Cavalcanti*, it also provides another side from which we can evaluate reception of Pound's work. Looking at translation provides a wider range of primary sources from which conclusions about reception and reputation can be drawn. Being interdisciplinary in nature means that Pound cannot begin to be understood until one considers him from each of the disciplines in which Pound worked. *Cavalcanti* was commissioned by Harding at the BBC to be Pound's second radio opera, but the inspiration for this came from years of work translating the poetry of Guido Cavalcanti. Pound's fascination with these poems kindled a deep connection with the works and their meanings, but there is little existing literature on applying his translation methods to his musical works. *Le Testament* was composed in a way which called for the singers to perform in Old French, so it will be interesting to investigate how Pound adapted the text, as well as the reasons why he did not translate the texts and meld these two disciplines together. In his 1913 imagist manifesto, Pound talks often about the synergy between music and the written word, so I will be looking at whether he still applied this modernist ideal to his work when dealing with other languages than English.⁵⁰ Chapter 4 explores Pound's treatment of different languages in terms of poetic valuation and consequently the application of his modernist agenda.

Partly due to the significant base of sources to draw from, and the fact that the subject can be approached from many disciplinary angles thus providing material for real in-depth analysis, the reception of Pound and his works will constitute a vital section of this dissertation. Not only is there extensive existing scholarship, particularly from the late 1960s and 1970s, on the reception of Pound (but also from the time of publication), but there are also several primary sources which I found on a visit to the BBC WAC which shed valuable light on the reception of Pound from different standpoints. I would like to clarify that I will be making a distinction between critical reception and public reception, with the former focusing primarily on scholars, professionals in the field and contemporaries, and the latter on the wider reception by members of the public with no specific foothold in the relevant

⁵⁰ Pound, *A Few Don't's by an Imagiste*

disciplines.⁵¹ Following these two veins while simultaneously comparing them will feed into the notion of collaborations by visible partners vs the less visible, by looking at the correlation between his close associates and the reception of members of this circle.

This revival of Pound in the mid-late 20th century comes back into consideration when exploring the theme of reception, because it is important to determine the motive of this critical resurgence before looking at the new criticism itself. These central 'revival' critics will be explored further in the context of Pound's musical work in chapter 5. The early critics of the revival, such as George Dekker with *Sailing after Knowledge* (1963) and Donald Davie with *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor* (1964) 'took the natural ground of criticism that the qualities and merits of his poetry were things to be discussed and, so far as possible, demonstrated rather than assumed.'⁵² Davie discusses the principles of sculpture and colour set out by Adrian Stokes in 1934 and 1937 and applies them to Pound's poetry and music. He notes how the interdisciplinary aspects of sculpture hold similarities to Pound's creative processes:

When [Stokes] writes 'not as a succession...non-musical', he is deploring the confusion of non-successive arts like sculpture and architecture with the 'successive' art of music... Pound had made the same protest, but from the side of, and on behalf of, music.⁵³

Firstly, this again emphasises how close music was to Pound, even when creating other works, and secondly, mapping a process from one artistic discipline onto another to make interdisciplinary comparisons is a model which will be employed in this dissertation.

Although Davie does view Pound's work in different ways, he still focuses primarily on the *Cantos*, whereas I would like to adapt this critical technique for use on his musical works.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Examples and sources relevant to reception will appear throughout this dissertation, but the specific evaluation of these issues will come in chapter 5.

⁵² Alexander, p. 15.

⁵³ Donald Davie, "The Poet As Sculptor", in *New Approaches To Ezra Pound*, 1st edn (Glasgow: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 205.

⁵⁴ There will be further discussion on Davie's critical scholarship in chapter 5, but more pointed towards translation.

Michael Reck (1968) explains part of Pound's overwhelmingly positive reception as being down to Pound's 'internationality'.⁵⁵ According to Reck, Pound's particular places of interest included Greece, Italy, France, England, Spain, Africa, America, Japan and China, which all influence parts of Pound's poetry.⁵⁶ There is existing literature on the impact these multinational influences had on his writings, so I will not be going into detail about Pound's 'internationality' in this dissertation.

Hugh Witemeyer's *The Poetry of Ezra Pound: Forms and Renewal 1908-1920* (1969) is a detailed aid to reading Pound's poetry and prose.⁵⁷ The book claims to be the first comprehensive study of Pound's work between 1908 and 1920, offering 'the first full account of the continuities and unifying patterns in Pound's early work.'⁵⁸ Again, these continuities are something I will study further throughout this thesis and then re-examine in relation to his musical works. I think the application of subject-specific observations and patterns to other disciplines is one of the most valuable ways by which we can expand our understanding of Pound and his methods across the board. In terms of reception, it is also noted that 'Mr. Witemeyer is able to clear up many of the obscurities and difficulties that have troubled Pound's readers'.⁵⁹ In order to fulfil this promise, Witemeyer is claiming a deep and profound understanding of Pound's work, which is interesting considering that he is primarily concerned with Pound's early poetry before *The Cantos*. Although providing a comprehensive study of these case studies, I would question how much Witemeyer can clarify for readers without looking further into Pound's work in other disciplines.

In 1979, Michael Alexander said that Pound scholarship only really took off after Kenner.⁶⁰ Kenner, by all accounts, has made an invaluable contribution to our understanding of Ezra Pound, most notably in his book *The Pound Era: The Age of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis* (1972). Amongst many other things, Kenner wrote interestingly on Imagism, the co-founding of which was one of Pound's most

⁵⁵ Michael Reck, *Ezra Pound, A Close-Up*, 1st edn (London: R. Hart-Davis, 1968). p. 153.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Hugh Witemeyer, *The Poetry Of Ezra Pound: Forms And Renewal, 1908-1920*, 1st edn (London (2 Brook St., W1Y 1AA); Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Witemeyer, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, inside front cover. I understand that inside covers could be subject to publishing bias, but this quote still outlines Witemeyer's objectives.

⁶⁰ Alexander, p. 16.

famous and well-renowned contributions to the Arts. Peter Nicholls deems Imagism as ‘an attempt to recover a stylistic purity, a ‘welding of world and thing’, which Pound traces back to the ‘plasticity’ of Gautier’s style and to the realism of Stendhal and Flaubert...’.⁶¹ Imagism and its consequences have been held in high esteem, but Kenner puts forward the argument that imagism was not in fact as important to Pound as commonly thought; he introduces the idea that it was just a scheme for promotion:

...Pound wrote (17 Sept. 1915), "the whole affair was started not very seriously, chiefly to get H.D.'s five poems a hearing without its being necessary for her to publish a whole book. It began certainly in Church Walk with H.D., Richard [H.D.'s husband] and myself."⁶²

This evidence presented by Kenner raises more information to consider in relation to the shift in motivation for creating works of which Pound was at the forefront. These shifts in motivation for Pound creating works are often regarded as ‘modern’, with his use of poetry and music as a form of criticism, but Kenner also suggests that imagism was not new, but just an adapted, more sophisticated version of Symbolism in the 1890s.

It was the post-Symbolists of the 1890s who brought pictorial images into short poems: theirs was the dead end we are frequently told Imagism was. Imagism on the other hand made possible the *Cantos* and *Paterson*, long works that with the work of T.S. Eliot are the Symbolist heritage in English. The minor poets of Symons's generation brought the necessary elements into English verse, but lacked the intellectual energy to break, as could Imagism, into some realm beyond the mood of the impression.⁶³

The notion of imagism being a more successful re-working of a pre-existing model of producing art creates another interesting lens through which to view *Le Testament*. I will

⁶¹ Nicholls, p. 170.

⁶² Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era*, 1st edn (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), p. 177.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

investigate further in chapter 3 how the documented shifts in Pound's motivation in relation to his poetry manifested in his other artistic works.

Alexander notes how much further Pound scholarship had progressed in America than in the UK, mainly because of his personal life and how, for the British, he became 'a peripheral and eccentric figure' who was often dismissed.⁶⁴ Alexander also critiques the lack of critical focus in works addressing Pound's oeuvre, claiming that British appreciation of Pound is hollow; Alexander claims that much of the literature praising Pound's work does not actually engage in critical discussion. The overall tone of the book focuses on how Britain is yet to catch up with Pound's forward-thinking ideals, despite these principles slowly being accepted so late in the same century.⁶⁵

Writing in 2010, Nadel argues that Pound has been historically misunderstood, and had to adapt to an audience struggling to decipher his work. Nadel is talking specifically about the public reading of the *Cantos* here, but I think this resonates with other aspects of Pound's work, shedding light on how Pound was received at the time. Due to the fragmented nature of the poem, readers struggled to follow it, so Pound's publishers recommended that Pound included explanatory pamphlets in the first 500 copies to help readers with their comprehension of it.⁶⁶ Although reluctant, Pound did comply, raising the question of how credible Pound really was as a modernist, considering that he compromised on his artistic style and intention for what was effectively 'not his problem'.⁶⁷ Nadel also epitomises the opposition between critics of Pound, stating that while some described the *Cantos* 'as "a shifting heap of splinters" or a "nostalgic montage without unity, a picaresque of styles"', others saw it as 'generating a new aesthetic with "syntax yielding to parataxis" as Pound juxtaposes "concrete particulars that he considers meaningful in the conviction that they will speak for themselves.'" Supporters declared that collage was the designated form

⁶⁴ Alexander, pp. 16-17.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ira B Nadel, *Ezra Pound In Context*, 1st edn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 9

The quotes Nadel is referencing are from:

Lucy Beckett, *Wallace Stevens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 62-64.

⁶⁷ I will note that Pound was not alone in this apparent compromise – Eliot made a similar aid for reading *The Waste Land* by way of essays written during the composition process.

of the work, linked to elements of Cubism and modern art, with metonymic preference replacing metaphoric expansion in the text.⁶⁸

As well existing Pound scholarship, which tends to centre on his poetry and literary work, there are significant sources suggesting how Pound was viewed by artists and practitioners in other disciplines. In the BBC WAC, sources providing useful reception information surfaced regarding his work in translation, scripting and music, so cross-examining these sources with published scholarship throughout this dissertation will allow me to gain a more robust insight into the reception of Pound in the UK after the publication of the works I will be focusing on.

Through the chapters of this dissertation, there will be several threads which will be linked in to different topics and ideas, one of which will be the ‘credibility’ of Pound and his work; by this, I mean the quality and artistic integrity of his output. Pound is a highly-celebrated poet and pioneer of modernism, but in researching much of the content for this dissertation, I have found sources which challenge how authentic he was as a modernist, and more specifically how successful specific works were in their respective fields. Taking a work completely out of its cultural context is problematic for a number of reasons, so to do so would be counterproductive, but by re-examining works with less of a focus on Pound’s modernist agenda and more of a focus on the merit of a work in its own right, I will be able to assess the credibility of Pound as an interdisciplinary modernist.⁶⁹ Charles Ferrall raises an interesting point in *Modernist Writing and Reactionary Politics* (2001), noting how many of the principles for which Pound was hailed as a forward-thinking pioneer are far from original:

Pound’s rejection of ‘decorative figures’, is anything but new or avant-garde; Wordsworth describes similar aims in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in 1805. Pound also echoes Wordsworth’s voice in his views about mixing the

⁶⁸ Nadel, p. 9.

⁶⁹ Kramer, pp. 63-64.

abstract and the concrete and furthermore about the overlaps between the Arts and science.⁷⁰

Pound seems to ignore Wordsworth in his critical literature, but almost exactly reproduces some of these same ideas. As an educated man, Pound would have certainly been aware of Wordsworth and his work, because he must be acknowledged before he can be dismissed, yet Pound does not credit him with these ideas. This leads me to question whether Pound's failure to acknowledge the similarities in their ideas was ignorance or an outright refusal. I will be addressing the authenticity of Pound's ideas throughout this dissertation, as it is an issue which is raised, in some capacity, in every chapter. Ferrall also states that rather than writing poetry which 'includ[ed] history, he instead duplicated the rhetoric which he rejected and attacked in much of his prose'.⁷¹ These are bold claims which need further analysis, but it is interesting that claims of inauthenticity only made it to the forefront of Pound scholarship much later than the revival. Pound's commitment to modernism is called into question by Michael Alexander in *The Poetic Achievement of Ezra Pound* (1979) when he comments on how Pound cycled through different writing styles: 'Such was the sequence of Ezra Pound's poetic output, revolving from 'romance' to politics and back again to a splintered realization of 'romance''; showing Pound to be more flexible than he often portrayed himself as.⁷² I will be applying this poetic observation into my analysis of Pound's work in music in chapter 5. Reck links translation with credibility when he challenges the authenticity of Pound's translation in *Cathay* (1915), asking: 'But how much of these superb translations is Pound's work and how much is Fenollosa's?'⁷³ He goes so far as to mark that 'there is one downright mistake in Pound's final version – but does it matter?'⁷⁴ Questioning the relevance of Pound's mistake highlights how highly regarded Pound was, shedding more light on the issue of reception as well as credibility. There are a number of sources which raise issues of Pound compromising on his modernist aesthetic, but most commonly these writings are in reference to his poetry (most often, the *Cantos*), and I want to take these

⁷⁰ Charles Ferrall, *Modernist Writing And Reactionary Politics*, 1st edn (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 43

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁷² Alexander, p. 18.

⁷³ Reck, p. 166

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 172 – Pound's posthumous collaboration with Fenollosa will be unpicked further in chapter 4.

anomalies and test them against *Le Testament* to gain a more well-rounded view of Pound's commitment to his cause.

The natural direction to follow, after assessing Pound as a multi-faceted artist, would be to explore the effects his creative processes and his artistic output on the works which followed his. I will be assessing how successful Pound was in influencing the broader picture of poetry and music, and whether or not his longevity on the public stage was fully warranted. Pound's approach was the antithesis of Victorian convention and tradition. He may not have been the first to reject these practices, but he was arguably one of the most visible of these nonconformists, and he moved further from these conventions than others.⁷⁵ His subversion of artistic expectation made him a pioneer with his much more satirical attitude and his heavily collaborative approach, but there are other factors to consider when determining whether his tenure in the artistic canon was completely down to merit, or whether other factors played a significant role. His legacy was one of internationality, directness and necessity:

Imagism evolved as a reaction against abstraction in favour of precision, replacing Victorian generalities with the clarity found in Japanese haiku and ancient Greek lyrics.⁷⁶

Pound introduced other thought-systems and cultural practices into his own work, as well as using his works as the ultimate form of criticism, but on a broader level, contextual events could potentially have had a huge effect on Pound and the long-lived respect for his work.⁷⁷ Firstly there are the two World Wars and the Cold War to consider. During the Cold War, America promoted abstraction and Surrealism as subtle propaganda to promote the notion

⁷⁵ Although other avant-garde composers were emerging around this time, such as Berg and Schoenberg, much more conventional operas were still being produced around the time of *Le Testament*, making Pound an important bridge between the conventional and the avant-garde. Puccini, Richard Strauss and Vaughan Williams all produced operas around the same time of, and after *Le Testament*. These generally sounded mostly Romantic in style, and were devoid of Pound's modernist manipulation of the operatic form.

⁷⁶ Nadel, p .2.

⁷⁷ Ezra Pound and T. S Eliot, *Literary Essays Of Ezra Pound*, 1st edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1954).

of freedom and liberty in the West.⁷⁸ They were promoting all that was seen as the opposite of Russian culture: traditional, ordered and conventional. Although most of the scholarship on this subject focuses a bit later, on composers such as Aaron Copland, I will be looking at this in relation to Pound and his role in innovating the artistic shift to the modern.⁷⁹ *Le Testament* was written long before the Cold War broke out, but there are parallels in style and compositional practice between Pound and Copland. Considering the involvement of the American government in promoting this modern, more free music, in terms of promotion as well as finance, I will be investigating the impact this had on the longevity of Pound's work, challenging the idea that his works have lasted purely on their own merit. Also, the dates of the aforementioned Pound revival at the BBC coincide with the US government's involvement in modern music in America, so I will be using this state intervention as another angle from which to explore the revival at the BBC.

⁷⁸ Jennifer DeLapp-Birkett, "Aaron Copland And The Politics Of Twelve-Tone Composition In The Early Cold War United States1", *Journal Of Musicological Research*, 27.1 (2008), pp. 31-62
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/01411890701807682>>.

⁷⁹ Further material on Copland the use of American experimental music in the 20th century includes:
Amy C Beal, *New Music, New Allies: American Experimental Music In West Germany From The Zero Hour To Reunification*, 1st edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006);
Danielle Fosler-Lussier, "American Cultural Diplomacy And The Mediation Of Avant-Garde Music", in *Sound Commitments: Avant-Garde Music And The Sixties*, 1st edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 232-253 <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/HUD/reader.action?docID=415785&query=>> [Accessed 28 August 2018];
Elizabeth B. Crist, "Aaron Copland And The Popular Front", *Journal Of The American Musicological Society*, 56.2 (2003), 409-465 <https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2003.56.2.409>;
Carol A. Hess, "Copland In Argentina", *Journal Of The American Musicological Society*, 66.1 (2013), 191-250
<<https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2013.66.1.191>>.

Chapter 2

Pound and the BBC

This chapter is about Pound's involvement with the BBC and examines the impact of the series of relationships formed at the Corporation upon his success. The BBC provided Pound with valuable contacts, in some cases with like-minded modernists, as well as providing a platform from which Pound could showcase his works. I will be looking not only at the nature of his relationships within the institution, but also their dynamics; the BBC must have gained from these arrangements as well in order for them to continue for a number of years. It is also interesting to note how these relationships contributed to the Pound revival from 1960s-1980s.

