San José Studies, Fall 1986

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W. Ann Reynolds

The Folly of the Body  
Harold J. DeBey

The Culture of High Technology: Is It Female Friendly?  
Jan W. Kelly

Vitamin A and Cancer  
Paul Gahlinger

Cover: *Ezra Pound and James Laughlin* walking up the salite (stoney path) from Rapallo to San Ambrogio. About 1963.  
—*photo by Ann Laughlin*
San José Studies invited participants to submit essays written for or developed from presentations to an Ezra Pound Centennial Colloquium, sponsored by the San Jose Poetry Center and by San Jose State University, November 6–9, 1986, in San Jose.

Selections from the submissions make up this issue, which was underwritten by the San Jose Poetry Center. In turn, the center was supported in presenting the Colloquium by the following agencies:

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Quotations from the writings of Ezra Pound, courtesy the Trustees of the Ezra Pound Literary Property Trust and New Directions Publishing Corporation.
# EZRA POUND CENTENARY ISSUE

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ARTICLES
James Laughlin

_I_

MAY be the last survivor who knew Pound in his best years, in his prime. Perhaps I can report what he was like before the newspapers turned him into a monster. I'd like to tell a little about Rapallo, Ezra and Rapallo, in 1934–35 when I was studying in his “Ezuversity.” Then something about publishing him and how he endured the years in St. Elizabeths. Finally some recollections of his sad old age.

The best thing that ever happened to me for my education was that my master at Choate, Dudley Fitts, had been corresponding with Pound about the affairs of Lincoln Kirstein’s _Hound and Horn_ magazine, which Pound always referred to as the “Bitch and Bugle.” It was Fitts who started me reading Pound at school. We also read T. S. Eliot and Gertrude Stein—remarkable for a prep school. I was bored my first years at Harvard which was just then between two generations of great professors. Fitts arranged for me to go to Europe, to Rapallo, to study with Pound in his famous “Ezuversity.” James Joyce once described Pound as “a large bundle of unpredictable electricity,” which certainly was apt for my time in Rapallo.

The Ezuversity was an ideal institution for a 20th-century goliard. First of all, there was no tuition. Ezra was always hard up, but he wouldn’t take any payment. The only expenses I had were renting a room and paying for my meals with Mrs. Pound and him at the Albergo Rapallo, which he called the Albuggero Rapallo. The reason they ate in the Albergo was that Dorothy Pound, a most lovable woman, was a lady from Kensington and she had never been taught to cook. The classes usually met at the lunch table. They might begin with Ezra going through the day’s mail, commenting on the subjects which it raised. He had a huge correspondence from all over the world; he told me that postage was his largest expense. Economics, of course, were by then his major concern; but there were letters from writers and translators, from professors and scholars of Chinese and the Renaissance, from monetary theorists, from artists, letters from Eliot, from Jean Cocteau, and, of course, from Ernest
Hemingway. Pound and Hemingway were devoted friends but Pound confided in me, "the trouble with Hem is that he can't keep two ideas in his head at the same time."

Many interesting things came out of Pound's mail. I remember one day at lunch Ezra tossed a paperback across the table to me, saying "Waal, Jas, here's a dirty book that's pretty good." It was Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer. Whence came a friendship with Henry that lasted till his death. To be sure, I was never able to publish Tropic of Cancer in the States because I knew my family would disinherit me; but New Directions did about 20 of Henry's innocuous books, most of them collections of essays and stories.

The Course of Study

After he had covered the mail, Pound would get on to the real subjects of the course. These were literature, and history the way he wanted to revise it, because of course, as we know, all history has been miswritten since Gibbon. And poetics and the interpretation of culture. All this information was delivered in the colloquial. Ez always spoke in the colloquial. That was the tone of his discourse. I remember one day he said that it didn't matter where "Fat-faced Frankie," by whom he meant Francesco Petrarca, placed all those adjectives in his lines. They were just for decoration, not sense.

Pound was a superb mimic and had total recall. He used five different accents. He had an American cracker-barrel accent, an American Blackcent, he had cockney, he had bistro French, but my favorite was the "Oirrish" of Uncle Willie Yeats.

Most astonishing were his puns. He loved to pun. Aristotle was Harry Stottle, and Aristophanes was Harry-Stop-Her-Knees. Every class was a performance by an actor with many personae; his hamming was part of his pedagogy. Equally exciting were the marginalia in the books from his personal library which he lent me to study. The most frequent comment in the margins of his Herodotus was, "Balls!!!" I read Propertius in his Mueller edition with his underlinings of passages to be used in the Homage. In his de Mailla Histoire Général de la Chine, I found checked the emperors he had chosen for the Chinese Cantos, with a big star beside Emperor Ching who had the characters for "Make It New" engraved on his bathtub.

The Ezuversity was peripatetic. Ezra was not didactic on the tennis court because he was too out of breath. But when he rowed out into the beautiful Tigullian Gulf on a patino to swim, the flow of useful knowledge continued. I remember especially one day when we were walking up one of the salite, the steep stoney paths behind Rapallo. Ezra had brought along a packet of scraps from the lunch table to feed the cats who were waiting for him on top of the stone walls of the little hillside farms.
Gertrude Stein and her self-described tire-changer (James Laughlin) on a road marker in the south of France, with Basket, the poodle, and Pepé. 1934
“Micci-micci-micci, vieni quace da mangiare.” Come Kitty, come kitty, here’s something to eat. As we walked he explained the Eleusinian Mysteries, about dromena and epopte, and went on to the bizarre theories you will find in the post-script to his translation of De Gourmont’s *Physique de l’amour*.

