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MOSAIC

A study of juxtaposition in literature,
as an approach to Pound's Cantos
and similar modern poems.

Roger Horrocks

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Auckland.

June 1976.

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ABSTRACT

'Mosaic : A study of juxtaposition in literature, as an approach to Pound's Cantos and similar modern poems.'

The principles of form in 'mosaic' poems such as The Cantos, Patterson, Maximus, or even 'The Waste Land,' are not yet clearly understood. Criticism needs to bring its various ideas of 'musical form,' 'non-linear form,' or 'the poem as a field of forces' into sharper focus.

Mosaic poems are characterized by sudden changes of direction, heightened contrasts of style and texture, a complex use of quotation, and strange effects of fluidity where the usual distinction between the 'tenor' and 'vehicle' of metaphors is dissolved.

To decide what features (if any) of the modern mosaic poem are new, the thesis examines possible precedents: so-called 'pre-logical' poetry, the associationism of Romantic poetry, Leaves of Grass, Rimbaud's poems, Mallarmé's Un coup de dés, etc. The work of European avant-garde poets of the 1910s (Apollinaire, Cendrars, Marinetti, et al.) is considered in detail, and the supposed originality of Pound and Eliot's poetry is somewhat diminished when it is viewed against this European background. Nevertheless Pound and Eliot do contribute some technical innovations, particularly in the way their poetry combines 'hard' and 'soft' textures (to use Pound's terms). The thesis examines Pound's special 'breakthrough' in 1919, and also the close interaction between his work and Eliot's during this period -- the two men advancing 'like mountaineers roped together.'

Mosaic poems demand a new style of 'reading by field.' Criticism

needs to develop ways of talking about the experience of discontinuity as sensitively as it now deals with continuity. Approaches to The Cantos that emphasize 'ideogrammic logic' tend to be over-intellectual and not able to deal adequately with the more fluid or discontinuous aspects of the poem.

The thesis explores the procedures of mosaic poetry, its various styles of 'jumping' (to use Robert Bly's term), ways of using fragments evocatively, and ways in which gaps or silences in a poem can be charged with meaning. Since collage is an important feature of mosaic poetry, the thesis attempts to survey this development historically, distinguishing it in some respects from traditional styles of quotation and allusion.

The mosaic poem is compared and contrasted with earlier types of poem-sequence. The doubts expressed by Eliot, Tate, and other critics about the coherence of the modern long poem are answered by such essays as 'Dr Williams' Position' in which Pound proposes new ideas of order. But Pound's poetic practice was still more subtle than his theory, a discrepancy also noted in Eliot's work.

The thesis looks cautiously at the analogy often drawn between mosaic poetry and modern painting or film-making. It also examines the ways in which the music of pre-modern composers such as Bach and Beethoven has been used as a formal model by mosaic poets.

The thesis offers a detailed analysis of 'Canto XLVII' as a critical experiment in analyzing the reader's temporal experience of mosaic poetry, his 'shifting gestalts' as he explores the 'field' of the poem. The analysis seeks to clarify the way in which The Cantos combines 'Imagist' hardness with the fluidity of Symbolist poetry.

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CONTENTS

Introduction	p. 1
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JUMP-CUTS

(1) 1 + 1 = 1	p. 26
(2) Time	p. 43
(3) Space	p. 87
(4) Inner / Outer	p. 111
(5) From Metaphor to Mosaic	p. 170

MOSAICS

(6) The Romantics	p. 232
(7) Whitman as 'Mosaic' Poet	p. 251
(8) A 'Mosaic' of Sensations	p. 261
(9) A 'Mosaic' of Symbols	p. 272
(10) French Symbolist Poetry	p. 280
(11) Mallarmé's 'Mosaic'	p. 288
(12) The Context of Experiment, 1909-1917	p. 297
(13) Pound and the Avant-Garde	p. 324
(14) Three Cantos (1917)	p. 350
(15) Revisions	p. 367
(16) The Breakthrough (1919)	p. 373
(17) The Cantos	p. 394
(18) Canto XLVII	p. 412
(19) Structure and Superstructure	p. 445

(20)	Collage	p. 454
(21)	Mosaic Form	p. 501
(22)	Critical Approaches	p. 536
(23)	Conclusions	p. 586

APPENDICES

(1)	Connectives	p. 616
(2)	The Counterpoint Poem	p. 624
(3)	Narrative Counterpoint	p. 650
(4)	Space and the Media	p. 661
(5)	Space in New Zealand Literature	p. 672
(6)	T.E. Hulme and 'Hardness' in Poetry	p. 684
(7)	Contemporary Poetry	p. 689

Bibliography	p. 698
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Order is not sufficient. What is required, is something much more complex. It is order entering upon novelty; so that the massiveness of order does not degenerate into mere repetition; and so that the novelty is always reflected upon a background of system.

[Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 400.]

Juxtaposition is great, -- but, you tell me,
affinity greater.
Ah, my friend, there are many affinities,
greater and lesser,
Stronger and weaker; and each, by the favour
of juxtaposition,
Potent, efficient, in force, -- for a time;
but none, let me tell you,
Save by the law of the land and the ruinous
force of the will, ah,
None, I fear me, at last quite sure to be
final and perfect.

[Arthur Hugh Clough, Amours de Voyage,
Canto III, vii.]