There are few sources specifically on Pound and the BBC, so much of the picture of Pound's relationships within the institution is constructed using correspondence between Pound and BBC employees held at the BBC Written Archive Centre, and Margaret Fisher's book *Ezra Pound's Radio Operas: The BBC Experiments, 1931-1933*. Seeing not only the written content of these letters, but also the huge scope of matters which were addressed through the correspondence helps to give a more rounded view of specific relationships which he held, thus giving a wider understanding as to his attitude towards the BBC as a whole.⁸⁰ Amongst the sources held at BBC WAC are budget sheets, invoices, personal correspondence, letters from the public and even advertisements, and it is looking at all these different types of sources simultaneously which helps us build a more realistic and well-rounded sense of the nature of Pound's BBC relationships.⁸¹

As informative as many of these sources are, there are however some problems which arise when conducting archival research. It cannot be forgotten that archives are

⁸⁰ This scope includes courteous niceties, technical information about publications specifications, reading recommendations, and deep philosophical discussions.

⁸¹ Also looking at how the letters were physically written, and the amount of attention and time dedicated to them is interesting. Aitken's (Music Articles Editor at the BBC) are consistently well-typed and without error, presumably because he had a PA or typist. Pound's on the other hand are often handwritten with little care, including scribbles, arrows and notes dotted around in no coherent order. If typed, Pound's letters were still pretty careless, with handwritten corrections and amendments written in careless squiggles. Looking at the two side-by-side is very telling; while Aitken had a more white-collar, office-based job and sent off letters which were written and presented well, Pound's letter style was a clear manifestation of his personal approach to writing and spelling, and was more representative of a creative lifestyle. Perhaps this even shows his more arrogant side, as he was employed on his terms and did not change his ways for someone else.

curated and that someone has actively decided what is important and therefore worthy of preserving. This must be taken into account when evaluating the value of an archival source, but it does not necessarily take away from the source's usefulness. Understanding the holes in the evidence gives a greater understanding of the evidence itself; forcing questions such as why the source was saved provides a new stance from which to assess the piece. Further to the curation of the archive, BBC WAC is also a company archive and not a personal one, affecting what would have been deemed useful. If a source seems personal to the subject, it begs questions as to what bearing this had on the company which holds it. The motive behind what is saved and studied is of paramount importance when trying to understand what the source means beyond the mere words on the page.⁸²

Background of the BBC

Starting life as the Marconi Company, the corporation presently known as the BBC began broadcasting to amateur radio enthusiasts in 1920. After a brief ban brought about by the military, the Marconi Company resumed business in February 1922, where they broadcasted 15-minute programmes once a week. The company grew substantially in only a matter of months, broadcasting nightly by May, and including musical programmes by June of the same year. In October 1922, the decision was made to rebrand as the British Broadcasting Company, which then evolved into the British Broadcasting Corporation, from 1 January 1927.⁸³ Today, the BBC is a fundamental part of British culture, providing a hub for both historical and contemporary television, film, radio and music, and is known worldwide for its rich history. The rate of growth for the Corporation was unprecedented, and Pound was able to watch the BBC rise in popularity, and then utilise the platform for not only the promotion of his works, but also his modernist agenda.

⁸² A broad and interesting account of archival discourse, including writings on personal and company archives, is:

Anne J. Gilliland, Sue McKemish and Andrew J. Lau, *Research In The Archival Multiverse* (Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2017) <<http://file:///C:/Users/u1361650/Downloads/628143.pdf>> [Accessed 23 August 2018].

⁸³ Jennifer R Doctor, *The BBC And Ultra-Modern Music, 1922-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 17-19.

The BBC has been a central pillar of music transmission since it started broadcasting music in June 1922 under its former moniker.⁸⁴ Its early programming focused heavily on ‘art music’, providing ‘high-brow’ music for the masses, however these noble intentions did not always cohere with the desires and interests of the listeners.⁸⁵ The reason for programming ‘high-brow’ music for the general public was an attempt to educate people in the pleasures of classical music, thereby promoting the industry outside of the radio platform. The intention was to encourage listeners to develop and refine their tastes and then pursue concerts, increasing interest (and audiences) for the benefit of the whole industry. John Reith, the first BBC Director-General, said in February 1924:

We say that by popularizing good music, wireless is doing an important service to the musical world, and one which an increasing number in the profession are glad to acknowledge.⁸⁶

The Listener

Pound, being a pioneer of form among other things, premiered his first opera *Le Testament de Villon* on BBC radio on 26 October 1931.⁸⁷ The creation of the ‘radio opera’ makes *Le Testament* an interesting study, as does Pound’s own relationship with the BBC. Pound was involved with the BBC in two main capacities: the first being a composer and poet whose works were featured in BBC programmes in various capacities over many years. In some ways, this was a relatively straightforward relationship of supply and demand as were it not for composers’ work being featured on programmes, the BBC would have no new work to broadcast. This type of relationship seems to have been fairly typical, whereby Pound was paid each time one of his works, either in part or in full, was featured on BBC radio. The BBC WAC holdings for Pound are relatively limited in sources in terms of invoices and payslips,

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

⁸⁵ Ibid.; Nick Stevenson, *Understanding Media Cultures*, 2nd edn (London: Sage Publications, 2002), p. 13.

⁸⁶ J.C.W. Reith, ‘Wireless and Music’, cited in Doctor, p. 28.

⁸⁷ The opera was broadcasted under the name *The Testament of François Villon*, and has had several different names based around *Le Testament de Villon*. However, in the interests of continuity, I will be referring to the opera only as ‘*Le Testament de Villon*’, or ‘*Le Testament*’.

but there is sufficient evidence to assume a typical pay-per-play relationship between Pound and the BBC. There is evidence that both excerpts of *Le Testament* and selections of Pound's poetry were broadcast, thus suggesting that the figure of Pound which was painted through programming at the BBC was one of an interdisciplinary modernist. Pound was given a platform from which both his literary and his musical artistic strands could be showcased, so it would have been a useful vehicle from which Pound could promote his modernist agenda.

Contrastingly, the latter of the two relationships held by Pound and the BBC has many more layers than the first. Pound was also employed as a columnist for *The Listener* magazine, and it is the relationships created through this role which sit outside the usual parameters for composer/BBC relationships (pay-per-play).⁸⁸ Pound was employed to write after he was approached by the Music Articles Editor, D.F. Aitken in 1936:

Would you consider writing us an article for the music pages of 'The Listener'? These pages usually deal with the music which is going to be broadcast in the following week, and assume a mild degree of musical knowledge on the part of the reader... It seemed to me that you would have a great deal more to say on the subject than the musical journalists around here.⁸⁹

The letter contains the expected technical information (that the article should be between 1200-1500 words in length and be submitted by 14th July), but is particularly nuanced in Aitken's reference to music journalists. Music journalism was a post typically held by well-educated, upper class white men who, more often than not, praised the traditional and condemned the modern. This middle-of-the-road approach, commenting on particular performers and technical aspects rather than critiquing the music as an entire work, did not suit the direction in which Aitken envisaged *The Listener* as going.⁹⁰ From the 1880s, music

⁸⁸ Pound's columns for *The Listener* are not the only example of Pound's work in criticism, as he also wrote often for *The New Age* magazine from 1917.

⁸⁹ BBC Written Archives Centre, RCONT1 Ezra Pound – Radio Times and Listener (1936-36), R19/2271/1, Letter from Aitken to Pound, 30 June 1936 [accessed 8 March 2017]; Fisher, *Ezra Pound's Radio Operas*, p. 196.

⁹⁰ Interestingly, Pound fitted into most of these criteria, being a white, well-educated man, but his lack of traditionalism is what set him apart.

journalists began lobbying to formalise the profession of ‘music critic’. Realisation of the role would help to distinguish letters published in newspapers and magazines by music journalists, from those sent in by opinionated members of the public. These articles were often left anonymous, so the field of musical criticism did not gain its own prominence until the early 1900s.⁹¹ Still then, a lot of professional music critics were ‘over-confident graduates of the university system’ whose articles were ‘based on first impressions rather than second thoughts’.⁹² Many were guilty of taking their own personal preferences to be universal, and so the profession by name did not attract much respect. With this label very much still attributed to the critics, it is clear why Aitken, even as late as the 1930s, began to pursue the criticism and opinions of those who did not come from that typical background. Pound was a radical modernist with often controversial views, which seemed to synergise with Aitken’s own at the time of employment. Given the state of music journalism as a profession, coupled together with Aitken’s own progressive views, Pound made the perfect candidate for becoming a *Listener* columnist.

As a well-educated man, Pound had a vast knowledge of music history and practice, but what set him apart from other critics was his futuristic outlook: rather than regurgitating praise for ‘the greats’, he formed his own strong opinions and was not averse to sharing them. Correspondence between Pound and Aitken highlights not only the sheer volume of material which Pound began producing for *The Listener*, but the strength of its content. The mirroring of views between Pound and Aitken was apparent also through private letters:

Your article on the Quartettes is entirely outside our usual orbit and it is quite against my principles to further the motives for which you want it published. But I like it so much that I propose to publish it anyway at the first possible opportunity.⁹³

That almost mischievous spirit in which Aitken writes to Pound suggests an excitement which he perhaps would not have got from the other ‘music journalists around here’. This

⁹¹ That being said, although the profession became formalised to an extent, certain columns still published anonymous critiques until much later.

⁹² Paul Watt, ‘Music Criticism In Late Nineteenth-Century England: Towards The Regulation And Reform Of A Profession In Crisis’, MMT Postgraduate Seminar, University of Huddersfield, 2017.

⁹³ BBC WAC, RCONT1 Ezra Pound – Radio Times and Listener (1936-36), letter from Aitken to Pound, 18 September 1936 [accessed 8 March 2017]; Fisher, *Ezra Pound's Radio Operas*, p. 196.

enthusiasm for the content they are able to publish is again reflected in the abundance of material which Pound produced for the publication: 'For heaven's sake don't write any more till I say go. I have only four pages a week and the congestion is getting really serious.'⁹⁴ Due to a limited number of sources pertaining to this particular employment at *The Listener*, it would be difficult to say definitively whether or not this writing role provided a conflict of interest. One can only speculate as to whether more of Pound's works were broadcast because of his employment at *The Listener*, but as Aitken says: "If you want to be a Minister of Kulchur you will have to broadcast, which is, I regret to say, completely beyond my control", it seems likely that Pound's two simultaneous relationships with the BBC remained distinctly separate.⁹⁵

Broadcasting and the Pound Revival

The BBC actively encouraged listener responses to programming in a talk in 1923,⁹⁶ and the trend grew exponentially. Although the BBC outwardly welcomed this criticism and its contribution to the development of their programming choices, there was a certain closed-mindedness within the institution which still attributed apparent faults in programming to 'bad listening' on the part of the audience:

In early 1930, the BBC approached the issue of correct listening more directly. A page of the BBC handbook published that spring prescribed the procedure for 'good listening' in simple terms and empathetic type[...]⁹⁷

In this guide, the recommendations for listening have parallels with how one is to conduct themselves at the theatre, placing considerable importance on the proper listening of BBC programmes. This rather condescending section of the BBC handbook gives an insight into the sense of importance felt by those working at the BBC, about the programmes they

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ BBC WAC, RCONT1 Ezra Pound – Radio Times and Listener Articles (1936-36), letter from Aitken to Pound, 27 August 1936 [accessed 8 March 2017]; Fisher, *Ezra Pound's Radio Operas*, p. 196.

⁹⁶ Doctor, p. 34.

⁹⁷ Doctor, p. 36-37.

made.⁹⁸ As the young BBC grew, the hierarchical structure of the corporation changed during the 1930s: while the fingerprint of the BBC was moulded by the personalities and talents of its employees, the growth of the institution meant that '[t]he Music Department's decisions and policies were thus less dependent on and cognizant of actions and discussions taking place in other parts of the Corporation'.⁹⁹ Going forward, therefore, the journey towards autonomy for the Music Department gave them much more freedom over broadcasting and programming, allowing perhaps for more experimental and controversial content. Although not a long-term programming strategy, in the summer of 1931 there was a large quantity of contemporary music broadcast by the BBC, including premieres of Second Viennese School works, as well as recently-composed works by both British and continental composers.¹⁰⁰ This shift towards new music allowed for more progressive composers, such as Pound, to showcase their work to a growing community of listeners.

From early data on programming, it is apparent that the number of hours dedicated to what the BBC called 'Classical Music' ('Opera, Orchestra [...] Chamber Music, Song Recital, Instrumental Recitals') increased significantly in the first few years of broadcasting, going from making up 18.05% of the music hours in 1924, to making up 32.15% of the music hours in 1929.¹⁰¹ This was due to technological advances within the BBC and their broadcasting capabilities, the wider ownership of radio equipment by listeners, and also because of the growing success of the BBC in these early years. By definition, Pound's opera would have fitted into this section of programming, suggesting that *Le Testament* was a part of a new wave of classical music made available to the masses. Considering the increasing level of governance within the Music Department, the choice to broadcast Pound can be attributed, at least in part, to the newfound freedom of the department. The BBC were heavily concerned with 'good music' for 'good listeners', and Pound fitted into this agenda of promoting new, but still 'high-brow' music.

⁹⁸ BBC Handbooks were annual supplements which provided summaries of the BBC's yearly activities and information on how Licence Fee money was used. They functioned as an advertisement to both existing and potential audiences. Cited in:

Matt Verrill, "Looking Back At The 1928 Handbook", *About The BBC*, 2018

<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/aboutthebbc/entries/261c0878-e6f4-3bde-8be8-8a888b03306c>> [Accessed 14 August 2018].

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 187-189.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 220-222.

¹⁰¹ Doctor, pp. 40-41.

Doctor notes that there was opposition to the growth of musical broadcasts on the radio, however, stemming from fears of making the musician obsolete. She demonstrates this with an article published in the *Daily Telegraph* in May 1923, written by William Boosey:

Music is not machinery, but music by machinery threatens more and more every day to put the musician out of his profession. Those members of the public, who naturally are very glad if they can get something for nothing... do not realise that unfortunately in this matter-of-fact world everything has to be paid for, and that if the services of artists are not paid for, their means of livelihood is totally destroyed.¹⁰²

William Boosey was the leader of a group of concert organisers who believed that radio as a musical platform was endangering the livelihoods of musicians and those involved in the performance process. This was one of the main oppositions to the music programmes faced by the BBC, but this argument did not seem to slow down the growth in popularity of music on BBC radio.

However interesting Pound's relationships with people at the BBC were, it cannot be overlooked that Pound was employed by the BBC as well as merely featured. Therefore, personal payments and budgets for the programmes must also be examined. The initial letter offering employment to Pound for writing for *The Listener* (mentioned above on page 33) mentions a payment of 'six guineas' for the first article.¹⁰³ It is hard to know whether this was the standard rate for *Listener* columnists, but this would have been a fairly healthy payment for a 1200-1500-word article, roughly equivalent to £183 in 2017.¹⁰⁴ Considering that Pound was writing articles quicker than the BBC would publish them, it stands to reason that Pound was making a decent wage from this writing, alongside his other freelance work. Separate from his employment at *The Listener*, Pound was also paid for the use of his work in broadcasts, as any poet or composer would have been. There is evidence

¹⁰² Boosey, 'Broadcasting'. *Daily Telegraph* (19th May 1923):11(D), cited in Doctor, p. 63.

¹⁰³ BBC Written Archives Centre, RCONT1 Ezra Pound – Radio Times and Listener (1936-36), R19/2271/1, Letter from Aitken to Pound, 30 June 1936 [accessed 8 March 2017].

¹⁰⁴ According to the 'Currency Converter' tool on *The National Archives* website:

"Currency Converter: 1270–2017", *Currency Converter*, 2018 <<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result>> [Accessed 14 August 2018].

held at BBC WAC of these features from 1930s right through to the mid-1980s. Figure 2.1 shows an invoice for the use of arguably Pound's most famous Poem *In a Station of the Metro*, which was paid to Pound's publisher, Faber & Faber.¹⁰⁵

THE BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION, BROADCASTING HOUSE, LONDON W1A 1AA

Service: *Secondary English* Date of issue: *21.10.83* 20th September 1983

Author if different from Payee: *Ezra Pound* GAB1420

Payee Number: 29-36 Payee Name: *Faber & Faber Ltd* 37-64 COPYRIGHT DEPARTMENT PAYMENTS Un. Cd. 65-66

Address: *Faber & Faber Ltd*
3 Queen Square
LONDON WC1H 3AU cc: *Peter Fossard*
O.S.B.R.