Another day when we were walking up toward San Ambrogio we got onto the subject of what he would do with his Nobel prize money when he won it. Well, of course he never did, which was a blow. He decided that he would get a very good cook so that he wouldn’t have to eat any longer in the Albuggero Rapallo.

In the evenings he loved to go to the movies. In those days, art had not yet reached the Italian cinema. These were the worst movies ever, absolutely inane comedies. But Ezra would sit up in the balcony with his feet on the railing, wearing his cowboy hat, eating popcorn, and roaring with laughter. They were terrible films, but they helped me learn some Italian.

The room where Ezra worked—the Pounds had a small but beautiful penthouse apartment in one of the old buildings on the seafront—was interesting. He had it well organized. So that he could easily find them, he hung his glasses and his extra glasses, his pencils, his pens, his scissors, and his stapler on strings from the ceiling over his desk. I watched him working sometimes. He would assault his typewriter with an incredible vigor. In fact, he had to have two typewriters, because one was always at the repair shop. His typing, which was extremely eccentric, as shown in an accompanying illustration, had, I think, a good deal to do with the visual arrangement of the pages of the *Cantos* because, in the fury of composition, he couldn’t always take time to go all the way back to the left margin; he would slap the carriage and wherever it stopped, that would determine the indent.

**What Not to Do**

Pound saved me some grief by pointing out that I shouldn’t waste time trying to write fiction, for Flaubert, Stendhal, Henry James, Ford Madox Ford, and Joyce had done everything with fiction that could be done. No one else should bother. Earlier Pound had told me that my poetry was hopeless and suggested that I “do something useful” and become a publisher. I don’t regret obeying his edict. But poetry is hard to suppress, the worse the more so. Some ten years later, encouraged by William Carlos Williams, I began to write light verse—and have had much enjoyment from it.

I observed Pound’s Chinese studies. Most days after lunch he would go up to his bedroom to take off into China. Curiosity about China came into Pound’s head as a boy. Back in Wyncote, Pa, his parents supported
Hereewith proofs returned.
Berryman to get the credit for the Selection, and make clear to him that E did not object to his essay qua essay. He objected to nothing in it as essay, but considered all the bother about other critics out of place in introduction, simply as distracting from main points to lesser.

WATCH line divisions in A. galley 8, first strophe to be in FOUR lines.

Will send news re/ greek accents galley nine, in a day or two as soon as verified. Stone needn’t worry.

DIRTY little greek fount/ use that sort of greek type ought to be flayed.

LET it stand to save time / but never again.
Bill go in next contract no fly-specks.

KRRRRist/ when the .... have chance to use something good to eye, they get that sort of crap.

Pound’s Typewriting Style

Of this letter, written by Pound to James Laughlin in 1948 from St. Elizabeths Hospital, Laughlin writes: “A very characteristic letter. Berryman is John Berryman, whom I had asked to select the contents for the 1949 Selected Poems paperback. Pound did not much like Berryman’s introduction, and he liked even less the choices from the Cantos, which Berryman had fragmented too much to
and god DAMN it get that FISH correct into canto
Canto 51 galley 42 /
as I told whatever loony lubber was in
the office to get EMBH into the RIG Cantos.

FISH / not FLY godbloodydamn their
halyards.

AND put the KAO•XAO ideogram right side up / there are
probably two on one cliché / and the whole thing
should be put the other way up. (same to be observed
if they are on two blocks. they are BOTH upside down
in the big Cantos, and the bottom one should be on top.)

course
Of HEMPSH to make half the book Cantos , is flagrant
violation of the agreement.
And E.P. is not in the least pleased by that fact.
It also etc.

... be improved by sitting at least three galleys from
the Pisan lot.
But not if it means delay.

NO

The hash made of Pisans is too filthy to pass.

I acceded to request to put in a FEW bits of cantos /
you are WASC the thing MALP Cantos /

suit him. Berryman got annoyed with Pound and withdrew his name and his
introduction from the book. He got equally annoyed with me for not backing him
up—he was very touchy and felt insulted—and he never spoke to me again. A sad
story."
Chinese missions and showed him books about China. Lying on the bed, his big black hat shading his eyes, he would prop a huge Chinese dictionary on a pillow on his stomach. He had first been drawn to Chinese by Allen Upward, author of that curious work, *The Divine Mystery*, and then by the notebooks of Ernest Fenollosa, an extraordinary linguist but one who apparently had not cottoned to the fact that not all of the Chinese characters are ideoglyphic. There, then, was Ezra lying on his bed, looking for the pictures of things, or people, or signs, that he thought should be in the characters. Often they weren’t, and he couldn’t reconcile what he saw in the characters with the dictionary meanings. As a result he invented meanings of his own. Sinologists deplore these inventions. But for most of us his language and his lines are so beautiful the inaccuracies hardly matter. Eliot said that Pound invented Chinese poetry for our time.

The *Cantos* were written, as far as I could see and I sometimes watched him at work, entirely from memory—more oral memory than visual memory. I saw no three-by-five cards in his workroom. All that vast store of information was in his head. Composing a canto he would put down what he remembered, usually accurately, but he seldom checked. If you consult Carroll F. Terrell’s exhaustive *Companion to the Cantos*, which tracks down every reference, you will find recorded quite a number of incorrect spellings and confusions in quotations or in paraphrases from sources.

When, at New Directions, we were publishing the successive volumes of the *Cantos*, scholars would point out bad spellings and we corrected them. There were about 600 such corrections. Then at a certain point, Hugh Kenner said, “Look, fellows, we’d better stop correcting, because we may be spoiling some of his best puns.”

Pound’s Greek was a problem. He knew Greek but he didn’t worry much about the accents. We used to send those passages to Dudley Fitts to clean up the Greek.