Ac.	RAI	Sc.
1	2	3-4
	0	07

Project No.	Nom. A/C	Fee	Name of Programme, Title of Work and Author	Date of Broadcast
5-17	18-21	22-28	non-punch	67-72
	0106		<i>SECONDARY ENGLISH 11-14</i> <i>For use of the poem 'In a Station of a Metro' from Personae by Ezra Pound © £6.40 + 1/6 per 1/2 minute, duration 0.04"</i> <i>Full Fee</i>	20.09.83
		<i>£7.47</i>		

Passed by: *Ch. Bentley* Certified duly performed on above date(s)

PS/544 9.81

Figure 2.1 - Invoice for playing 'In a Station of a Metro' in 1983, held at BBC WAC – RCONT22 Ezra Pound – Copyright (1980-1984)

This is an example of the typical relationship between Pound and the BBC alluded to earlier in this chapter. Although this example is from a much later date than *Le Testament*, it still serves as a useful source detailing how much the BBC paid for use of Pound's works aside from his opera. The invoice shows that Pound's publisher Faber & Faber were paid £7.47 for the use of his two-line poem in 1983, and under the title of the work, the invoice clearly sets out the costings of this payment. It is notable from the dates on the source that it took one month from broadcast to payment, but considering the bureaucratic side of radio work, this does not seem out of the ordinary. The poem named in this source was written in 1913, so this feature in 1983 would be in line with the revival of Pound's work

¹⁰⁵BBC WAC, RCONT22 Ezra Pound – Copyright (1980-1984), invoice for broadcast of poem, 21 October 1983 [accessed 8 March 2017].

starting from the 1960s. This source details a payment to his publisher rather than Pound himself, but so far, the monetary side of Pound's relationship with the BBC seems fairly textbook, but the budgets of the BBC departments and programming must also be considered. Some of the holdings relating to Pound at BBC WAC give some insight to the budgets producers were working from. Although there were no official budget sheets available for viewing, piecing together information from correspondence along with the odd costing sheet does give some insight into the economic situation of the BBC's music programmes from the 1930s through to the 1980s. Figures 2.2 and 2.3 reproduce sources held at BBC WAC which give a clear example of how programming budgets affected the presentation of Pound's works, and therefore possibly their intended effects. When there was a push to replay and appreciate *Le Testament* again in the 1960s, the plan went from putting on the whole opera, to providing a selection of solos which would have cost less both in terms of production, and paying the performers.

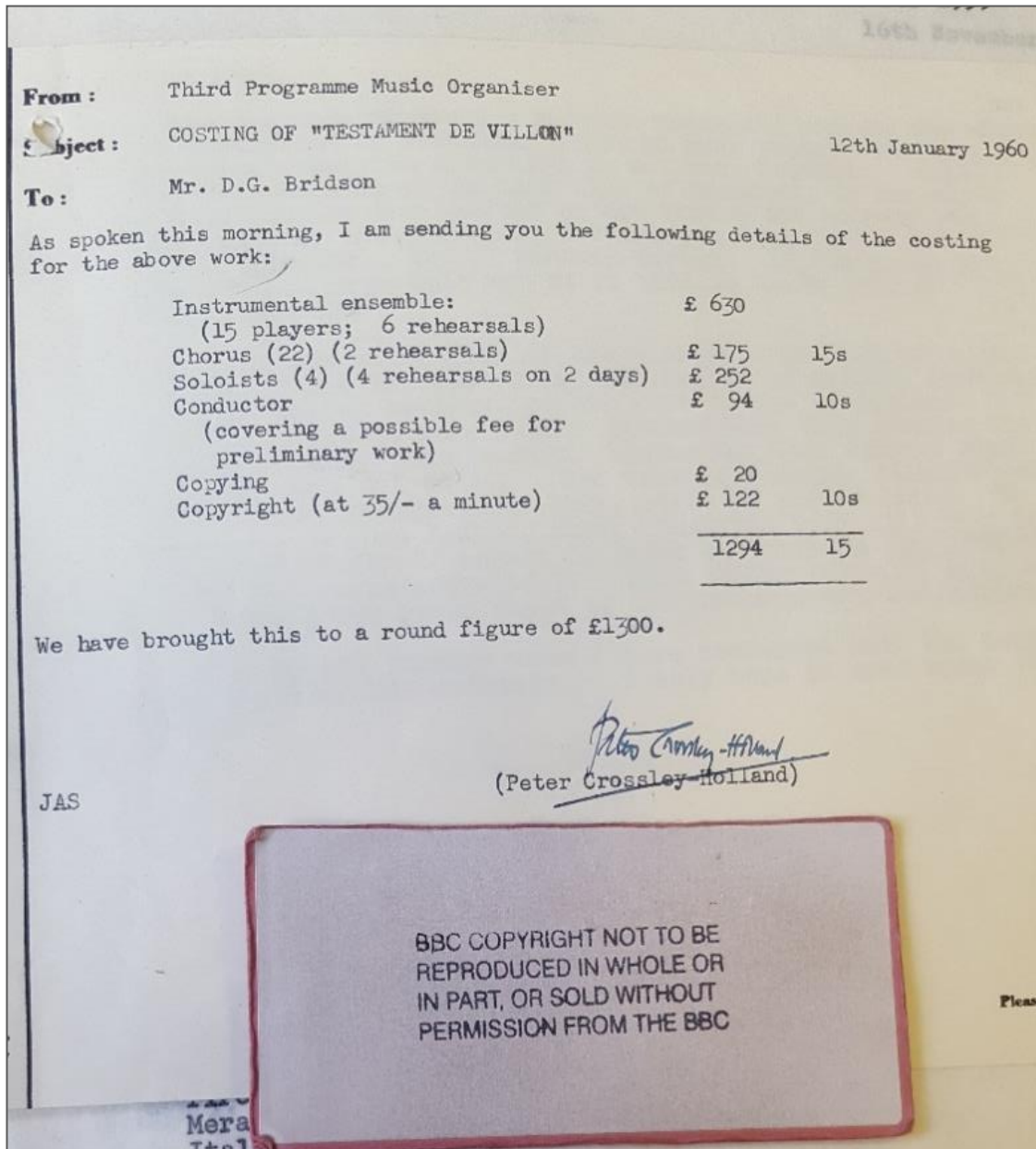


Figure 2.2 - Cost of putting on 'Villon' in January 1960, held at BBC WAC - RCONT1 Ezra Pound – Scriptwriter (1953-1962).

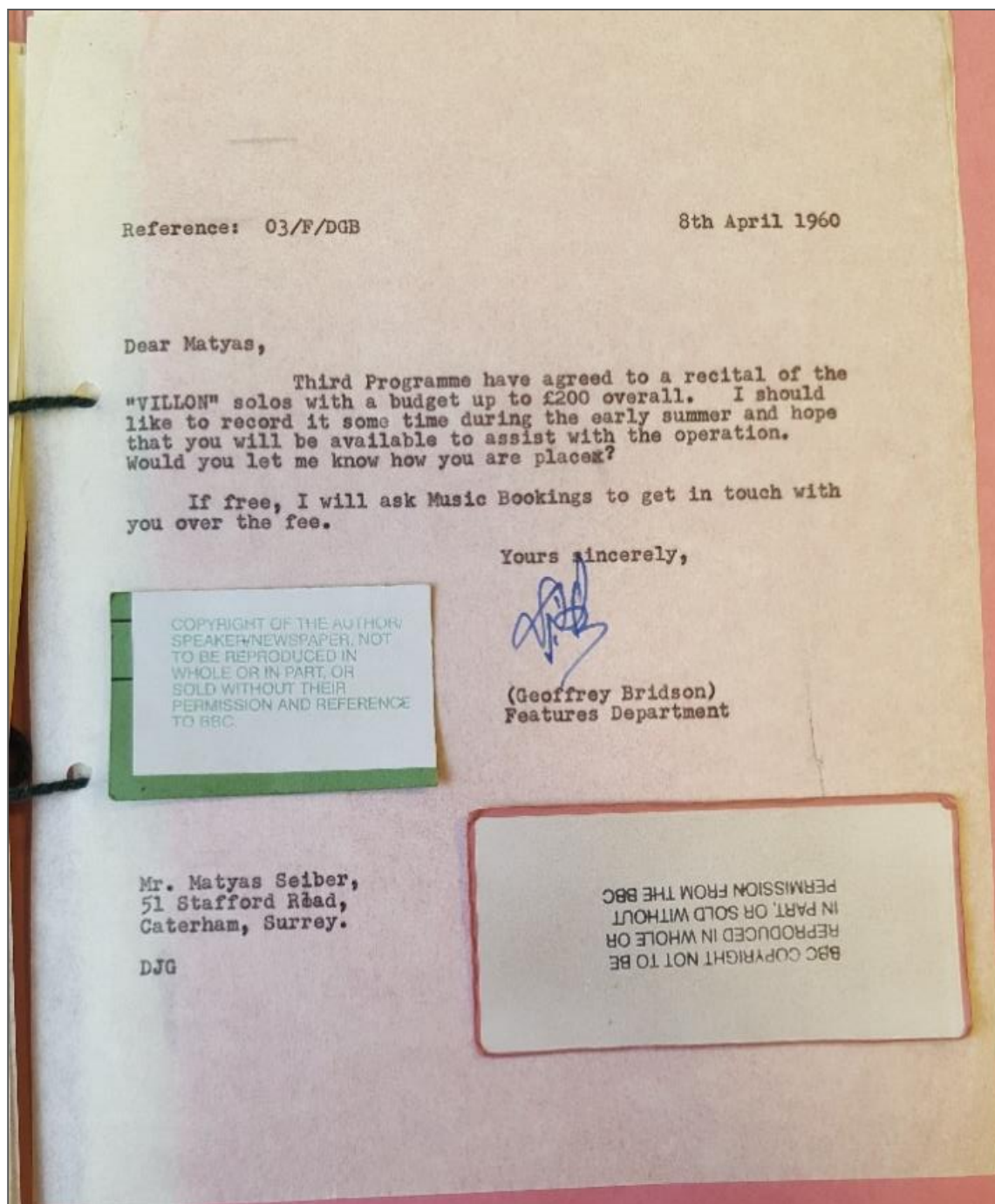


Figure 2.3 - Revision of production in April 1960, held at BBC WAC - R19/2271/1 Villon – Ezra Pound (1959-1961)

These sources show that a production of *Le Testament* was proposed to Geoffrey Bridson of the Features Department in January 1960 and was costed at 'a round figure of £1300.' However, this plan was later revised and reduced to a 'recital of the "VILLON" solos with a budget up to £200 overall' in April of that year. Figure 2.2 is a costing sheet which clearly lays out how much each aspect of the production would have cost, concluding that a

budget of £1300 would have covered fees for the musicians, chorus, soloists, conductor, copying and copyright. Figure 2.3 is a letter dated 3 months later which shows Bridson explaining to Matyas Seiber that the production the Third Programme actually agreed to was a revised version of the full opera with a fraction of the budget outlined in the costing sheet (figure 2.2). The creation of the costing sheet would have taken careful consideration and planning but was still rejected by the Third Programme in favour of broadcasting a reduced production, demonstrating the harsh reality of their budget constraints. Were the revision of the production on the grounds of lack of interest, the budget would not have been cut so drastically, but to cut it by such a large percentage indicates a motive more concerned with money than programming. Pound's work can only be judged when people are exposed to it. Although much more Pound scholarship emerged around this time, and there was clearly an interest in him from the BBC, monetary constraints meant that the public were not getting the work as originally intended, and therefore possibly were not able to judge the work for what it was. Out of context, music can be judged through a single lens, purely for the notes on the page; broadcasting a recital of solos, by definition, omits the spoken interludes of the opera and indeed the running story, meaning that the music is to be received in isolation, arguably removed from its affiliation with modernism and Pound. When a work such as *Le Testament* is performed in excerpts and lacks the continuity needed to tell the story of Villon's poetry, an element of the work is lost, making it extremely difficult to judge effectively. To evaluate Pound as an effective modernist then, the context and setting of *Le Testament* cannot be disregarded, for being a modernist is fundamentally intertwined with Pound's work and outward aesthetic.¹⁰⁶ The budgetary constraints at the BBC arguably contributed to the one-sided criticisms of Pound's works, rather than allowing him to be judged as the multi-faceted modernist that he was.

The revival of Pound and his work is interesting because of the political state of the world at the time. Firstly, the sources held at BBC WAC seem to be dated either around the mid-1930s, or from 1959 to the late 1980s. There is a large gap in Pound scholarship here, which made it possible for a 'revival' to occur. World War 2 fits almost perfectly into the middle of those missing dates in scholarship, so it would seem that the reason for the first decline in literature pertaining to Pound was quite straightforward. What is interesting,

¹⁰⁶ Kramer, pp. 63-64.

however, is that a somewhat fringe writer from the 1920s and 1930s was picked up again, and held in a significant, long-lived, position within the artistic spheres. Considering that Pound was arrested in 1945 for treason against the USA, it would seem plausible that he would have been left to be forgotten after the war, but it seems that he was deliberately revived and promoted by critics and institutions such as the BBC.¹⁰⁷ Political tensions could possibly have created intrigue in Pound's character, but it is interesting to have such a revival before the expected posthumous memorial.

¹⁰⁷ Louis Menand and others, "The Pound Error", *The New Yorker*, 2008
<<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/06/09/the-pound-error>> [Accessed 14 March 2018].

Chapter 3

Form, Genre and Media

There are many aspects of Pound's *Le Testament de Villon* which are fascinating, both in terms of Pound as a composer, and also Pound as a modernist. His first opera generates questions as to whether the more confusing aspects of the work were an accidental contradiction of his values, or a very deliberate statement. He chose the well-established form of opera through which to rework Villon's words, then chose to publicly release it in the UK through the new, unconventional platform of radio. Some contradictory aspects of his personality and artistic output have already been explored, and this discussion will be extended further, asking why Pound made the decisions he did in terms of the media and form used, and how these helped to express his modernist persona. Evaluating these questions in a way which is somewhat removed from looking at the actual words or notes used, and looking more at Pound's approach, will shed a slightly different light on how he operated, and what his intentions were with the opera.

Form: Why Pound Chose Opera

The experimental element of much modernist work allowed Pound, amongst others, to practice unconventional form as well as media. In the context of *Le Testament de Villon*, the choice of the operatic form through which to revive Villon's poetry is an interesting one. Further to the issue of sensory restrictions, which will be explored in further detail later in this chapter, the use of opera in this context raises many more questions about Pound and his creative processes. Opera has had a long-standing history, riddled with conventions and norms, which of course has evolved considerably over the years. *A History of Opera* by Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker gives an extensive overview of opera, from its origins as 'court sponsored private entertainments of the seventeenth century', to its presence in modern-day society.¹⁰⁸ Part of opera's journey to the present day saw shorter, more satirical operas and operettas, critiquing political and artistic circumstances emerge around the turn of the 20th century. *Le Testament* is not so much a social commentary, but does still fit into this 'other' category due to its function as literary criticism.

¹⁰⁸ Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, *A History Of Opera* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2015), p. 19.

Opera and Pound's Modernist Aesthetic

The questions posed, then, revolve around why Pound chose opera as the form for a work when it seems like a particularly problematic choice both in terms of practicality, and his outward image. Pound's use of form here seems somewhat problematic when comparing his practice to his theory set out in *A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste*: '[d]on't retell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose.'¹⁰⁹ In his manifesto, Pound is referring specifically to poetry and prose but as a man who talked profusely about the synergy of different art forms and the transgression between different artistic disciplines, it does not seem unreasonable to expect a version of this model to be applied to his work in poetry and music. In establishing Imagism in 1912/1913, Pound spoke against the excessiveness and abstraction of Romanticism, but then seems to contradict this doctrine with the emergence of 'Make It New', the concept which was encapsulated in a collection published around 10 years later. The premise of 'Make It New' was about renaissance: reusing historical techniques, work and media to form new work. *Le Testament* fits directly into this latter model, as a reworking of Villon's words, but simultaneously sits in contention with the Imagist manifesto. *Le Testament* highlights the paradoxical nature of much early, reflexive modernist literature, exposing the differences between modernist sub-movements, and raising the question of whether Pound was inconsistent or continually evolving.

Opera and Pound's Modernist Evolution

The emergence of the 'Make It New' slogan was the culmination of Pound's transition from Imagism to Vorticism, changing and adapting his own ideas until he reached his new ideology. Pound as an artist desperately did not want to be misunderstood, but keeping up with his ever-changing ideals was a challenge in itself. In 1914, in collaboration with Percy Wyndham Lewis, Pound co-founded Vorticism, which was in part a development from Imagism, but equally a reaction against it. In true modernist spirit, the development through the sub-movements was incredibly rapid, in comparison to previous accepted historical

¹⁰⁹ Ezra Pound, *A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste*.

eras, causing artistic rebellion against previous sub-genres to be led even by those who created them. It is in Pound's shift to Vorticism that the key to his use of opera lies:

In his explanatory essay "Vorticism", published in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1914, Pound likewise emphasized that Vorticism included several arts - he mentioned painting, sculpture, music, and poetry - and similarly called for Vorticist artists to make full use of the "primary pigment" associated with their particular art, i.e., the medium distinctive to that art, and to concentrate on employing that medium to present that which could best, or only, be conveyed by way of it (G-B 91-94, especially 87-92).¹¹⁰

Obviously in Pound's case, he chose opera as music's 'primary pigment', and so its use as a vehicle through which to convey Villon's words, is actually in perfect keeping with the progression of his modernist values. Although this does still leave some unanswered questions about intention, it does provide a prime example of what modernism was really about. Vorticism, as the name suggests, mirrors the swirling, chaotic vortex of modernity, meaning that in learning to understand the art, the art then in turn gave readers/ viewers/ listeners the tools to deal with this in modern life; in unpicking and decoding a vorticist image, you are developing transferable skills which can be applied in order to make sense of the rapidly changing western world. Vorticism, much like Imagism, is one of the branches off of the modernist movement, but modernist terms can themselves be somewhat problematic. The term 'modernism' is often used interchangeably with 'Avant-Garde', but what is highlighted in this example of Pound's artistic beliefs is the important difference between the two: the former being an active movement from the immediate past into the future, and the latter being the deliberate destruction of past art.¹¹¹ Using the 'primary

¹¹⁰ Hickman, *The Geometry Of Modernism*, pp. 256-257.

Hickman's reference 'G-B' is citing: 'Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska*' (shown in *Abbreviations*, Hickman, p. xi).