**Why Rapallo?**

Why Rapallo for his home? people often ask. There was an argument about that at the Yale Pound Conference. Why did he move from Paris to Rapallo? The learned Poundians were giving abstruse psychological theories to explain the choice. But it’s really very simple. Ezra told me, “I came here because I like the swimming.” During the years when he was based in London and Rome he made many visits to Italy. He lived in Venice as early as 1908. He loved Verona and Sirmio, but he chose Rapallo over such more glamorous places because the trains from Paris to Rome all stop in Rapallo. Friends and admirers dropped off to see him. The Ezuversity flourished because Rapallo was easy to reach. And
Rapallo is a beautiful spot. On the Tigullian Gulf—one of the bays on the Ligurian coast below Genoa—it has lovely mountains rising from the sea with umbrella pines on them. It has an old castello built out into the water. There is the sound of the church bells at four o'clock ringing down into the town from a dozen little villages on the mountainside.

Pound loved Rapallo and the Rapallesi loved him. They remember him with affection, as I found when I went back two years ago to make a documentary film about him. They harbored no resentment about his pro-fascist leanings. The newspaper editor explained, “Noi siamo tutti stati fascisti.” We were all fascists!

Pound’s father, Homer, worked most of his life in the Philadelphia mint. Ezra, an only child, was always a dutiful son. When Homer retired, Ezra brought his father and his mother, Isabel, to live in Rapallo. In the Beinecke Library at Yale there are more than 800 letters that Ezra wrote to his parents.

The old folks, as Pound called them and as I called them, lived up the hill in a villa which Yeats had once rented. Their social life was restricted because they couldn’t learn Italian. Their life revolved around Ezra. Homer called him “son,” but Isabel favored “Ra,” his boyhood nickname. Homer was naive, unsophisticated, sweet, and lovable—a very American old man. But Isabel was somewhat upper-class in her manner. She was, after all, a New England Wadsworth, related to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. I remember her as being fluttery. She had brought her china from home and liked to give tea parties, but since she didn’t know many people, there were few guests.

Isabel was the one who had pushed Ezra since his childhood to be a poet. She encouraged him to read and to write. What, of course, Isabel really wanted was to be the mother of a poet. But with their background, neither Isabel nor Homer could understand much of “son’s” work, especially after he began the Cantos. It was simply beyond them, this complicated, polylingual poetry. When I went up the hill to call on them, they would quiz me on what “son” or “Ra” was doing and what it meant. I’m afraid I wasn’t too helpful. But they were very sweet people.

What Ezra would usually answer if his father asked him what he was writing was simply, “wait and see, Dad.” Some years earlier, however, Ezra had been a little more communicative to his male parent. He wrote him then,

Dear Dad, afraid the whole damn poem is rather obscure, especially in fragments. Have I ever given you outline of main scheme, or whatever it is? Rather like, or unlike subject and response and counter-subject in fugue. Live man goes down into world of dead. The repeat in history. The magic moment or moment of metamorphosis bust through from quotidian
into divine or permanent world, Gods etc. Various things keep cropping up in the poem. The original world of gods, the Trojan War, Helen on the Wall of Troy, with the old men fed up with the whole show and suggesting she be sent back to Greece.

I doubt if Dad was much the wiser for this revelation, but the parents' faith in Ezra was complete. They knew "son" was a genius and the greatest poet since Dante. If they couldn't understand the Cantos, that was their shortcoming.

Once I asked Olga Rudge, who was Pound's lifelong companion after the 1920's, if he explained his work to her. She said that he never talked about his work, he just wrote it.

**Italian Nobility**

Rapallo was a town of petit bourgeois and retired people, among them a good many English who did not find Ezra congenial. But there was a very small segment of the Italian nobility—the San Faustinos, the Robilantes, and the Collis. Ezra was a darling of these people. He amused them. The gentry met at noon in a little closed café in a back street—they wouldn't go to the tourist cafes on the seafront. Ezra often went there at noon, though he almost never drank anything. They made much of him and he loved it.

There wasn't much literary life in Rapallo. For that Pound was dependent on people who came through for the Ezuversity, such as, among the most famous, the poets Louis Zukofsky and Basil Bunting. Max Beerbohm, the great British writer-cartoonist, had a villa in Rapallo, but Pound seldom saw him. There was Monti, the painter who did the much reproduced portrait of Ezra walking along the sea wall. There was John Drummond, a young Englishman who became a kind of public relations assistant for Pound, writing letters on economic subjects to the London newspapers; they were seldom printed.

There was a group around the local paper, Il Mare, in which Pound instigated a cultural section. There were tennis friends at the club such as the charming Dr. Bacigalupu. Ezra was an enthusiastic tennis player; he had a forehand drive, executed with 90-degree body pivot, which none of us could return. He organized a series of concerts held in the town hall of Rapallo. The concerts featured his favorite composers—Bach, Mozart, and Vivaldi. The nucleus of performers was Olga Rudge, an accomplished concert violinist, and the German pianist, Gerhardt Munch, who lived in Rapallo. Guest stars were imported from time to time.

After literature, Chinese, and economic reform, music was Pound's great passion. This preoccupation grew out of his long study and transla-
tion of the Provençal troubadour poets. From them he took the concept of *motz el son*, that poetry is song and that words must be equated with ver­bal sounds. He never had formal musical training but he heard much music in his London years when he wrote music criticism for the *New Age* under the pseudonym of “William Atheling.” He bought a clavecin from Arnold Dolmetsch, the reviver of ancient music. On this instrument he tapped out with one finger the melodic line for his two short operas, *Le Testament*, with words by Villon, and *Cavalcanti*, using texts from Dante’s friend, Guido Cavalcanti. These scores are monadic—what interested Pound was the duration in music of the vowel sounds in the poetry—with orchestration supplied by his friends George Antheil and Agnes Bedford. At first neglected, these operas have been performed here and abroad several times. They are unusual and engaging music.

An anecdote will illustrate Ezra’s taste in music. One of the best trips I ever made with Olga and him was to visit the town of Wörgl in Austria. Wörgl is the only place on record where Silvio Gesell’s stampscrip—one of Pound’s favorite panaceas for monetary reform—was ever tried out. It worked for a few weeks; then the central bank in Vienna found out about it and that was the end of that. From Wörgl we went on to Salzburg to the music festival. Ezra loved Mozart, but I made the mistake of taking him one night to the *Festspielhaus*, where Toscanini was conducting Beethoven’s *Fidelio*. After about 15 minutes, Ezra reared up in his seat and expostulated quite loudly, “What can you expect? The man had syphillis.” We tramped out; Toscanini didn’t miss a beat.

**Distressing Topic**

Pound’s anti-Semitism is a distressing topic. It did much to ruin his life. It was the one thing I didn’t like at the Ezuversity, though at that time it was limited to jokes and attacks on bankers such as the Rothschilds and Sir Montague Norman of the Bank of England. When I challenged him about it, he simply said, “How can a man whose name is Ezra be anti-Semitic?” Pound’s friendship with the poets Louis Zukofsky and Allen Ginsberg are recorded. But I’d like to speak of his kindness to the Jewish sculptor, Henghes, whose real name was Heinz Winterfeld Klussmann.

One day when I was in Rapallo, a bedraggled figure with his feet bleeding turned up on Ezra’s doorstep. In Hamburg he had heard that Ezra had some sculptures by Gaudier, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Ezra’s friend of the London days. Henghes wanted to see them and get advice from Ezra about his own work. He had no money, so he had walked most of the way from Germany. In the mountains he had picked up in a streambed some small pieces of soft slate which he carved with his pocketknife. The minute Ezra saw these pieces he knew Henghes was
good and wanted to help him, as he had helped artists and writers all his life. There was no extra bed in the apartment, so he put Henghes up in the large dog kennel on the terrace. He fed him and, as soon as he’d gotten Henghes rested up a bit, he took him over to the local stone-cutter, the man who carved the gravestones. Pound said, “I will stand good for a piece of stone for this man and you lend him some tools.” Henghes went to work carving the striking figure of a centaur which later became the model for the New Directions book colophon. People do say from time to time that it is a sitting-down horse, but why shouldn’t a centaur rest? Then Ezra went up to Turin with a photograph of the statue to show to the Fiat lady, Signora Agnelli. He convinced her that Henghes had genius and she bought the statue for a good price.

Henghes was able to move out of the dog kennel and pursue his art and the young ladies of Rapallo. He went on to a considerable success. His greatest fame came when he had moved to London and was commissioned to do a statue for the middle of a pool at the new Festival Hall across the Thames. This statue, a seated figure of a man, caught the fancy of the youth of London. Every night someone would wade out into the pond to put a different funny hat on the figure. The tabloids began running pictures which made Henghes so famous that he was asked to do a piece for the Time-Life Building. The importance of publicity. But Ezra started it.

Some Poundians try to brush Ezra’s anti-Semitism under the rug. That is foolish. It is there and we have to face it and think about it. There are only about 15 overtly anti-Semitic lines in the Cantos, but the wartime broadcasts which he made from Rome Radio are virulent. As Alfred Kazin says, “They show a mind in trouble.” Pound calls FDR “the Jew Rosenfeld.” Like that—and more. At the same time, many of the broadcasts deal with literary and cultural topics and show him as his old self—a great and witty critic—as he was before obsession took over.

When Pound was awarded the Bollingen Prize for the Pisan Cantos, his critics asked “Can a bad man write a good poem?” I think that many good poems have been written by unsavory characters. The question is an over-simplification, but we must try to answer it.

Some years after Rapallo, when I had become Pound’s publisher, I pressed him again about the anti-Semitism. This is what he answered:

Again in Cantos all institutions are judged on their merits, idem religions. No one can be boosted or exempted on grounds of being a Lutheran or a Manichean, nor can all philosophy be degraded to status of propaganda merely because the author has one philosophy and not another. Is the Divina Comedia propaganda or not? From 72 on we will enter the Empyrean, philosophy, George Santayana, etc. [He is
referring to when he gets to *Canto 72.*] The pub’r cannot expect to control the religion and philosophy of his authors. Certain evil habits of language, etc. must be weighed and probably will be found wanting. I shall not accept the specific word anti-Semitism. There will have to be a general formula covering Mennonites, Mohammedans, Lutherans, Calvinists. I wouldn’t swear to not being anti-Calvinist, but that don’t mean I should weigh protestants in one balance and Anglo-cats in another. All ideas coming from the near-East are probably shit. If they turn out to be typhus in the laboratory, so is it. So is Taoism, so is probably all Chinese philosophy and religion except Kung [he means Confucius]. I am not yet sure.

Pound’s extreme anti-Semitism in the 40s put a severe strain on my affection for him. But I came to understand his obsession with more charity when Dr. Overholser, the head psychiatrist at St. Elizabeths Hospital, told me, “You mustn’t judge Pound morally, you must judge him medically.” He explained that Ezra was paranoid and that anti-Semitism is a recognized element in paranoia. Pound could not control himself.