¹¹¹ Some interesting accounts on the distinction between 'modernism' and 'avant-garde' are:

David Ayers and others, *Utopia : The Avant-Garde, Modernism And (Im)Possible Life*, 1st edn (De Gruyter, Inc., 2015) <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/HUD/detail.action?docID=4230812>> [Accessed 28 August 2018];

Sascha Bru and others, *Europa! Europa? : The Avant-Garde, Modernism And The Fate Of The Continent*, 1st edn (De Gruyter, Inc., 2009) <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/HUD/detail.action?docID=476002>> [Accessed 28 August 2018].

pigment' of your chosen discipline to showcase new work is another method of redefining existing convention and forms. Through this statement then, Pound is advocating rejection rather than destruction. This is an important distinction to make, and one often overlooked when talking about complex and challenging works of this era. Considering this in conjunction with questions as to whether the work can even be called an 'opera' at all, it seems that Pound either made some large oversights, or was making a very deliberate statement by being intentionally exploitative of the form: the latter highlights Pound's personal progression through modernism as well, so is the more likely option.

Abbate & Parker argue that the development of technology either coincided with, or caused, a decline in demand for opera amongst the masses: '[p]opular regard for opera has shrunk during the very years in which experiencing opera - in the form of recordings - has become more and more effortless'.¹¹² This pertains to the use of opera in film; as previously stated about the widespread popularity of opera in Europe and the USA only 3 pages earlier, Abbate and Parker make an interesting case when considering it in the context of progressive modernism. It is suggested here that the communication of opera through mass-media coincided with its decline in popularity, and it was during this time that Pound created and broadcasted his radio operas. It is not clear whether it is mass-media which caused this reduction of interest in opera but the two occurred simultaneously, nonetheless. Perhaps rather than being a victim of this trend, Pound was in fact utilising it effectively: making a statement by reshaping the definition of a form in decline. Innovatively using opera in the way he did showed an outright rejection of Romantic values, but Avant-garde ideals took this notion further, seeking to destroy these conventions rather than just reject them. In creating Dada, both its founder Hugo Ball and its advocate Tristan Tzara, believed that art had become disposable, no longer holding meaning or cultural significance.¹¹³ Still being studied as an Avant-garde movement today, Ball's vision clearly was not that successful, but attitudes to art still progressed to this stage, and Pound was a major figurehead in this development from rejection to outright destruction. That is not to say that modernism and the Avant-garde are totally separate, as the two concepts often

¹¹² Abbate & Parker, p. 549.

¹¹³ Ian Buchanan, "Dada", *Oxford Dictionary Of Critical Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2018) <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780198794790.001.0001/acref-9780198794790-e-157>> [Accessed 14 July 2018].

overlapped, but I think distinguishing between 'rejection' and 'destruction' is important for noting Pound's placement within modernism. Peter Bürger notes that modernism is categorised by the challenging or destruction of 'traditional unity'.¹¹⁴ By associating modernism with destruction in this way, Bürger is highlighting the closeness of the two concepts, showing that they share common ground and suggesting that a distinction between the two is not clear cut. There is an undeniably strong relationship between Pound's actions and decisions in terms of creating and setting his works, and the evolution which saw modern movements become progressively more radical.

Hughes & Fisher discuss the problematic features of the *Le Testament* broadcast, suggesting that a new opera perhaps was not fully compatible with the platform of radio.¹¹⁵ It would not be incredible to ascribe this seeming unsuitability of opera and radio to Pound being a novice composer and musician, but this seems unlikely given how well-educated Pound was, coupled with his great personal fondness for music; it seems more likely that this was in fact Pound's way of making a statement.¹¹⁶ As an experiment, it is certainly interesting; he violates the traditional form of opera, thereby attempting to destroy, or at the very least remould, the long-standing and well-respected conventions which were so closely affiliated with Victorian impressionism. Mistreating the respected operatic form toes the line of Pound's modernist image, promoting his values of looking forwards rather than back.

Media: Why Radio?

The first, and perhaps most obvious question to ask, is *why radio*?¹¹⁷ Technological advances caused radio to grow rapidly from a medium used almost exclusively by the military and private enthusiasts, to a national platform from which information, and later music, could be transmitted to the masses with the intention of educating and entertaining, in only a matter of years.¹¹⁸ It was a fast-growing medium, and was no-doubt an exciting

¹¹⁴ Peter Bürger, Michael Shaw and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, *Theory Of The Avant-Garde*, 2nd edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 55.

¹¹⁵ Hughes & Fisher, pp. 9-10.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ I do acknowledge other interesting uses of various media by Pound, but am unfortunately unable to address them in this dissertation.

¹¹⁸ Doctor, pp. 17-19.

prospect for forward-thinking modernists such as Pound. It would have been an exciting notion that music, once confined to private salons or concert halls, could now be instantly accessible to a vast proportion of the population, spanning different ages, sexes and classes.

Being able to reach so many people at once, however, is a two-sided coin. Having your music reach the masses sounds like a potentially exciting concept, but conversely, it does leave one open to criticism from a huge audience, some of whom perhaps would not have had the same foundation in classical music as those who would have gone to see the work premiered in a concert hall. Considering the possibility of such a large scope of criticism, a mass audience could seem like an intimidating notion, especially since it would not have been a problem that even Pound's closest predecessors would have had to consider. Dwight Macdonald notes that not only did Mass Culture emerge fairly recently and quickly from technological advances in radio and television, but also that it began life as 'a parasitic, a cancerous growth on High Culture.'¹¹⁹ He is suggesting that mass media was detrimental to High Culture, and that making 'high art' widely accessible somehow lowered its value. This is an interesting notion to consider when examining Pound's engagement with radio as a mass-media form, as he is not using it to transmit pre-existing 'high-art' material, but to premiere his opera. A controversial work on a controversial platform being made so readily available for judgement does seem to fit with the rebellious aspect of Pound's modernist aesthetic. Therefore, this problem of mass-criticism would arguably have been immaterial to Pound: as an opinionated man himself, he would have been more concerned with the work he produced than how it was actually received, leaving radio as a platform with arguably more pros than cons. The other appealing thing about radio, of course, is that it is remote. Pound lived in Italy, and travelled a lot for work, but the nature of recording makes radio a convenient medium, as well as an exciting one. Recordings can be made and stored until broadcast, creating a somewhat less-demanding schedule, thus making the use of Pound's time more effective. All aspects considered, radio would have been an appealing form both in terms of fashion and functionality.

¹¹⁹ Dwight Macdonald, "A Theory Of Mass Culture", in *Cultural Theory And Popular Culture*, 2nd edn (Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall, 1998), p.23.

The Question of Intention

Furthermore, it is interesting to look at how the choice of media could have affected the composition of the work itself. *Le Testament* was not initially intended for radio, but was adapted for it when the opportunity arose. This begs the question as to whether Pound saw this as a possibility for publication when he started the compositional process.¹²⁰

There is a particularly notable feature of *Le Testament* which could suggest that Pound had the intention to broadcast the opera on radio right from the time of composition. The use of voicing in the score is busy and was potentially designed to imitate properties of radio. The use of different voices is worthy of exploration in *Le Testament*, as can be seen in figure 3.1. Particularly towards the end of the opera, there is a lot of rapid changing from 'solo' / 'tutti' / 'bassi' / 'males' / 'tenor + females' / 'three voices' and so on from pp.70-81 of the 1920-1921 score (edited by Antheil in 1923).¹²¹

¹²⁰ It does seem unlikely that Pound considered the possibility of radio before it was proposed to him, as he is documented as having changed his compositional style for *Cavalcanti* after hearing what did and did not transmit well over radio.

Hughes & Fisher, p. 54.

¹²¹ Ezra Pound and George Antheil, "Le Testament: Opera After Francois Villion By Ezra Pound" (New Haven, 1920-1923), Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Ezra Pound Papers.

Considering opera as a multi-sensory form, consisting of at least audio and visuals, it seems questionable to choose to perform an opera via a medium which is limited to only one.¹²² Abbate and Parker provide an interesting overview of the use of opera in the inter- and post-war periods, during which *Le Testament de Villon* was written and performed. It is stated that '[f]rom the 1930s through to the 1950s [...] the *institution* of opera was so high on the popular radar in America and Europe that it was thought completely reasonable to make and expect profit from opera-themed movies.'¹²³ Opera was so popular in the West in this period that transferring it into different formats created a new lease of life for the historic form, and was even largely profitable. It makes sense to progress onto a new form which allows for all sensory aspects of the work to be communicated, such as film, so although progressive use of technological platforms does almost create a sort of renaissance for opera in this context, we are still left with problems when framing an opera in the solely audio dimension of radio.

Figure 3.2 depicts a letter, dated 1959, between BBC employees, discusses the BBC's intention to broadcast *Le Testament de Villon* again, and it contains many interesting points. Firstly, it is one of the multiple sources which questions the form, describing the work as a 'song cycle'. Perhaps more notably, however, *Le Testament* is described as 'an almost unique example of composition by a major poet with ideas about the setting of words and vowel tones.'¹²⁴ This letter not only confirms the cultural importance of the work, but also the significance of Pound's interdisciplinary modernist approach.

¹²² This proves what an interesting experiment adapting an entire opera for radio, and highlights that it was in fact just that: an experiment.

¹²³ Abbate & Parker, p. 546.

¹²⁴ BBC WAC, RCONT1 Ezra Pound – Scriptwriter (1953-1962), letter from Bridson to C.T.P., 28 October 1959 [accessed 8 March 2017].

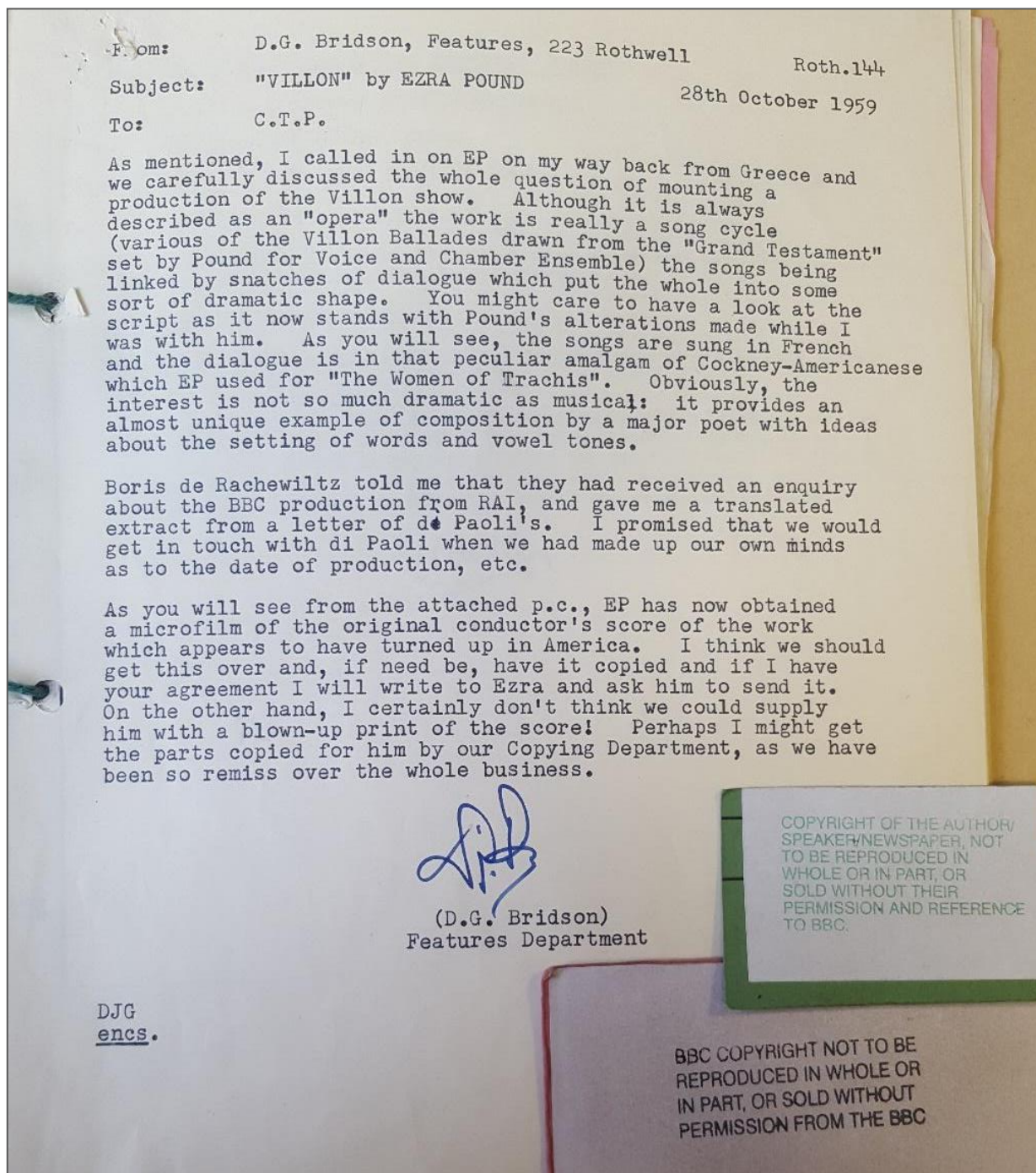


Figure 3.2 - Letter from D.G. Bridson to C.T.P., October 1959, detailing the originality of Pound's work, held at BBC WAC - RCONT1 Ezra Pound – Scriptwriter (1953-1962).

Bridson says in this letter how Pound included 'snatches of dialogue which put the whole into some sort of dramatic shape', suggesting that the writing of the opera did partially

compensate for the solely audio format of radio through use of passages spoken in English, and therefore initially designed for broadcast over radio.¹²⁵

Examining Pound's intentions in relation to the visuals for *Le Testament* are interesting when considering transferring the opera to radio. If visuals make up half of the sensory outlets of an opera, then plans for visuals and staging could suggest that radio was not in fact considered for *Le Testament* in the early compositional process. The issue of visuals cannot be concisely answered, but from evidence found both at BBC Written Archive Centre, and in sources in the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University (BRBL), a few details can be stitched together. Firstly, there is an undated letter held at BRBL entitled *Staging of the Villon*.¹²⁶ The letter has no date or addressee, but gives an idea not only of his intentions, but of how once again, monetary constraints limit the possibilities for the work. Pound says:

...the play was written for masks, that is for the principal characters. These masks wd. have heightened the upper part of the face, been flexible at the sides, waxed to the cheeks but leaving the jaw free.¹²⁷

Pound then says that the play can be performed without spending funds on masks, but to make up for it, characters must wear heavy make-up, and fit into two distinct categories in terms of movement on stage: 'the immobile' and 'the figety [sic.]'. He goes into great detail about how the actors should move, showing intent from the start for the vocalists to perform as well as sing. Again, this source is undated, so this could well have been an early intention which was later scrapped, or could have indeed been a final objective. Either way, we know that there was, definitely the intention to have a combination of both visuals and

¹²⁵ Bridson worked for the features department of the BBC, having influence and input in programming, and choosing artists (and therefore the styles and movements they represent) to broadcast. I do acknowledge that the score was continually adapted, and could have been specifically changed for broadcast over radio, but the evidence above suggests that use of radio was an important aspect of *Le Testament* and even if it was not designed for radio initially, it was at some point edited for this specific purpose.

¹²⁶ Ezra Pound, "Staging Of The Villon" (New Haven), Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Ezra Pound papers.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

acting, showing once again that it is unlikely that adapting this stage-intended opera for radio was on Pound's radar during the compositional process. The other place to look for intention, of course, is in the score itself. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will be referring to the rough working manuscripts digitised by Yale university (held at BRBL), and a bound score edited by Murray Schafer, which is held at BBC Perivale. In the Schafer edition, there are notes and directions written into the score, some labelled as Pound's, and some unlabelled, presumably Schafer's. They mainly consist of musical style directions to achieve a particular effect, however these instructions do not go into more detail or have any more narrative functionality that one would expect from a piece of program-music or film composition. The music tells a story through the libretto and melodies, but there is not great evidence of heavily detailed direction which would compensate for the missing visual dimension of the opera. The vocal interludes, spoken in English, do contribute to guiding the listener through the story, but only if the work is played in its entirety; when the solo excerpts were broadcast at the latter end of the 20th century, they would have omitted these passages, leaving the music to speak for itself. In conventional, classical compositional practice, there was a whole network of accepted musical coding which was used to convey emotion or narrative further than the libretto.¹²⁸ Being a modernist composition, therefore, rejecting these common codes and symbols, *Le Testament* arguably lacks the power to effectively convey its story over the single-sensory medium of radio, especially when it is not broadcast in its entirety.¹²⁹ The opera functioned as a literary criticism, and as an experimental use of musical practice and form, but arguably could not deliver its content effectively because of the lack of the very practices and codes from which Pound was trying to liberate the art-world from.

Even if broadcasting *Le Testament* on radio was not Pound's initial intention, the choice of radio as a platform for the opera was certainly a notable decision. As with most experiments, the outcome can never be accurately predicted; the risk of premiering the opera in the UK over radio could have either made the work less accessible to the masses by limiting an already challenging work to only one sensory dimension, or could have worked with his outward modernist aesthetic. The latter would have helped in creating an

¹²⁸ Leonard G Ratner, *Classic Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1985).