Drawing for the Henghes centaur sculpture, later the model for the book colophon of *New Directions.*
Publishing Pound

It was a pleasure to publish Pound. Some writers complain a lot. But if Pound was annoyed about something, he would fuss for only one letter; in the next he would have forgotten it. He had a reputation for irritability, but that was mostly when he was writing to or about Nicholas Murray Butler, the president of Columbia, whom he considered the greatest cultural criminal in the United States, or to Montague Norman, the head of the Bank of England. With me he was indulgent and put up with my lapses. Well, he did get quite angry when I printed two of his Chinese characters upside down. But he didn't demand that the page be reprinted.

There were frequent delays in getting his books out. For months each winter I was off skiing somewhere. Once he wrote, "Are you doing anything? Of course, if you spend three-quarters of your time sliding down ice-cream cones on a tin tea-tray, if you can't be bothered with detail, why the hell don't you get Stan Nott over from London, who could run it."

And another time, "Youse guys seem to think Ez made of brass, with steel springs and no attrition. God damn delays for years and years beginning to get the old man down."

Once, when something had irritated him, he enclosed a little poem for me:

Here lies our noble lord the Jaz
Whose word no man relies on
He never breathed an unkind word
His promises are pizen.

That, of course, is a parody of Rochester's impromptu on Charles II:

God bless our good and gracious king
Whose promise none relies on
Who never said a foolish thing
Nor ever did a wise one.

Pound never cared much for most of the books I published—except those of his friends. This was his comment once on book selection at New Directions, "possibly a politic move on Jaz's part, great deal of sewage to float a few boats. Possibly useful; nasty way to educate the public, four percent food, ninety-six percent poison."

Here is a passage in one letter that mystified me at first. Pound wrote, "Jaz, can't remember everything during your flits. Have you remembered to send Mrs. Dutch Holland (Regina) the Confucian stone classics for to show her you can do something else except split your britches? You gotter educate them at the top." This is the explication: I had been skiing.
at St. Anton in Austria. The Queen of Holland was there, a most amiable and democratic lady. She had invited me to join her party on a high mountain ski tour. On the trip I fell down and split my pants. Now bless me if Queen Juliana didn’t have a needle and thread in her little sitzpack. With motherly concern, Her Majesty sewed me up so I could get down the mountain without disgrace. I wrote this tale to Ezra as something to divert him. His reaction shows how his mind worked. He immediately said to himself, now I’ve got a contact with the Big People in Holland. A chance to convert Holland to Confucianism if I can get my translation of the Ta Hio to her. I sent the book, received a polite thank-you from a secretary, but have noted no change in the Dutch national ethos.

One of Pound’s dearest and most loyal friends was T. S. Eliot. Ezra helped get Eliot published and later edited the draft of The Waste Land. Their letters to each other—Eliot was “Old Possum” and Pound was “Bre’r Rabbit”—are masterpieces of affectionate teasing. In this tone Pound wrote to me, “Eliot’s low saurian vitality. When the rock was broken out hopped Marse Toad, alive and chipper, after three thousand or whatever years incastration. When Joyce and Wyndham L. have long since gaga’d or exploded, Old Possum will be totin’ round de golf links and givin’ bright nickels to the lads of 1987.”

Here is a poem he sent me about Eliot entitled “The Right Reverend, Bidding him Corajo”, which means, I think, courage.

Come now, old vulchuh  
Rise up from thy nest  
Stretch forth thy wing  
on Chimborazo’s height  
Strip off thy BVDs and undervest  
Display thy whangus in its antient might  
The old scabs is a droppin’ orf the world its sore  
and Men would smell thy corn-cob poipe once more.

As Pound aged there was a gradual slippage. He never lost his wits; but, as he became more obsessed with economics and saving the world through monetary reform, his letters became more brief and elliptical. When we were putting out a new edition of Guide to Kulchur, I asked for some description for the jacket copy. All he answered was, “Guide to Kulchur; a mousing round for a word or a shape, for an order, for a meaning and last of all for a philosophy. The turn came with Bunting’s lines, ‘man is not an end-product, maggot asserts.’ The struggle was and still might be to preserve some of the values that make life worth living. And they are still mousing around for a significance in the chaos.” That says what he wanted to say, but without his old spirit.
Here is a nugget on Yeats who had visited Rapallo: "The aged Yeats left yester. I had several serious reflections re doing a formal document requesting you to chloriform me before I get to that state. However, must be a trial to be Oirrish in Oireland."

Let me report one piece of Pound’s humor which is rather sardonic but perhaps important. Humphrey Carpenter, who is writing a new biography of Pound, took a magnifying glass to scrutinize the famous news photo taken of Pound when he landed at Naples after St. Elizabeths and gave a fascist salute to the reporters. Naturally this was trumpeted in the press as a sign that he was unrepentant. However, Carpenter maintains that magnification of the news picture shows that Pound was laughing as he gave the salute. A very Poundian joke. At his sanity hearing in Washington Pound shouted, "God damn it, I never was a fascist!"

1939 Trip to U.S.

A turning point in Pound’s life was his trip back to the United States in 1939. It proved to be a depressing experience. He had come over hoping to meet Roosevelt and certain members of Congress. He would tell them what to do about the national economy and international policy. But no one of importance in Washington would see him. This failure to be recognized as a thinker, not just as a poet, broke his spirit. Undoubtedly he appeared an eccentric screwball to those who did see him in Washington. One of his proposals was that, to avert war with Japan, the United States should trade Wake Island to the Japanese for a complete canon of the classic Noh plays. Such an idea demonstrates, I think, what the psychiatrists later diagnosed as "confabulation," an inability to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Not being seen by Roosevelt led to paranoid hatred, as we find it in the Rome broadcasts.

Some think that Pound’s staying on in Italy when war broke out proves him a traitor. Not so. Many passages in his work, especially the Jefferson and Adams sections of the Canto’s, show that he remained profoundly American during his expatriation. A major theme of the broadcasts is his concern for preserving the Constitution and the principles of the Founding Fathers, at least as he interpreted them. Pound has stated that he wanted to come home, but he couldn’t leave his old father, Homer, who was in an enfeebled state in the Rapallo hospital with a broken hip.

As for Pound’s fascism, it is usually explained that he hoped that Mussolini would be strong enough to crack down on the Italian banks and believed that the fascist corporations, with which Il Duce had replaced labor unions, would fit into a Social Credit system. One of my own theories about his facism—and I have my own gift for confabulation—is that Pound identified Mussolini with one of his great heroes of the
Renaissance, Sigismundo Malatesta of Rimini, to whom *Cantos* VIII–XI are devoted. Sigismundo was not only a great warrior but a patron of artists and humanistic learning. Is it not possible that Pound imagined that he could persuade Mussolini to grant state patronage to writers and artists? Unfortunately, the only borsa which Mussolini gave was to Pirandello, who was a fascist.

Pound spent 12 years in St. Elizabeths after the federal court found him to be of unsound mind. I had been out of touch with him during the war years; mail did not go through to Italy and it was impossible to send him his royalties, so that he was living in penury, except for what Olga earned giving English lessons in Rapallo. When I saw him in Washington I was troubled to see how he had aged after his experience in the Army's Disciplinary Training Center at Pisa. His confinement in a cage had brought on a nervous breakdown. Then he was moved to a tent and allowed to use a typewriter in the medical office. But most of the *Pisan Cantos* were drafted in handwriting in schoolchildren's notebooks given him by the Jewish chaplain. These are now at the Beinecke Library at Yale.

**Sanity Question**

In Dr. E. Fuller Torrey's notorious book, *Ezra Pound and the Secret of St. Elizabeths: The Roots of Treason*, the author, a student of the insanity defense and an authority on schizophrenia, attempts to prove that Pound was mentally sound and that a group of writers that included T. S. Eliot, Archibald MacLeish, and myself conspired with Dr. Overholser to protect Pound from trial. This is simply not true. As I told Torrey when he first interviewed me, I did not know Overholser until months after the sanity hearing. Torrey is now on the staff of St. Elizabeths but he came there after Ezra had departed and never knew him. Under the Freedom of Information Act, he obtained access to Pound's medical records and used them in such a way as to present his case.

Torrey says that Pound was well enough to stand trial, but I disagree. I saw Ezra several times soon after he reached Washington. No question about it, his head was in trouble. He could not concentrate, he could not arrange his thoughts in any kind of rational order, and he was confabulating. I had asked my lawyer, Julien Cornell, to see him and to report on his condition. After their meeting Cornell called me to say: "Jas, this won't wash. The man is not in his senses and couldn't possibly help me defend him." Cornell went on to say that he had asked Ezra if he could get him anything. Ezra replied, "Well, I'd like to have a Georgian grammar. I want to write to Stalin about Confucius."

For a time, before he was moved to St. Elizabeths, Pound was held in Gallinger Hospital, a real snake pit full of maniacs and dangerous criminals. I visited him there and found him in terror, afraid for his life.
"Jas," he said, "I don't know what I'm doing here. I thought they were bringing me to Washington to send me on to Tokyo to help MacArthur convert the Japs from Shintoism to Confucianism."

I attended the sanity hearing, the necessary preliminary in his case to a trial, which was held before Judge Bolitho Laws, a courtly Southerner, in federal court. Three psychiatrists appeared for the government—Dr. Overholser of St. Elizabeths, Dr. King of the Public Health Service, and Dr. Gilbert of Gallinger—and one, Dr. Muncie of John Hopkins, for the defense. All of them had had the opportunity to study Pound, some over a period of weeks. They were grilled for several hours by two lawyers from the justice department. Their terminologies were various, but all four agreed that Ezra was in no shape to stand trial.

The sanity hearing was a memorable experience for me. It made me proud to be an American. In some other countries Ezra would have been railroaded into prison, or worse. Ezra was not questioned and spoke only once. He sat at a small table below the bench with his head in his hands. But at one moment one of the government attorneys accused him of being a fascist. He reared up out of his chair and shouted, "God damn it, I never was a fascist!" The jury took only a few minutes to decide that he was of unsound mind, and Judge Laws remanded him to St. Elizabeths to remain there until he was well enough to stand trial—which never happened.

In sum, the diagnosis of the four psychiatrists was "a paranoid state, with confabulation." Dr. Jerome Kavka, a Freudian on the St. Elizabeths staff who worked with Pound, diagnosed "severe narcissism," which means, I'm told, "excessive arrogance." No drugs or therapy were used, but he was given excellent care at St. Elizabeths. Gradually his power of concentration returned and he began writing. He wrote further Cantos and did his extraordinary versions of the Confucian Odes and of Sophocles' Women of Trachis and the Elektra of Euripides. With the help of a disciple, Marcella Spann, he put together his choice of poetry in the Confucius to Cummings anthology, which he referred to in his letters as the "Kung to Cgs." He carried on an enormous correspondence, though by now his letters had become very elliptical and scrappy, with many unexplained references. For years he had always seemed to assume that his correspondents had read every book he had.