¹²⁹ This is particularly problematic when considering that 'meaning' was Pound's main priority, both when translating poems by language, or indeed by form (poem to opera).

illuminated image of Pound as a forward-thinking modernist, breaking trends and subverting convention. Looking at correspondence from BBC WAC, specifically revisiting figure 3.1, it seems that even those who admired the work questioned its authenticity; D. G. Bridson of the Features Department, who advocated its repeat broadcast, said:

Although it is always described as an “opera”, the work is really a song cycle (various of the Villon Ballades drawn from the “Grand Testament” set by Pound for Voice and Chamber Ensemble)...¹³⁰

The discussion of the use of radio and opera in conjunction with one another assumes that the work was correct in being labelled an ‘opera’ at all. By describing *Le Testament* this way, it would seem that the amateur qualities in Pound’s musical work sit at the fore of our reception of it, which is particularly interesting when considering the broad perception of opera as elitist. Furthermore, an article in *The Times* which advertised the work on the day of the broadcast (Monday 26th October 1931), also neglects to use the word ‘opera’. As shown in figure 3.2, it is simply labelled as ‘a melodrama’, excusing the author of any responsibility of possibly misrepresenting the work.¹³¹ This article would most likely have been written by personnel at the BBC and sent to the newspaper for print, so yet again, it is the BBC who are shown as being sceptical of *Le Testament* being branded as an opera.¹³²

¹³⁰ BBC WAC, RCONT1 Ezra Pound – Scriptwriter (1953-1962), letter from Bridson to C.T.P., 28 October 1959 [accessed 8 March 2017] (pictured in figure 3.2).

I am reusing figure 3.1 because I think it is particularly useful to explore the questions surrounding Pound’s use of the operatic form, and the legitimacy with which the title ‘opera’ is used.

¹³¹ Hughes & Fisher also note that *Le Testament* was labelled as an ‘opera’ before its adaptation for radio, and a ‘melodrama’ after (pp. 51-52).

¹³² The Times, "Broadcasting", 1931, p. 20,

<<http://find.galegroup.com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=hudduni&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS335750490&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>> [Accessed 9 March 2018].

Broadcasting

THE PROGRAMMES

A MELODRAMA

Listeners to the National Station tonight will hear a performance of *The Testament of Francois Villon*, a melodrama founded by Mr. Ezra Pound on the life of thieves in thirteenth-century Paris as mirrored in the poetry of Villon. Villon's own poetry set to music by Mr. Pound will link the dialogue. The cast will include Mr. Robert Maitland, Miss Violet Marquesita, Mr. Victor Lewisohn, and Mr. John Armstrong. At 8 p.m. there will be broadcast a variety entertainment, to which Mr. Gillie Potter, Mr. Ronald Gourley, and Messrs. Flotsam and Jetsam will contribute.

Figure 3.3 - Column from *The Times* newspaper about the original broadcast, 26th October 1931, from *The Times* digital archive.

In 1960, there were discussions as to whether or not *Le Testament de Villon* as an entire opera was worth reviving on the BBC's Third Programme. At first, the BBC agreed to go ahead with the production, however they soon cut the production down to only a few select recitals. The letter from Bridson proposing the production of *Le Testament* in 1960 (which was accompanied by the costing sheet pictured in fig 2.2), is faded and hard to understand, but after stating his arguments about this 'uniquely special' case of 'the only example known of a music score composed by a major poet', he sums up by saying '[I]n other words, although the cost might be high, the lasting value of the work would be higher still.'¹³³ The costing total came to £1300 for the conductor, the musicians, and the copyright fees, but later, due to probable monetary constraints, the production was reduced to a few solo recitals:

¹³³ BBC WAC, RCONT1 Ezra Pound – Scriptwriter (1953-1962), letter accompanying costing sheet (fig 2.2) from Bridson to C.T.P., 13 January 1960 [accessed 8 March 2017].

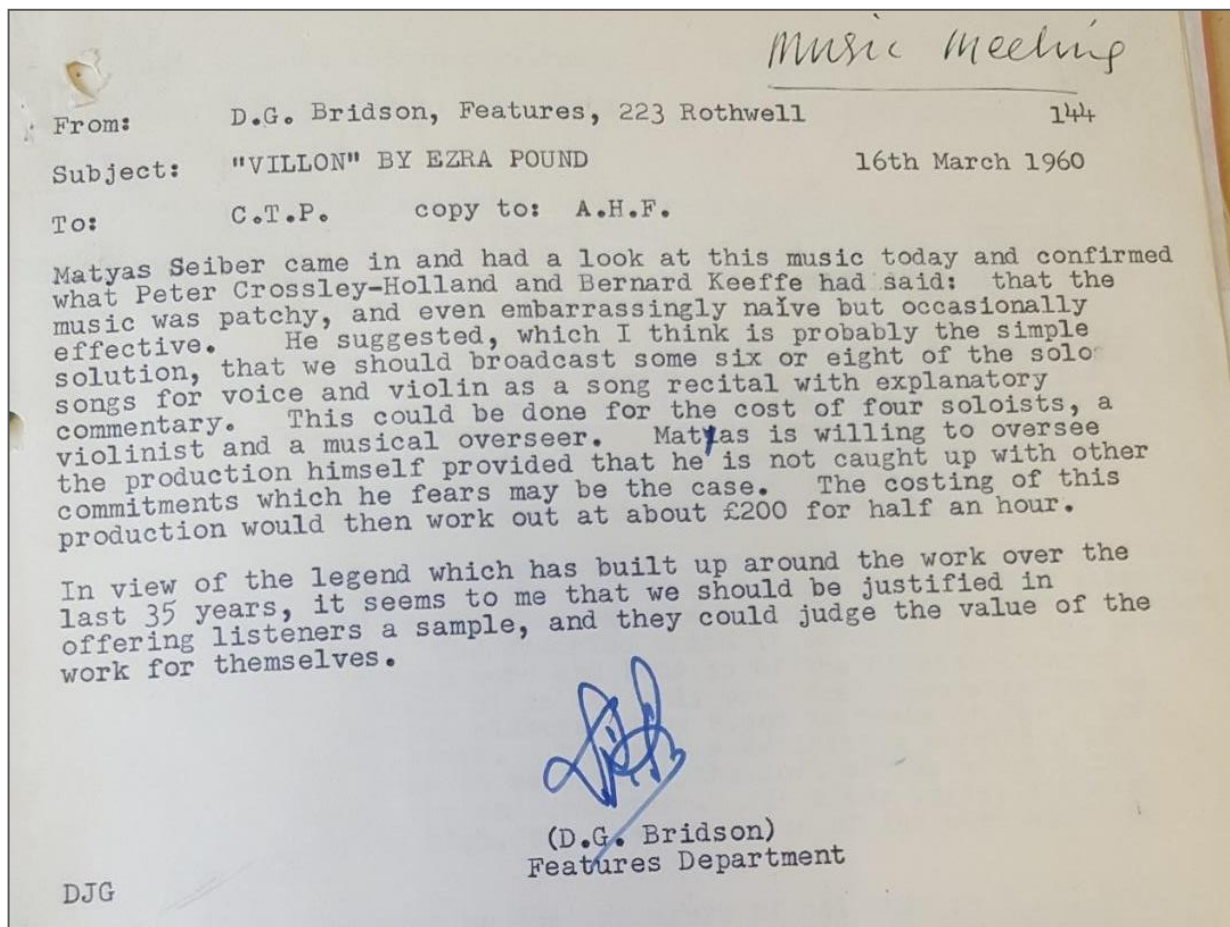


Figure 3.4 - Letter from Bridson to C.T.P. in March 1960, proposing the reduction of the opera to a few solo recitals, held at BBC WAC – RCONT1 Ezra Pound – Scriptwriter (1953-1962).

What is interesting in this letter, is the acknowledgment of the opera's importance despite being seemingly limited technically. Note how highly respected the work is; Bridson mentions 'the legend which has built up around the work', suggesting that being the first musical composition by a 'major poet' held great significance in the literary and musical worlds, by transgressing the boundaries of traditional artistic disciplines.¹³⁴ Well-known operas generally have a level of standing whereby excerpts can be performed out of context while still holding their own merit. In concert halls, singers would recite singular arias while reproducing the appropriate acting which one would see on stage if one were to see the full opera. It works for established and well-respected operas because of their standing and

¹³⁴ BBC WAC, RCONT1 Ezra Pound – Scriptwriter (1953-1962), letter from Bridson to C.T.P., 16 March 1960 [accessed 8 March 2017].

respect; they can be spliced up and performed separately or in different combinations while still holding their own level of prowess because of the existing reputation of the opera as a whole. Applying this treatment of opera to an obscure work such as *Le Testament*, over a medium which does not allow for any sort of context or storytelling to be conveyed further than the words and the music, arguably detracts from the piece as a whole. Abbate and Parker articulate this point well:

As the archival tonnage [of opera] increases, there is a sense in which its contents can become an obsession and a distraction. Repeated visits to the treasury of recordings are, as a gesture, analogous to our museum-like approach to the operatic repertory, in which the old is fervently and lovingly preserved, and far more often performed than any new work.¹³⁵

Without the level of accepted understanding which comes with an aria from a better-known opera, a solo excerpt from a smaller opera such as *Le Testament* lacks context, grounding, and some degree of respect. Treating the opera as a piece to be dissected disregards the form, making it quite understandable why Bridson would refer to it as ‘really no more than a song cycle’.¹³⁶ It is also the use of radio which reduces the form, in reality, to something significantly less substantial than ‘an opera’.

Pound’s non-musical radio work also displays parallels with aspects of the *Le Testament* broadcast. Much later than the broadcast of *Le Testament*, Pound broadcasted a series of anti-Semitic and anti-war speeches from the Rome studios of Ente Italiana Audizione Radio, from 1941-1943. Pound was very openly against American involvement in the war, and being outspoken in these views is what led to his arrest in 1945 for treason.¹³⁷ These were controversial, and major sections of what was arguably his life’s work, the *Cantos*, were written during this time, continuing through his imprisonment at an Army

¹³⁵ Abbate & Parker, p. 553.

¹³⁶ BBC WAC, RCONT1 Villon – Ezra Pound (1959-1961) (R19/2271/1), letter from Bridson to Matyas Seiber asking him to conduct ‘a special broadcast performance’ of *Le Testament*, 3 March 1960 [accessed 8 March 2017].

¹³⁷ Menand and others, "The Pound Error".

Disciplinary Training Centre, and later at St. Elizabeth's psychiatric hospital, where he was held for twelve years.¹³⁸ These broadcasts are a poignant reminder of the power of words, and the dangers entangled with mass-media forms, but it is important to note that these broadcasts were exclusively concerned with 'meaning', much like his musical settings of poetry, for which he openly valued communicating meaning over beauty.

¹³⁸ Ibid. – Hughes & Fisher also speak about how the *Cantos* were intertwined with Pound's life: 'In 1995 Roland John's *Beginner's Guide to The Cantos of Ezra Pound* predicates "the true linear element [being] Pound's own life... Pound gathers his material from his life and from his wise and idiosyncratic reading... Everything that touched Pound's mind went into the poem." (xvi of John's book). As his work became the ultimate expression of his life Pound attempted to live what he wrote and write what he lived.', p. 3.

Chapter 4

Translation

It has been established that Pound was an interdisciplinary modernist, but perhaps the most unusual of his disciplines was translation. Not historically an artistic field, Pound exploited the practice as a means to create some sort of poetic renaissance, and to 'Make It New', adapting what has been conventionally used as a method for convenience and comprehension, into a form of profound expression.¹³⁹ However, Pound's translation style has been subject to fervently mixed criticism, being simultaneously praised for its intuitive approach and mocked for being less proficient than others'. Pound developed the field to include changing media, manipulating meanings and images to communicate the work in alternative formats.

There is an interesting, and at times humorous, exchange held at BBC WAC from May 1969 wherein BBC Script Editor Richard Imison asked BBC Theatre Producer Raymond Raikes to replay Pound's alternative version of Sophocles's play *Women of Trachis*.¹⁴⁰ The request is met with fierce disapproval, and it is extreme reactions such as these which show Pound to be a contentious figure, not only in the field of translation, but in general. Raikes's description of the translation as 'slangy' and 'an oddity' show how much hostility Pound's work in translation was met with – and this was from the BBC, the very institution which supported Pound's vision and provided him with the tools he needed to present it to the masses.¹⁴¹ This intense reaction was in response to a letter requesting to replay the production on air, highlighting the acute divide in reception to Pound's work in translation; two employees at the same institution have strongly opposing views as to what makes a 'good' translation. Furthermore, the style of the 'slangy' translation used in *Women of Trachis* shares similarities with the 'cockney-Americanese' spoken interludes between arias in Pound's operas, showing a similar approach, while attracting a similarly mixed response.¹⁴² R. Murray Schafer also notes that Pound's work in translation had come close

¹³⁹ Kenner suggests that 'Pound came to think of translation as a model for the poetic act' in around 1911, p. 150.

¹⁴⁰ BBC WAC, RCONT12 Ezra Pound – Scriptwriter (1968-1972), letter from Richard Imison to Raymond Raikes, 2 May 1969 [accessed 8 March 2017].

¹⁴¹ BBC WAC, RCONT12 Ezra Pound – Scriptwriter (1968-1972), letter from Raymond Raikes to 'Script Editor, Drama (Radio)', 13 May 1969 [accessed 8 March 2017].

¹⁴² BBC WAC, RCONT1 Ezra Pound – Scriptwriter (1953-1962), letter from Bridson to C.T.P., 28 October 1959 [accessed 8 March 2017].

to the musical field before, as Pound translated the libretto of Massenet's *Cinderella* for the Beecham company in 1916, but his translations were never used.¹⁴³ The attitude Pound took to his translations, and the methods he used are not only directly reflective of his work in other artistic disciplines, but arguably created another avenue through which he could express his modernist persona.

Before looking at how the work of both Cavalcanti and Villon was converted from text to music, we must address how translating poetry contains its own plethora of issues. Firstly, poetry is the least representational of the arts – prose is often literal, art is depiction (be it actual or abstract), architecture and sculpture are physical representations, and music's existing presence in the surrounding world makes it representational as well as imitative (birdsong/fanfares etc.). Poetry, on the other hand, is meticulously written work which uses language, the vehicle for basic communication. Each word is painstakingly chosen to create deeper meaning, extended metaphor, double entendre and complex networks of subtext and association. It is this characteristic of poetry which makes its translation so fascinating. Pound stated his work was building towards a different purpose to other translators, as he believed that they were often too preoccupied with conveying poetry's content alongside its beauty to give the proper attention to a work's true meaning.¹⁴⁴ The translation of poetry, both to different languages and different forms, is so interesting because of its inherent complexity. Although many translated editions of various poets' work have been globally accepted, it has widely been debated as to whether or not poetry as a form is translatable at all.¹⁴⁵

However, the translatability of poetry is not uniform; poetry differs hugely in vocabulary, metre, rhyme schemes and therefore creates different levels of complexity when it comes to translating them. Donald Davie argues that the difficulty in translating

¹⁴³ Ezra Pound & R. Murray Schafer, p. 25. – Although it is unclear why the libretto was never used, it could well have been due to the nature of Pound's translations.

¹⁴⁴ Anderson, pp.xvii. Cited in Anderson's footnotes: *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 569 (December 1912), p. 562.

¹⁴⁵ For interesting discussions on the difficulties in translating poetry, see:

Francis R. Jones, *Poetry Translating As Expert Action : Processes, Priorities And Networks*(Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011)

<<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/HUD/detail.action?docID=730305#>> [Accessed 14 August 2018]; Susan Bassnett, "The Complexities Of Translating Poetry", *Ticentre: Teoria Testo Traduzione*, 2015, 157-168 <<https://doi.org/10.15168/t3.v0i3.77>>.

poetry is that ‘the language of a poem is continually making allusions’, putting this down to the fact that ‘poems are characteristically much shorter than novels, [and] their language therefore has to be more densely packed with meaning, and allusiveness is a way of packing meaning in’.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, José Mateo points out that in trying to ‘adapt the cognitive and pragmatic content... [t]he translation then becomes a delicately woven system of intentions, words, meanings, implications, cultural and encyclopaedic knowledge and poetic effects.’, and then argues that if a translator forgets any of these aspects, the result is of ‘conflicting relevance causing their readers to give different cognitive responses in their comprehension process’.¹⁴⁷

There are so many interweaving aspects of poetry, that conveying one without another can alter with the meaning, or nuances of the poem (or even perhaps both). However, Mateo also points out that ‘[m]any written texts do not usually help the reader to process all their meanings’, and if this really is the case, and some level of the meaning is often lost, then surely the act of translation will not necessarily detract from the poem at all, if even in its original language something is already lost.¹⁴⁸ Although the poems Pound translated (specifically Villon and Cavalcanti) are central to this part of the dissertation, I will not be discussing the quality of Pound’s poetic translations, due to the vastness of the topic. These arguments are however still interesting to bear in mind when questioning Pound’s intentions in terms of language within his operatic works, and help us to understand his choices.

In a letter written about Pound’s attempts to translate ancient Japanese Noh plays, which he was asked to complete by building on the late Ernest Fenollosa’s work by his wife in 1913, Pound spoke about the difficulty of the translation: ‘[Noh] seems too delicate to give to prophane [sic] English vulgo’.¹⁴⁹ Here, the difficulty lies in worries of ruining the purity or quality of the original Japanese play, rather than literally translating the words.

¹⁴⁶ Donald Davie, *Poetry In Translation*, 1st edn (Portsmouth: Grosvenor Press, 1975), pp. 5-6; 13-14.

¹⁴⁷ José Mateo, "Contrasting Relevance In Poetry Translation", *Perspectives*, 17.1 (2009), 1-14 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09076760902940104>>.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Letter from Pound to Dorothy Shakespear, from ‘Ezra Pound and others: *Ezra Pound's Poetry And Prose* (New York: Garland, 1991)’, cited in: Akitoshi Nagahata, *Pound's Reception Of Noh Reconsidered: The Image And The Voice*, pp. 113-125 <<http://www.disclit.unige.it/pub/15/06.pdf>> [Accessed 8 May 2018], p.114; Fisher, *Ezra Pound's Radio Operas*, p. 9.

Although this example pertains to a play rather than poetry, it is still relevant to Pound's approach to translation due to the fragility of the language and the struggle of relaying both literal meaning and linguistic beauty. This example also shows how the topic of collaboration extends to Pound's work in translation, as his fifteen translations and four separate synopses were built upon the work of Fenollosa. The fact that Fenollosa was deceased at this point does not detract from the importance of the collaboration, because the end result still combined effort and credit.

Cavalcanti

Guido Cavalcanti (1255-1300) was a *dolce stil nuovo* poet and troubadour from Italy, whose work was resurrected through the keen interest of Ezra Pound throughout the early years of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁰ Despite his surname being the title of Pound's second radio opera (c.1931-1933), Pound's initial interest in Cavalcanti stems from much earlier. Pound wrestled with a number of attempts at translating Cavalcanti, including several essays and a critical edition, as well as his opera.¹⁵¹ His first public interaction with Cavalcanti's work was a translation of "*Donna mi prega*", which was published in *The Dial* in 1928, however even from this first translation, Pound's work surrounding Cavalcanti in this field was far from straightforward. The complexity of this work alone has many levels, stretching from labelling to reception, however the opposing sides of the latter seem more extreme; in his review of Anderson's book, Tim Redman notes Cecchetti's assessment of this particular translation as reproducing 'better than all the others, the poetic exactness of the original', which is strongly opposed by Shaw, who said that it was 'more obscure than the original in any version.'¹⁵²

When describing his version of "*Donna mi prega*", Pound avoided the term 'translation' and categorised the work as a "traduction", which is a Latinism, coming from

¹⁵⁰ Anderson, pp. ix-xxx.

¹⁵¹ The arrangement to publish one of Pound's critical editions of Cavalcanti's work in the UK in the late 1920s fell through, leaving Pound embittered for quite some time: *ibid.*

¹⁵² Tim Redman, "Pound's Cavalcanti: An Edition Of The Translations, Notes, And Essays. Ezra Pound, David Anderson", *Modern Philology*, 84.3 (1987), 340-343 <<https://doi.org/10.1086/391567>>.

the word *traductio*, meaning ‘leading across’.¹⁵³ This better fits Pound’s attitude to, and style of, translation, however Anderson points out that:

Such restless attention to the term betrays impatience with the conventional limits of the activity it names, and in fact Pound was a theorist who insisted that “bringing over” a poem could take many different routes, from new composition in the style of a given period to “criticism via music, meaning definitely the setting of a poet’s words,” and from prose commentary to the poetic juxtapositions of the *Cantos*.¹⁵⁴

Here, Anderson is clarifying that the use of “traduction” was not a term to replace “translation”, but rather a term to broaden its scope; “traduction” encapsulates the essence of literal linguistic translation, and places it *alongside* other forms of translating which are not to do specifically with language. By creating a far broader term which places retelling, or re-setting an existing work, next to translating by language, Pound is practising a fascinating concept. With the use of this term, therefore, Pound is transcending the borders of location-determined language, and applying the model of ‘leading across’ to different forms and genres. Adapting a term to effectively permit alternative communication of a pre-existing work as a viable art-form, rather than a thing of convenience or necessity (as linguistic translation often has been), a new form is recognised as art, which may have previously been overlooked, or at least, not appreciated from an artistic perspective. Pound wrote about his attempt to broaden the scope of translation before his 1934 essay *Date Line*, in a letter he wrote to H.B. Lathrop in December 1931: “The edtn. ought to serve as a START for a new method of handling international texts.”¹⁵⁵ Pound’s treatment of translation helped significantly in the development of ‘imagism and the formation of Pound’s mature style’,

¹⁵³ ‘Traduction’ is also the French word for ‘translation’ – again displaying Pound’s internationalism and interest in language.

¹⁵⁴ Anderson, p. ix, referring to Pound’s essay *Date Line* (1934).

¹⁵⁵ Here, Pound is referencing his translation of Cavalcanti’s *Rime*, for which the University of Pennsylvania refused to award him a PhD on the grounds that he did not fulfil all of the requirements. Cited in Tim Redman’s review of Anderson’s *Pound’s Cavalcanti*.

showing how valuable understanding his approach to the discipline was in relation to his outward modernist aesthetic.¹⁵⁶

The preoccupation with correct labels is not exclusive to translation/“traduction”, because as a literary scholar, Pound often coined his own new terms which he felt better represented the action; accurate representation, for Pound, was always favourable to description after all. However, “traduction” was not a straight replacement term, and instead expanded the parameters of the existing term to remove its borders. The treatment of the term in this case, then, involves improvement rather than replacement, allowing for the modernist vision of artistic progress to be manifested in an accessible way, by furthering rather than outright replacing. This gentler approach to progression arguably helped Pound and his peers to plant the roots of modernism more easily, acting as a cornerstone and allowing for its subsequent development to the avant-garde and beyond.

Considering Pound’s ‘Make It New’ aesthetic, Pound is creating a new work using existing material, making it accessible and relevant to his contemporary artists and audiences alike.¹⁵⁷ In the instance of Cavalcanti’s work, as well as the issue of linguistic translation, the remoulding of form and meaning, also comes under Pound’s updated version of the field of translation. This process extends to many layers however, encompassing his translations, critical editions and of course his radio opera. ‘Making New’ Cavalcanti’s poetry and critical editions for publication, however, arguably involved a much less complex process than the opera. Opera also brings with it the issue of the accompanying musical composition, the setting of the words, and the staging.¹⁵⁸ Choosing poetry and music as the two disciplines between which to translate meaning perhaps came from them both being aesthetic disciplines with a lot of overlapping qualities. They are both deeply evocative and include elements of rhyme and rhythm, making Pound’s melding of

¹⁵⁶ Redman, p. 342.

¹⁵⁷ I should note that the concept of ‘making new’ has a long-established musical standing; although not necessarily named or credited like Pound’s version of the concept, attempts to rework existing material without losing the original artists’ intentions have littered musical history. Transcription, arrangements, reductions and other editorial work has historically held little artistic recognition, but has become increasingly scholarly in recent years.

¹⁵⁸ This is if, of course, any visuals were intended for *Cavalcanti*, being an opera specifically designed for radio broadcast.

the two fields particularly interesting; perhaps it is a statement that they are simply different manifestations of the same art.

Edward A F Harding encouraged Pound to pursue his second opera while producing *Le Testament* for broadcast in 1926. Pound began working on *Cavalcanti* in 1931, however Harding's enthusiasm soon wore off after *Le Testament* received mixed reviews following its broadcast. *Cavalcanti* was never broadcast in Pound's lifetime, most probably as a direct result of the reception of his first radio opera. Harding took a firm step back from *Cavalcanti* and it remained a pipe dream until Robert Hughes collated the manuscripts and premiered it in 1983.¹⁵⁹ The opera is written in three acts, and runs for just over twenty minutes, comprising mainly of musical settings of Cavalcanti's poems, interwoven with comical commentaries from 'obscure characters', spoken in a mixture of English, Provençal, Italian, and a 'pseudo-Italian invented by Pound'.¹⁶⁰

The "traduction" of Cavalcanti's various works in this instance exists in several layers, but before addressing the musical settings, treatment of words, or issue of form, the matter of literal linguistic translation must first be explored. The mixture of languages being performed within the one work is a style which was not uncommon in modernist literature and poetry (T.S Eliot's *The Wasteland*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, etc.), so superficially, this seems like a simple case of transferring the technique from literary to musical practice. This is indicative of Pound's interdisciplinary nature and serves as an example of him transcending the borders of different artistic disciplines, and just producing 'art' undefined by labels. The mixing of different languages (and indeed extending this to the invention of new ones) is an interesting feature, and usually has ties to classical or ancient language. In literature, this is usually a sort of joke amongst those educated enough to understand the different languages, and indeed the cultural significance behind them, reinforcing the general notion of Modernists as elitist.

¹⁵⁹ Donato Mancini, "Cavalcanti, Opera In 3 Acts | Details | Allmusic", *Allmusic*, 2018
<<https://www.allmusic.com/composition/cavalcanti-opera-in-3-acts-mc0002608024>> [Accessed 3 May 2018].

¹⁶⁰ It is interesting that the songs were not sung in English, given Pound's earlier work in translating Cavalcanti's poetry. This will most likely have been deliberate, in an effort to preserve the poetry's original musical beauty:
ibid.

Le Testament de Villon

The question of intention has already been explored a lot in this dissertation, but with good cause. Anderson states that Pound's intention to publish his "traductions" of Cavalcanti's poems opposite the original Italian texts in 'bi-lingual editions' had a 'determining influence on the nature of these translations, for in them Pound made a conscious and highly innovative attempt to explore the potential of the facing-page translations as a literary form.'¹⁶¹ This is yet another example of the way Pound manipulated form, expanding its boundaries and carefully designing his work around it.

Similarly to *Cavalcanti*, *Le Testament* also contains multi-linguistic aspects, with the script being written in a mixture of French and 'cockney-americanese'.¹⁶² This seems to be a running theme in Pound's two operas, and perhaps suggests a sort of 'musical fingerprint' or compositional trademark which Pound was creating for himself.¹⁶³ As mentioned above, the fusion of different languages together within one opera is interesting, however this interest is furthered with the possibility of this being a deliberate, identifying feature of Pound's musical work. It is clear that Pound had the knowledge and tools at his disposal to translate these works in full, so it cannot be the case that Pound neglected to translate the works, but rather he made a conscious choice.

In a source held by the BRBL, entitled 'Emendations to Libretto if Villon' (assumed to have meant 'of') and reproduced in fig. 4.1, Pound writes corrections and alterations to the libretto, but also goes into some considerable detail in terms of the pronunciation of words (specifically the Provençal, as it is probably the least well-known of the languages featured in the opera).¹⁶⁴ There are numerous supporting documents providing information about the performance of *Le Testament de Villon*, separate to the score and manuscript

¹⁶¹ Anderson, pp. ix-x.

¹⁶² BBC WAC, RCONT1 Ezra Pound – Scriptwriter (1953-1962), letter from Bridson to C.T.P., 28 October 1959 [accessed 8 March 2017].

¹⁶³ This can only be speculation, considering that this dissertation is only discussing his first two radio operas – perhaps the third would have been finished, and even more works produced had the reception weighed slightly more in Pound's favour.

¹⁶⁴ Ezra Pound, "Emendations To Libretto If Villon" (New Haven), Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Ezra Pound papers.

documents, and this one gives us insight into how particular Pound was about the language (and delivery of it) being correct.

The words not in Pere Noe , are mostly from old Provençal.

Et hu et hu (hu pronounced u)

P. 76 of gold score , After J.Cotard , and the et hu/ and
oboe/ these lines

Gaita de la tor , gardez enter
Le mar , si dieu vos voyre ,
Dame et seigneur
Sont a sejer
Et lairon vont en proie ;

with repeats and et hu.

This between the 2nd. and 3 strophes of the Pere Noe.

My text also differs from that in yr/ typescript.
3 strophe opens/
Comme un vieillart.

Figure 4.1 - Example of pronunciation specifications from 'Emendations to Libretto of Villon', held at BRBL, Yale University.

In this particular example, Pound is clarifying the pronunciation of the 'old Provençal', amongst other notes about repetitions and score discrepancies. However, singers are used to performing in an array of languages, so generally have a good grasp of correct pronunciation; the details in this document reiterate the uniqueness of using old and obscure languages.

In another example, Pound again specifies pronunciation, this time of “Les flics” as “Lay fleek”. The choice to pronounce “Les” as “Lay” here is a good example of the aforementioned ‘cockney-Americanese’. “Lay” has a lazy vowel-sound, and is not consistent with standard French pronunciation. Furthermore, his specifications stretch past foreign words, even detailing how to pronounce the most basic of English words: ‘You’re a nose. (pronounced “Yurr ah noze)’, suggesting that this is yet another positive decision by Pound, through which he can demonstrate his creative power and authorship over his “traduction”.

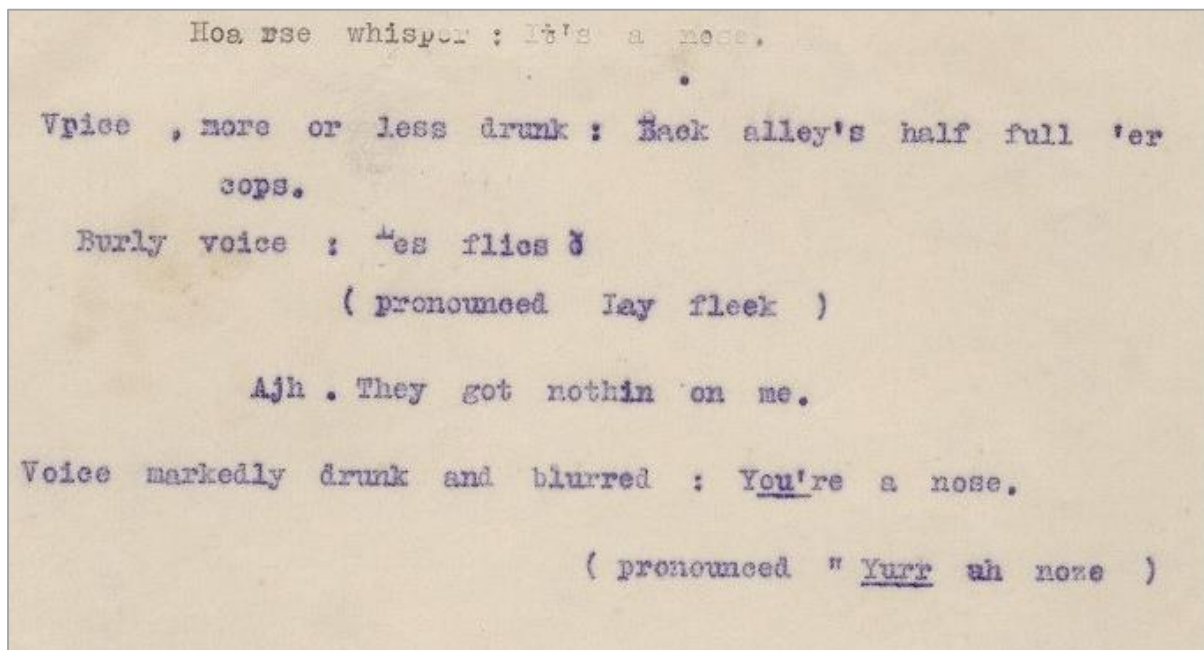


Figure 4.2 - Example of pronunciation specifications from 'Emendations to Libretto of Villon', held at BRBL, Yale University.

By using scripts in different languages, being particular about pronunciation, and generally being controversial in his engagement with the field, Pound was employing techniques and styles he had used across his poetry and translation, and implanting them into his musical version of Villon’s work, thus showing that there are threads which run through many of his works, even within totally different disciplines. These artistic links, which are not necessarily obvious features, but rather compositional components, arguably boost the effectiveness of his oeuvre though this interdisciplinary approach, by having homogeneous aspects which together create a larger and therefore more familiar modernist aesthetic.

In the preface to the libretto to *Cavalcanti*, Pound claims similar intentions to *Le Testament*: “to take the world’s greatest poetry out of books, to put it on the air to bring it to the ear of the people, even when they cannot understand it, or cannot understand all of it at once. The meaning can be explained but the emotion and beauty cannot be explained.”¹⁶⁵ Similarly to Pound’s work in translation being incomparable to others’ due to having been written with an entirely different motive, perhaps his musical setting of poetry is so drastically different also because of its purpose. Being a form of literary criticism means that although Pound’s work seems to replicate the historical model of setting poetry to music, the dramatic difference in purpose means that they cannot be properly compared. Purpose aside, even Pound’s choice of setting poetry to music seems paradoxical on some level when considering his modernist agenda and public criteria for high art. Maybe the answer to this is simple; perhaps it is the most likely case that Pound did not in fact have, or live by, strict rules, but rather liked what he liked, and disliked what he did not - after all, being a contentious figure does not by definition deprive someone of their human nature.

Translation is a significant tool Pound exploits to extend the reach of his art. By expanding the meaning of translation to “traduction”, Pound includes the alternative communication of a work through different forms and criticisms as well as language, thus creating a whole new art form in itself. It also perfectly feeds into his modernist image, as Akitoshi Nagahata points out:

Though he occasionally reverted to his older aesthetics, as shown in his plays modelled on the Noh, Pound’s reception of this traditional art form was part of his act of “Making It New”, of creating a new poetics.¹⁶⁶

Redman sums up beautifully the importance of translation not only to Pound personally, but to the shaping of artistic history, when noting that Anderson’s collection of translated

¹⁶⁵ Richard Sieburth, p. 152; Fisher, *Ezra Pound’s Radio Operas*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁶ Akitoshi Nagahata, p. 123.

Cavalcanti works helped to '[...] deepen our understanding of Cavalcanti's central role in the Pound pantheon and how the craft of translation gave birth to the art of modernism.'¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Redman, p. 343.