In St. Elizabeths

When he first came to St. Elizabeths, Pound was quartered in Howard Hall, a gloomy old building. Later Dr. Overholser moved him to Chestnut Ward, the senile ward, which was more cheerful. There he had his own cubicle with his books in orange crates and a table for his typewriter. There was an alcove by the window with fairly comfortable chairs where
he could receive his visitors. He was allowed to see anyone who was not a journalist. Many of the leading poets came to sit with him, as did I, from time to time. I was astonished at his good spirits, considering that a good number of the Chestnut Ward inmates were zombies who sat motionless on benches along the wall. Ezra was soon the king of the ward. A snap of his fingers would bring one of the mobile zombies to run his errands or to fetch an extra chair for his guests. Dorothy Pound had taken a small apartment near the hospital. She had lunch each day in the cafeteria, then came to sit with him, often helping him with his correspondence. Many of the letters to me of that period are in her hand.

After a few years in St. Elizabeths, Pound was almost himself again. His stories were as comical and various as ever. His remarkable memory was no longer impaired. Yet some confabulation persisted. One day he asked me to stay for lunch with him. Our plates were brought to us by one of the mobile zombies. Then another one came to the table and systematically tasted his food. "What's this about?" I asked. "Don't you know," he said, not joking, "that Bernie Baruch is trying to have me poisoned?" So sad. Then he went on, "I don't know why the Jews are after me. I sent them plans for rebuilding their temple in Jerusalem."

After some years Julien Cornell thought that he might be able to get Pound released on a writ of habeas corpus. He had been unable to find any precedent for holding a man in Pound's situation indefinitely if he were not a menace to society, as Pound certainly was not. Cornell drew up the papers, but Ezra would not let Dorothy, who was his legal guardian, sign them. "I'm going to come out of here," he told me, "only with flying colors and a personal apology from the President."

All during the years in St. Elizabeths, Pound kept up his "network" by correspondence. The "network" was made up of people all over the world who were committed to his literary and economic principles and who were prepared to do propaganda for them. He either controlled or influenced five tiny magazines: Strike, Current, Four Pages, Noel Stock's Agenda in Australia, and William Cookson's Agenda in London. He also instigated the Square Dollar series of paperback books. But his name is not to be found in any of these publications, though it is easy to detect his contributions from the style. In those years he would sign nothing, not even a book contract, because he felt that his individuality had been stripped from him.

Dr. Overholser gave him grounds privileges in summer or when the weather was fine. He would carry his bathchair out onto the lawn, there to be surrounded by visitors and disciples. It was the Ezuversity all over again, his little academy. He would lean far back in the bathchair, the position we see in the Wyndham Lewis portrait that is now in the Tate in London. He loved to tease the squirrels. He would tie a peanut to a thread and toss it out to them. But when the squirrel took it, he would jerk it
Among the most faithful of the disciples was the beautiful artist La Martinelli. She was perhaps 25, with splendid red hair, dressed in Victorian silk gowns—a figure out of a pre-Raphaelite painting. She would sit at Ezra’s feet with her sketch pad, drawing him very carefully. “Maestro,” she would say, “please move your head a little to the left... a little more to the right.” Her drawings were not very good, in fact, quite bad, but Ezra was much taken with her. To advance her career he persuaded his Milanese publisher, Vanni Scheiwiller, to bring out a small book of her work. In his text he described her as the finest draftsman since Botticelli. Another confabulation: concitatio senectutis.

The disciples who came to the Ezuversity at St. Elizabeths were a mixed group. The worst of the lot was the notorious John Kasper, an extreme racist, who preached against “racial integration” in the South and ended up in jail in Tennessee. But there were many good ones: Hugh Kenner, who wrote the first important critical book about Pound; Guy Davenport, now a professor at the University of Kentucky and perhaps the most brilliant avant-garde writer of his generation; David Gordon, who took up Chinese at Pound’s suggestion and now teaches it at the University of Maine; Marcella Spann Booth, now a professor of English at the University of Connecticut; and Dallam Simpson, who first published a book by Basil Bunting in this country.

In 1958 Pound was finally released from St. Elizabeths. There had been growing protest at his indefinite confinement from all over the world. It was an embarrassment to our state department, as Christian Herter reported. Dag Hammarskjold of the United Nations gave his support. Eliot, Archibald MacLeish, Hemingway, Robert Frost, and other eminent writers applied pressure in Washington. The actual mechanics of the release were accomplished by Gabriel Hauge, an economic advisor to President Eisenhower, who persuaded Sherman Adams, Eisenhower’s chief of staff, to request the justice department to quash the old indictment for treason. Pound was at last a free man, permitted to return to Italy.

Old Age

But his old age was a sad one. Physical ailments added to his other problems. There were a few good years at his daughter’s castle above Merano in the Italian Alps and visits with Drummond and an Italian friend, Ugo Dadone, in Rome. Then his condition deteriorated with severe prostatism and, far more crippling, an intense depression that no drug could relieve. I reported this to Dr. Overholser who explained that clinical depression was often a sequel to paranoia when physical vitality became diminished. When I visited him in the early 1960’s, he told me that he could no longer write at all because he couldn’t get the fog out of
his head. There were no more Cantos, though he did gather together a small volume of Drafts & Fragments, which New Directions published in 1968. These final cantos are of great beauty but they are very short and often fragmentary. He did not have the strength to write the grand paradisiacal closure which he had intended, in counterpart to Dante’s Paradiso, though with Pound it was to have been the paradiso terrestre, the earthly paradise, which he hoped his economic reforms would usher in. The last line, as he left off, is “To be men not destroyers,” preceded by a loving tribute to Olga Rudge which includes the tragic lines.

That I lost my center  
fighting the world  
The dreams clash  
and are shattered.