Chapter 5

Reception

All aspects of this dissertation have, in one way or another, been linked to the topic of reception; in the case of Ezra Pound this topic is particularly interesting and fraught with fervently opposing views. Although this topic has by no means been neglected in previous scholarship, the point here is to create an interdisciplinary view of the reception of Pound's works around the time of the production of his operas, and therefore establish how various audiences of his work viewed Pound as an 'artist', rather than a poet, composer, or man tied to any singular artistic discipline. Given the limitations of this dissertation, I will obviously not be able to address critical material exhaustively, but rather create a broader overview. Rather than evaluate a high volume of sources pertaining to one field, I will be discussing the weight of fewer sources, which span right across Pound's disciplines. This way, I will be able to create a snapshot of the reception of Pound, his art and his modernist aesthetic, not just of Pound singularly as a poet, composer or translator. I will also be able to evaluate Pound's capacity as a critic, and the implications of reception of his subsequent works. I do acknowledge a difference between critical reception and public reception, but rather than comparing the two, I am more interested in the bearing each had on the other. However, it seems prudent to first assess these issues in relation to his operas, to provide a solid foundation to build upon. The operas have proven to be such interesting case studies in terms of Pound's approaches to, and treatment of, art and therefore provide a fascinating basis from which to examine how Pound was valued not only at the time of publication, but also around the time of his revived popularity (c. late 1950s-1970s), and even closer to the present day.

Furthermore, arguably the main reason for the reception of Pound and his works being so complex is the issue of 'the man' versus his work. There is now significant scholarship about Pound's economic and political beliefs, but the historical separation of the man from his works was perhaps one of the main factors which allowed his work to remain influential and highly regarded despite his deplorable personal views. There is a pattern of politics being overlooked in favour of art, with the most famous example being Richard

Wagner.¹⁶⁸ Interestingly, there has been significant discussion about Wagner's works and his politics, and on the separation of the two: Na'ama Sheffi, in documenting the Jewish community's rejection of Wagner illustrates just how enduring highly-regarded works can be. Sheffi details how when deciding to ban Wagner from programmes at the Palestine Symphony Orchestra, it was not Wagner or indeed his work which was being protested, but rather the 'false appropriation - as Toscanini saw it – of Wagner's legacy' by the National Socialist party.¹⁶⁹ This is an explicit example of how an artist can be removed from their own politics: the Nazi party promoted Wagner's works due to perceived parallels in ideology, yet due to the profile of the composer and works, is deemed here as 'false appropriation'. Wagner's reputation seems to have excused him, to some extent, from the politics to which he was closely associated. Applying this example to Pound's *Le Testament* creates an interesting counter-argument: that he was not separated from his politics passively by positive reception, chronological distance or simple ignorance, but rather he was excused because of his social standing and artistic contribution.

It is hard to know how successful Pound's works would have been if consistently received with his politics in mind: arguably, if studied closely alongside his politics, although he would still have no doubt been an interesting character to study, our interaction with his work would be much more superficial, with many outright rejecting the work as we would his political and social beliefs. Timothy Findley brings this issue to the fore in his novel *Famous Last Words* (1981) and his play *The Trials of Ezra Pound* (1994), by way of transferring the dilemma of studying and even praising a man who supported heinous racism and political regimes to his audiences, 'particularly those [people] in the academy who teach modernism. By manipulating our sympathy and judgement in these works, Findley makes us participants in the continuing debate about the value of Pound's contribution to modern literature.'¹⁷⁰ When a work, and therefore an artist, is universally accepted as a 'great', and as having contributed significantly to the development of their field(s), to then retrospectively question this praise by placing the work back into its socio-

¹⁶⁸ Na'ama Sheffi, "Who's Afraid Of Richard Wagner: The Israeli Press, Politics And Music, 1938–1994", *Patterns Of Prejudice*, 31.4 (1997), 35-51 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322x.1997.9970237>>.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Donna Krolik Hollenberg, "Art For Whose Sake? Reading Pound's Reputation In Timothy Findley's *Famous Last Words* And *The Trials Of Ezra Pound*", *Journal Of Canadian Studies*, 33.4 (1999), 143-152 <<https://doi.org/10.3138/jcs.33.4.143>>.

historiographical context is an interesting, and at times challenging task. Findley is not only doing this through the creation of his own works, but he is forcing audiences and scholars to do the same. This approach makes for a challenging re-evaluation of the canon and collective knowledge, but is equally important and valuable as it is testing. In her article 'Art For Whose Sake?', Donna Krolik Hollenberg is reuniting Pound with his politics, by reminding the reader that he did face opposition, even amongst his contemporaries explicitly because of his political beliefs. Hollenberg reminds us that after Pound received the Bollingen Prize for *The Pisan Cantos* in 1949, 'eminent critics of the award' objected to 'the twisted elements of Pound's philosophy and the anti-humanistic role he played in the struggle of the times'.¹⁷¹ Hollenberg is challenging the trend of removing the man from his politics, by not only reminding the reader of his beliefs, but also by highlighting the opposition Pound faced at the time. Reconciling Pound and his politics in this way is comparable to this thesis reuniting Pound's works from different fields, and both of these approaches marry together to create a more well-rounded view of Pound.

The presentation of this dilemma within Pound scholarship therefore creates a new problem when looking at reception. It brings into question whether or not the reception of a single work, separated not only from work in other fields, but also from its political context can be considered properly, as it refers to the work in isolation. This removal of a work from its roots can also aid in explaining the revival in Pound discourse in the mid-late 20th century; chronological distance from the political and social situations with which Pound's works were closely tied gives the reader a fresh perspective, and permits the partial neglect of context.

Reception of *Le Testament de Villon*

Pound's operas are especially interesting when considering issues of reception and criticism, as Pound was himself employed as a music critic. Most famously, Pound wrote for the London weekly *The New Age* from 1917, where he tended to specialise in reviewing vocal performances due to his vested interest in the spoken/sung word, although he reviewed up

¹⁷¹ Hollenberg, p. 144.

to three concerts a week of all genres.¹⁷² It is through this line of work that Pound created a 'strong, well defined set of criteria leading to judgments which were sophisticated, if idiosyncratic.'¹⁷³ Developing 'criteria' for his own criticism directly mirrors Pound's Imagist manifesto which he published only three years earlier – setting out rules to discern whether or not a work (or performance in this case) is of the correct standard. Here, Hughes and Fisher have given an interesting insight into how Pound worked, as having been employed as a critic himself, he developed strict personal rules which he adhered to. Furthermore, being a critic himself could surely have rendered other criticism unimportant; surely if he followed his own rules, then theoretically, the work would by default be at least acceptable and at best outstanding. Acknowledging his own inexperience and limited technical knowledge of music would not have been sufficient in excusing him from being held to the same criteria he used to judge others, suggesting that if Pound's musical works were acceptable to him, then they were, for a fact, acceptable. This aside, criticisms of Pound's operas were still written, and therefore still deserve attention when looking at Pound's overall public reception.

Before other critiques of *Le Testament*, the thoughts of Pound and his collaborators should first be considered. Pound, along with Agnes Bedford in particular, did not think highly at all of the radio broadcasts of *Le Testament* in 1931. The very task of adapting *Le Testament* for radio broadcast presented a multitude of problems in the first instance, including compromises such as using earlier versions of certain sections, and stitching them into Antheil's 1923 edition. These earlier drafts used fewer instruments, and on hearing them interwoven with the 1923 version, it is documented that even Pound himself could not tell which versions were used.¹⁷⁴

In May 1931, Pound and Harding met in Paris for a production meeting where, with help from Harding, Pound broke *Le Testament* down into four scenes, and introduced more characters with spoken lines to better communicate the narrative. Several additions were made:

¹⁷² This is of course as well as his aforementioned employment by the BBC to write for *The Listener* magazine.

¹⁷³ Hughes & Fisher, p. 15. More can be read about Pound's *New Age* columns: Ezra Pound & Raymond Murray Schafer, *Ezra Pound And Music*.

¹⁷⁴ Hughes & Fisher, pp. 54-55.

[t]he new dialogue, written in a Cockney style of English, was to be performed side by side with Pound's settings of Villon's poetry in Old French. Heaulmière was to introduce the final sextet "Frères humains", with spoken lines that were essential to convey to the radio audience the visual irony of the last scene - a haunting a cappella chorus of six corpses strung from the gibbet.¹⁷⁵

These amendments, along with the other technical issues of restricted rehearsal time and musical compromises, all contributed to Pound and Bedford's disdain for the BBC broadcast of *Le Testament*. Bedford blamed a lot of the 'problems' on Harding and various performers' 'interpretive authority'.¹⁷⁶ Pound and Bedford unanimously commented upon the lack of grit in the performance, with Bedford even likening the sound of the BBC's production of the last number to the 'Salvation Army'.¹⁷⁷ Comparing Pound's gritty new opera to this religious group dedicated to doing good in the community is meant as an insult: the BBC production lacked the edge and rawness of emotion that Pound intended it to have. As well as interpretive issues, there were also technical ones, which hindered the balance and smoothness of the performance. This left Pound unsatisfied with the performance, but helped in shaping his approach to *Cavalcanti*.¹⁷⁸

Furthermore, it is interesting to consider that Harding decided to withdraw his support from the creation of *Cavalcanti* before it was even finished due to the strength of negative reception to *Le Testament de Villon* after its 1931 broadcast.¹⁷⁹ Although this has been previously mentioned, it is of such significance that its importance must be considered in further detail. Harding was initially incredibly enthusiastic about this new endeavour, studying Pound's *Cantos* and even learning Italian in preparation for *Cavalcanti*.¹⁸⁰ This ardour seemed to cool off however, and Pound's second radio opera never made it to broadcast. Above Harding's personal views, this particular set of circumstances really drives home the importance and influence of public reception. Having commissioned *Cavalcanti*, Harding clearly had an affection for Pound's work and methods, but abandoned the project

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Mancini, "Cavalcanti, Opera In 3 Acts".

¹⁸⁰ Hughes & Fisher, p. 58.

following reactions to *Le Testament*. Here, the power of public perception is particularly evident. The sheer weight that it holds over Harding in this example demonstrates how public reception can influence critical reception; that is to say that a work which is widely disregarded by a public audience is more likely to be dismissed in a similar fashion by critics, than a widely praised work.¹⁸¹

Running parallel to the reception of Pound's opera is the reception of Villon's words, so public reception was to some degree dictated by Pound's own approach to *Le Testament*. The opera was Pound's method of literary criticism, and was simultaneously a way for Pound to showcase work he so strongly admired to the public spheres. The power of radio meant that at the very least, the poetry could be received passively, and in the best scenario, it would have attained dedicated attention; the listeners here, no matter how actively they were participating in their own reception of the opera, were in fact consuming Pound's criticism of Villon's work through the musical medium.¹⁸² Pound's composition and musical setting, therefore, had an immediate and direct impact on the public reception of the poetry he so eagerly wanted to share with the masses, dictating through his approach how it was to be inferred and digested. In the words of George Antheil: '[t]here is really nothing more to say. Those who want to understand, will understand Villon.'¹⁸³ Through this statement, Antheil is placing the responsibility for the success of the work in the hands of the individual listener, by suggesting that comprehension is a choice. Just as Pound expanded the meaning of translation, Antheil is expanding the accepted parameters of what it meant to understand music; the comprehension of a work does not necessarily have to apply specifically to understanding language or harmony, but is a choice to accept the piece and the composer's intentions as they stand.

¹⁸¹ Pound's involvement with the BBC is especially relevant here, as this model of public reception affecting critical reception could indicate a trend for how public reception impacted on programming and broadcasting within the organisation.

¹⁸² Kimberly F. Canton, "Opera As Translation: Ezra Pound's *Le Testament*", *University Of Toronto Quarterly*, 79.3 (2010) <<https://doi.org/doi:10.1353/utq.2010.0244>>.

¹⁸³ Pound and Antheil, *Le Testament: Opera After Francois Villion By Ezra Pound*, forward.

Reception of *Cavalcanti*

Before exploring the people's reception of Pound's *Cavalcanti*, we must remember that as with Villon, Pound was himself a critic of Guido Cavalcanti. He regarded the poet as unfairly overlooked throughout history, and praised him particularly for the music in his work. In his introduction to Guido's poetry in 1920, Pound wrote about the importance of 'absolute symbol or metaphor' and stated: 'I would liken Guido's cadence to nothing less powerful than line in Blake's drawing.'¹⁸⁴ David Anderson notes a particular critique of Pound's translation of Cavalcanti's poetry in the *Times Literary Supplement*, to which Pound responded (1912). Anderson writes:

Predictably some reviewers of *Sonnets and Ballate* blamed Pound's translations for not being as pretty as Rossetti's. John Baily ironized in the *Times Literary Supplement* (November 12, 1912), that "Mr. Pound has, indeed, surpassed Rossetti in one respect – that of quantity," concluding that "...where we have Rossetti no one will wish to substitute Mr. Pound for him." Baily complains about the "obscure" archaisms and notes that Pound "frequently absolves himself altogether from the duty of rhyming" and keeping to a meter.¹⁸⁵

In the issue published on 5th December of the same year, Pound's reply was printed, informing Baily that he had in fact entirely misunderstood Pound's motives. In his reply, Pound stated:

...my endeavour was not to display skill in versification but to present the vivid personality of Guido Cavalcanti, a man of very different temper from his associates...Guido cared more for sense than for music, and I saw fit to emphasize

¹⁸⁴ *Ezra Pound And The Visual Arts* (New York: New Directions, 1980), p. xiii.

Pound's admiration for Guido has been well-documented in spaces which have been able to offer the subject the proper attention it deserves, so I will not be delving into this huge topic further in this dissertation. For further reading, see Hughes and Fishers' *Cavalcanti: A Perspective on the Music of Ezra Pound* (2003), Simon West's *Ezra Pound's Cavalcanti: Fidelity and the Masculine Spirit* (2005), or James J. Wilhelm's *Guido Cavalcanti as a Mask for Ezra Pound* (1974).

¹⁸⁵ Anderson, p.xvii. Cited in Anderson's footnotes: *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 569 (December 1912), p. 562.

this essential aspect of his work. The music is easily available for anyone who will learn Italian pronunciation. The meaning is more than once in doubt even after long study. I thought I served my audience best by setting forth the meaning.’¹⁸⁶

Pound writes succinctly here that the reasons Baily has stated for criticising Pound’s translation are entirely irrelevant, as he was working to a different objective than to simply rival Rossetti’s translations. As poetic translations of Cavalcanti’s works already existed, Pound was almost creating a supplement to those by deciphering their meanings. Pound’s preference for publishing translations on pages opposite the originals, then, makes perfect sense, as he is supplying the music of the poetry (through displaying the original Italian) and the meaning (in his translations) simultaneously, therefore providing the reader with a fully comprehensible piece of work. It is responses to criticisms like these which provide arguably the clearest examples of Pound’s motives, as he sets out in plain English why he disagrees with the judgement, and in this case, succeeded in rendering Baily’s comments moot in doing so.

It is these sorts of exchanges which seem to have the astonishing capability of aiding an artist in their cause, by giving the subject the opportunity for clarification. In this case, Pound was ‘serving his audience’ by making Cavalcanti’s work more accessible, and eliminating some doubt which surrounded it. Pound’s own work was supposed to be, by his own admission, concise and direct, so he is using his own artistic model, and the medium of translation here to actually reach backwards in time, and give a new voice to long-dead poets such as Cavalcanti and Villon. In the case of translation and poetry, even the negative receptions have served him well, by giving him a platform from which to voice his intentions and tear down the critics.

The fascination with Pound’s second opera *Cavalcanti* is shared by the composer himself. The opera maps the progression of Pound’s personal musical ability, and his letters to Agnes Bedford during the compositional process show to some extent the development of Pound’s musical style. Pound said in a letter to Bedford written on 7th July 1932, “New

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. xvii-xviii.

show much more ‘musical.’”¹⁸⁷ Although, in true Poundian style, this statement rather lacks description, he is alluding to his

determination that melody instead of rhythm convey the essence of poetry...Using very simple meters and rhythms [to allow] his line to “sing”, uninhibited by *Le Testament’s* “fractional metrics” or the limitations of the earlier opera’s troubadour-derived hexatonic-octave melodic gamut.¹⁸⁸

The music Pound wrote for *Cavalcanti* perhaps differed in style from *Le Testament* so much because they were written for different purposes:

Each opera... had a very different literary genesis, resulting in highly contrasting musical realizations. While the motivation for *Le Testament* was to provide an exemplar of the vitality of speech rhythms restored to the medium of the sung word, *Cavalcanti* was written to promulgate the poetry and advance an appreciation of a poet Pound felt unjustly neglected.¹⁸⁹

A different purpose required a different approach, and this can be attributed largely to the failings of *Le Testament*. Pound’s own critiques of the broadcasts of *Le Testament* led to the development of his style, which now had much more consideration for musical line, the performers’ capabilities, and the power of simplicity. *Le Testament* had rather angular musical lines which, according to Hughes & Fisher, did not carry well over the airwaves.¹⁹⁰ *Cavalcanti* on the other hand, features much more simple melodic writing.¹⁹¹ These changes to technique were triggered by the reception of the first opera, and also by the constraints

¹⁸⁷ Hughes & Fisher, p. 9.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

¹⁹¹ This syllabic approach which mirrored and even accentuated natural speech pattern has roots in the very composers Pound outwardly held the utmost disdain for. Philip Weller notes that Debussy (amongst others) ‘paid particular attention to the refinement of details in the rhythmic delineation and declamatory profile of the vocal parts – a procedure which is of special interest in regard to the broader aesthetic concerns of the symbolist operatic project.’ – from: Philip Weller, "Symbolist Opera: Trials, Triumphs, Tributaries", in *The Cambridge Companion To Twentieth-Century Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 72 <<https://doi-org.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/10.1017/CCOL9780521780094>> [Accessed 19 July 2018].

of broadcasting complex music on radio, which only became apparent after it went on air.¹⁹² Problems with balance were given much more consideration, and were corrected by careful attention to scoring, and he even ‘adjusted his pitch gamut to accommodate the frequency bias of radio’.¹⁹³ All of this meticulous attention to detail occurred because of the reception of *Le Testament*, so maybe it is possible that all criticism, positive or seemingly negative, can in fact be equally useful. There is still evidence of Pound’s musical inexperience in the simplicity of the scoring, but overall, this careful revision of approach and techniques marks a significant journey to musical self-sufficiency for Pound.¹⁹⁴

Reception in Revival Scholarship

Chapter 2 refers to the critics who together make up the central pillar of Poundian scholarship, and there are a few points made about reception and approach which require further attention. In 1969, Hugh Witemeyer provided a thorough account of Pound’s London years, offering analyses of Pound’s poetry before *The Cantos*. In the Preface, he discusses his reasons for dedicating several chapters to Pound’s earliest work, which are seldom acknowledged with Pound’s accepted oeuvre; Witemeyer definitively states ‘the poems omitted *are inferior*’, but does still discuss them with great affection.¹⁹⁵ In terms of reception, Witemeyer provides a closer look at Pound’s early poetry, but what is of particular interest is his references to Pound’s critical work. Pound’s prose tends to be made up mostly of critical material, and it is Witemeyer’s evaluation of this which speaks volumes about the issue of reception. He quantifies Pound’s central beliefs about components of historical art making up the building-bricks of tradition, stating that for Pound, ‘originality lies less in the components of the structure than in the total design’.¹⁹⁶ That is to say, that rather than rejecting tradition, as many ascribe to be one of Pound’s most telling attributes,

¹⁹² Many of the melodies in *Cavalcanti* were in fact drawn from Pound’s *Ghuidonis Sonate*: Fisher, *Ezra Pound’s Radio Operas*, p. 4.

¹⁹³ Hughes & Fisher, p. 56.

Hughes & Fisher also suggest that Pound intentionally left himself open to manipulate *Cavalcanti* in the opposite way to *Le Testament*; they note that annotations from the score indicate that it could be modified for stage production, illustrating Pound’s intention for versatility: *ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ These simplicities concern mostly technical aspects of composition, such as writing the tenor and baritone parts for *Cavalcanti* in treble clef, meaning them to sound an octave lower than written: Hughes & Fisher, p. viii.

¹⁹⁵ Witemeyer, pp. vii-viii.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

he instead idealised utilising tradition as a springboard from which to propel oneself into modernity. He believed in utilising and exploiting these traditions to make something which ultimately subverted them; basing new work on old art was acceptable *only* so long as one goes on to challenge and modify it.

In *Ezra Pound: A Close-Up*, 1967, Michael Reck published a more intimate view of Pound's life. He discusses Pound's frequent geographical movements, concentrating particular acclaim for *The Cantos*. Unsurprisingly, there is a chapter dedicated to *Reading the Cantos*, and he describes the poem as 'magical'... a 'dazzling array of characters through all history', written with 'virtuoso ability'.¹⁹⁷ Such adulation most likely comes from fascination with *The Cantos*. While it is easy to argue that Pound's praise has been skewed somewhat by the continued separation of his work from his politics, when it comes to *The Cantos*, this argument is a little simplistic. They were written over many years, and not only do they develop in style through time, but they also map his life's journey through the poem. Some were written in Mussolini's Italy, while others were written while in detainment for treason and mental instability, giving *The Cantos* an edge which fundamentally cannot be removed from Pound's views and choices. Perhaps *The Cantos* are so fascinating because not only is it the "poem including history", but as Christine Froula puts it: '[...] error, chance, fallibility, divagation are inwoven in Pound's epic "record of struggle" in ways that illuminate the historical conditions of modern art and thought [...]'. *The Cantos* receive the attention they do because of the intrinsic realness and rawness spoken through them, so to this work, context is everything.¹⁹⁸ What is becoming clear in the complexities of Pound's works, is that tying Pound to his politics is, more often than not, optional, depending on what best fits the work, and the reader's own motives.

In 1969, Eva Hesse collated a selection of criticisms in *New Approaches to Ezra Pound*, in which this interesting dichotomy of Pound's art vs. his politics is made particularly evident. The majority of the chapters are various accounts of Pound's relationships with other artists, his engagement with history and myth, and his myriad influences. Of 15 chapters, only the final one is concerned with his politics, and it is by its position held

¹⁹⁷ Reck, p. 182.

¹⁹⁸ Christine Froula, "Reading Modernism, After Hugh Kenner (1923-2003): Hugh Kenner's Modernism And Ours", *Modernism/Modernity*, 12.3 (2005), 473, <<https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2005.0085>>.

separate from the others in the collection.¹⁹⁹ Leslie Fiedler's *Traitor or Laureate: The Two Trials of the Poet* is a fascinating commentary of the plight of twentieth-century poets, the limits of their art, and the case of Pound's politics. By being the only essay of its nature in the collection however, as well as being placed last, it is just one example of Pound's politics taking a backseat in Poundian discourse; the chapters concerning Pound's poetry and influences flow readily from one to the next, while Fiedler's chapter sits with only one neighbour at the end of the book, holding few parallels to other chapters. Fiedler suggests that perhaps these two sides to Pound attracted two types of admirer:

Precisely the [controversial 'art vs. politics'] qualities, however, which have made Pound the prototypical enemy of the people in our time have attracted to him not only certain impotent young cranks who might have been successful Hitlers had time and circumstances conspired, but also the sort of disaffected young poet who turns out in the end to have written the poetry by which an age is remembered.²⁰⁰

Fiedler addresses the politics of Pound here, as well as his complicated legacy of inspiring followers of his artistic achievements and his politics alike. He is implying that perhaps Pound's multi-faceted existence warranted entirely separate strands of reception in the case of poetics vs. politics. However, a general picture of the reception of Pound *can* still be drawn by taking out the borders of artistic discipline. Politics may still remain a related, but separate, issue from his art, holding a legacy of its own, but that is not to say that each element of Pound's work has different pools of reception to be examined separately. I would still argue that aside from politics, the reception of Pound's art should be holistic, irrespective of specific field, as interdisciplinary 'art'.

¹⁹⁹ Leslie Fiedler, "Traitor Or Laureate: The Two Trials Of The Poet", in *New Approaches To Ezra Pound*, 1st edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), pp. 365-377.

²⁰⁰ Fiedler, in Hesse, p. 371.

Pound Revival & Reception

The Pound revival from mid-late 20th century is interesting when considering Hans-Robert Jauss's work on reception theory in the late 1960s. In this model, which places the reader at equal or even higher status than the work itself, the work then takes on a passive role, acting more as a tool through which the readers' perceptions of the work can be 'directed or stimulated'.²⁰¹ Jauss believed that readers' own experiences and knowledge shaped their comprehension of a text, thus placing the reader centrally with the author and the text in terms of authority. Furthermore, Jauss extends this premise by including the notion that reception is changeable depending on social and historical circumstances: the 'horizon of expectations'. *The Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication* defines this as:

The shared 'mental set' or framework within which those of a particular generation in a culture understand, interpret, and evaluate a text or an artwork. This includes textual knowledge of conventions and expectations (e.g. regarding genre and style), and social knowledge (e.g. of moral codes). It is a concept of reading (and the meanings this produces) as historically variable.²⁰²

When considering Pound, then, and his revived popularity several decades after the production of these case studies, the fluctuations of the 'horizon of expectations' (due to a number of factors including World War 2, the Cold War, the economic depression, and the rapid progression of art following the Wars) could surely account for Pound's work suddenly resonating with critics in a way which it may not have at the time of publication. Jauss's theory provides a plausible explanation as to why Pound appeared to be 'ahead of his time',

²⁰¹ Jeremy Lane, "Reception Theory And Reader-Response: Hans-Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, And The School Of Konstanz", in *Modern European Criticism And Theory : A Critical Guide*, 1st edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 278-285

<<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/hud/detail.action?docID=1962004>> [Accessed 5 June 2018].

²⁰² Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday, "Horizon Of Expectations", *A Dictionary Of Media And Communication* (Oxford University Press, 2016)

<<http://www.oxfordreference.com.libaccess.hud.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199568758.001.0001/acref-9780199568758-e-1217#>> [Accessed 5 June 2018].

and proves to a great extent how socio-economic and political circumstances substantially influence public reception.

It is evident in these Pound scholars' writings that they hold little but admiration for him and his works. This could be down to the aforementioned 'horizon of expectations' changing, finally permitting Pound's work to be understood and admired now that the social conditions were right, or it could simply be that there was now enough distance between Pound's art and politics. Allowing time to pass, and wounds to heal, allows for the neglect of unpleasant aspects of his political and social beliefs to become easier – ancient history. Also, the majority of this revival scholarship revolves, understandably, around poetry.²⁰³ As Pound's main field of art-production, this is completely to be expected, and in some ways, the critical models can be transferred over and considered in relation to other artistic fields, however this body of work is not hugely representative of Pound as an interdisciplinary modernist. There is reference to his musical endeavours and his contribution to translation, but the focused critical material in these areas did not emerge until c.1990-2010. Even with the appearance of these, however, there are still gaps in regard to addressing his interdisciplinary nature, which need to be filled by cross-referencing Pound's techniques and approaches, to make a judgement on the artist.

So considering reception through our interdisciplinary lens, the issue of consistency appears; while it is entirely possible that Pound was simply more or less proficient in some areas than in others, it seems more likely that general reception has been too mixed to allow for a unanimous view to appear. Pound's poetry was a new approach to an ancient art form, and although it received a mixed reception, has been widely accepted into the modern literary canon. Pound's work in translation received a tougher criticism, as it has the added dimension of having a functional purpose (comprehension) as well as an artistic one. The former of these two functions means that his body of work is more often compared to others', being criticised for not being as literal, or not balancing 'meaning' and 'music' properly. As for the operas, they have received arguably the most scathing criticism of all his artistic endeavours. Although it is completely plausible that they were 'ahead of their time', or too innovative in style, they are the culmination of Pound's various disciplines, being

²⁰³ Hugh Witemeyer's *The Poetry of Ezra Pound: 1908-1920*, Alexander's *The Poetic Achievement of Ezra Pound*, Sister Bernetta Quinn's *Ezra Pound: An Introduction to the Poetry* etc.

poetry presented via the platform of *music*, after years were devoted to *translating* much of the content. This makes the operas the ultimate 'interdisciplinary' works, so no matter whether the reception was positive or not, the very division of critics and discussion surrounding the works indicates the significance of him transcending the long-established artistic borders and entering a true 'interdisciplinary' state.

Conclusion

Pound the Paradoxical

As Michael Reck succinctly put it, 'Pound was a man of all the arts'.²⁰⁴ I have established the significance of Pound's work in the fields of music, radio and translation, acting as a supplement to the ample existing Poundian poetry discourse. By looking at these different practices together, as a homogenous output undefined by artistic discipline, four main issues emerge: the importance of his personal relationships and collaborators; the consistency with which Pound adhered to his own working criteria; the transference of skills and techniques; and of course his legacy.

Pound's output has several compromising elements. Firstly, there are the obvious paradoxes between manifesto and poetry, and although these have been stated in various accounts of primary Poundian scholarship, my findings here lie in applying these same concerns to works in other fields. The pure sceptic would perhaps argue that compromises may have occurred due to the simple fact that artists, like anyone else, need to make a living and therefore have to occasionally bend their own beliefs. However, it is most likely that the progression through the modernist subgenres occurred at such a pace that Pound's technical, idealistic literature and his art simply did not neatly line up consistently. Pound very much worked to the beat of his own drum, so although he did set out artistic criteria, they were intended as a foundation to build upon rather than set rules. This would naturally mean that anything 'built' upon this framework would have a different aesthetic to the framework itself, making the mapping of Pound's consistency an impossible task.

What is possible, however, is the mapping of consistency between art in different disciplines, rather than between art and its instructional literature. The transference of techniques, such as varying language, phonetic writing, and 'making it new', shows clear bonds between Pound's works, regardless of discipline. To expand on what was alluded to in chapter 5, perhaps Pound was not creating so much of a 'musical' fingerprint, but a more general one; that is to say that despite his progression through genres and indulgence in different fields, Pound's overarching style is what maintains his canonical position, and

²⁰⁴ Reck, p. 93.

attests to his credibility. Any further inconsistencies can mostly be attributed to purpose – his reasons for creating works have included literary criticism, ‘making it new’, and giving dead artists a new voice, as well as social and political motivations.

Furthermore, the ties between the man and his politics have been of significant interest throughout this dissertation, specifically the severing of them. Be this intentional or not, it has allowed for Pound’s work to resist being tarnished by his controversial racial and political ideas, and remain separate from its historiographical context.²⁰⁵ Well respected accounts of Pound’s work would arguably have a very different tone if the two strands of Pound’s personality (art and politics) became fully intertwined. I would argue that scholars’ admiration for Pound’s work would not be reduced, but would take the form of fascination rather than praise, were Pound and his politics consistently studied together. The main exception to this is *The Cantos*. As Pound’s semiautobiographical epic, it is not only closely tied to the man, but it contains him. This is where readers’ fascination stems from, and it is this rawness of sections of the poem that oddly attracts people to it, despite its often abhorrent meaning in the context of Pound’s politics, and his journey through incarceration and institutionalisation. Therefore, using *The Cantos* as a benchmark, the issue of social commentary can be measured in his other works; if *The Cantos* are regarded as groundbreaking due to the poet’s political and social motivations, then it seems plausible that Pound’s rebirth of Villon and Cavalcanti’s works are just the application of their content in a modern context.

Legacy

As with any contentious figure, Pound’s legacy is interesting. Although he is known for spouting elitist, as well as racially and socially divisive views, there are aspects of Pound’s legacy which actually lend themselves to a softer political sympathy. When identifying an example of Pound transcending artistic borders, Sieburth noted:

²⁰⁵ His life is often relevant to, and referenced in, critical writing of this era, however more often in terms of his relationships with friends and collaborators, and his professional circumstances rather than his fascist worldview and striking anti-Semitism.

In his 1927 essay on “Workshop Instrumentation” for the *New Masses*, Pound would [...] suggest, in Futurist fashion, that the very noise of industrial machinery might be composed or “harmonized” into musical tempi so as to aesthetically disalienate labor by transforming the entire factory floor into an operatic *Gesamtkunstwerk*.²⁰⁶

This refers to creating music by effectively redefining what makes it, but in deeper reading, seems to contradict his fascist beliefs. By suggesting that we can create music in this way, Pound is effectively breaking down the borders between mere factory workers and the better-educated professionals, not only setting out new parameters for what constituted art, but also proposing an almost communist scenario, by putting everyone in that environment at an equal level in understanding the music. Again, this could fit into the argument that Pound is fundamentally self-contradicting, but I prefer to see it as an illustration of an altogether more well-rounded and perhaps even occasionally sympathetic character. In terms of legacy, then, Pound left behind him lessons on the importance of accessibility.

Furthermore, another facet of Pound’s legacy is the transcendence of artistic borders. It goes without saying that Pound has been an important inspiration for many subsequent artists, but what is interesting is their varying levels of success. Fiona McMahon notes Pound’s repeated dismissal of poet Charles Reznikoff; he keenly employed several aspects of Pound’s working models, but that was not Pound’s intention.²⁰⁷ Pound’s influence had a huge bearing on Reznikoff, inspiring him to write the ‘modern long poem’, *Testimony: The United States (1885-1915): Recitative*. Not only is this an obvious parallel to *The Cantos*, but it is also continuing Pound’s endeavour to question the impact of poetry on the telling of America’s history.²⁰⁸ Pound wanted his work to act as a springboard from which future artists would move forward, so the direct application of his techniques far from flattered him. This exposes the exactness of Pound’s vision, however it is only one

²⁰⁶ Sieburth, p. 151.

²⁰⁷ Fiona McMahon, "Orchestrating Rhythms In The Wake Of Ezra Pound's Interpretative Prosody", in *Ezra Pound And Referentiality* (Paris: Presses De L'université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003), pp. 83-92.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

example. After all, '[m]uch of the subsequent history of modernism, is foreshadowed in this at first sight rather trivial distinction between 'image' and 'impression'.²⁰⁹

In addition, an important aspect of his legacy is Pound's longevity, which is attested to in the Poundian revival in the latter end of the 20th century, and his continuing appearance in contemporary discourse and syllabi. I would argue that part of his continuous study has been down to outside factors. There is some interesting scholarship on the promotion of modern approaches to art by the American government during the Cold War, in an effort to be anti-traditionalist, and therefore anti-Russian. The American government agencies used modernism and what followed as propaganda, promoting the freedom of the West.²¹⁰ Although DeLapp-Birkett is referring specifically to Aaron Copland in her book, she raises the question of longevity, leading me to question whether this state intervention contributed to Pound's endurance. Considering the many complex levels of people's appreciation of Pound, this probably had at most a limited effect, but it is an interesting idea to consider.

Whether Pound's art is studied in conjunction with his politics or not, and whether or not he can be deemed entirely consistent in either of these areas are undoubtedly valid questions, and in endeavouring to answer these, some significant findings have surfaced. It would be rather anticlimactic to argue that these factors were immaterial to Pound lasting arguably longer than many of his contemporaries in the critical spheres, however, whether he endured due to admiration, fascination, or disgust, the outcome is the same. His work across the disciplines superficially seems like a compromise of his artistic beliefs, but on closer inspection, his operas are in fact the culmination of his interdisciplinary artistic endeavours, containing common themes, methods and aims which create a striking personal style which outweighs any possible inconsistencies in his works.

²⁰⁹ Nicholls, p. 171.

²¹⁰ Jennifer DeLapp-Birkett, pp. 31-62.

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