It was Olga Rudge who took care of him in his last years because Dorothy’s health was also failing. Olga sheltered him in her little house in the San Trovaso district of Venice, where Pound had first come in 1908, and in her farmhouse at San Ambrogio on the mountainside above Rapallo. I visited them several times and can attest that the care that Olga gave Ezra was both angelic and practical. She kept him going when he would otherwise have slipped away. There was, of course, no money for a nurse or servant and it was a night and day job. She occupied his mind by coaxing him into recording the Cantos. He believed then that his work was no good and could not understand why students and admirers came to call on him. One day when I was asking him about possible spelling corrections in the poem, he said, “Why don’t you abolish the Cantos?”

Perhaps it was along about 1963 that the much reported “silence” set in. Pound ceased to talk. He would go for hours without saying a word. I noticed that he followed conversations with his eyes but he said nothing. He told me that he did not talk because no one would listen to his economic ideas, and he quoted to me the legend that comes from the Book of Ecclesiastes and is repeated on one of the chapel scrolls in his favorite building in all Italy, the Tempio Malestestiana in Rimini, “tempus loquendi, tempus tacendi.” There is a time for speaking and there is a time to be silent. His family has always interpreted the silence as a form of meditation, of monastic withdrawal, but this does not accord with his views on religion. He believed in such cults as the Eleusinian Mysteries, not in Christianity or Buddhism. The appeal to him of Confucius was precisely that it was ethics, not religion as most of us conceive it. Remembering what a great raconteur he had been in his prime, it was shattering for me to be with him in this perpetual muteness. I would talk my head off trying to divert him, to bring him some comfort in his desolation . . . but almost never got the slightest response.
Yet I do remember a few occasions when he spoke. One day in Venice, Olga wanted to go shopping and I took him to lunch at Monti’s, a quiet trattoria that he had always liked. Not a word from him all during the meal. But when I happened to ask him, “Ezra, what was Djuna Barnes like when you knew her in Paris?” he suddenly answered: “Waal, she wasn’t very cuddly.” The old wit was there. And as I was saying goodbye, about to leave Venice, and he knew I was going to London, where I would see Eliot, he spoke again: “Tell the Possum that the headache pills came from a place behind the Chambre de Députés.” Something remembered from 50 years in the past.

In 1967, Olga brought him to Paris for the publication of French translations of some of his books. One Sunday I hired a car and drove them out to see the chateau of Vaux-le-Vicomte. Swinging his cane, Ezra walked briskly through the house and the gardens. No comment whatever. But that evening he uttered. He had been seeing his old friend Sam Beckett, who had taken him to a performance of Fin de Partie (Endgame), the play in which two characters are in garbage cans. Out of the blue he said, “C’etait moi dans la poubelle.” I was the one in the garbage can.

**Last Visit to the U.S.**

In that same year, Pound, accompanied by Olga, made his last visit to the United States. He attended a reception given by the Academy of American Poets at the New York Public Library. He was seated in a doganal chair at the end of the large room. As people came to speak to him, he would rise for each one, shake hands, but say nothing. However, Marianne Moore, with whom he had corresponded since the days of The Dial, had come to greet him. Marie Bullock took them off to a side room and stood guard at the door. But she let me peek in; Ezra was talking to Moore with animation.

It made me so happy to see Ezra talking again. But the next week I was quite shattered when he said something that revealed the depth of his despair. In 1939, Pound’s alma mater, Hamilton College, had given him an honorary doctorate of letters. At the 1967 commencement Hamilton was giving me a degree, largely, I think, because I was his publisher. Ezra and Olga came up to Clinton, New York, for the occasion. And it was a fine one. He marched in the academic procession and received a tremendous ovation when he entered the hall. He was courtly in acknowledging greetings but totally silent. That evening, as we were driving back to my home in Connecticut, we stopped at a Howard Johnson restaurant for some supper. One of Olga’s problems in the later years was to get Ezra to eat. He had become very thin and, with his white beard and hair, looked like a beautiful old prophet. But my wife coaxed him into having apple pie with ice cream. As we left the restaurant to go back to the parking lot, I
noticed that Ezra was missing. I checked the men's room; not there. Then I noticed a figure in the darkness moving slowly down toward the woods back of the building. "Ezra," I asked, when I got to him, "where are you going? The car is over there." Then came the saddest words I have ever heard. "Why don't you discard me here? Then I won't be any trouble to anyone." All I could do was put my arms around him and tell him that we all loved him.

Pound died on November 1, 1972, at the age of 87. He is buried in San Michele, the island cemetery in the lagoon at Venice. His grave is in the part reserved for foreigners—exiled White Russian generals, Stravinsky, Diaghilev. There is no monument, just a simple stone plaque in the ground with ivy growing around it. Many urge that he should be moved home to this country, perhaps to Hailey, Idaho, where he was born. But Hailey is the end of nowhere. Let him rest where he is. He loved Venice, was often happy there, and some of the finest lines in the *Cantos* are about Venice.

I sat on the Dogana's steps
For the gondolas cost too much, that year,
And there were not 'those girls,' there was one face ... 
And the lit cross-beams that year in the Morosini .
Gods float in the azure air,
Bright gods and Tuscan, back before dew was shed.
Light: and the first light before ever dew was fallen.

I conclude with some lines from a poem of my own, written to honor Ezra Pound:

Lie quiet, Ezra, there in your campo santo on San Michele
In paradisum te deducant angeli
To your city of Dioce, to Wagadu
To your paradiso terrestre
What I have reft from you
I stole for love of you
Beloved, my master and my friend.
Italy and Ezra Pound's Politics

Fred Moramarco

During a Fulbright year in Italy in 1973, I had to come to grips with a series of questions that then seemed central to my ideas about literature generally: could I admire and greatly value the work of a writer whose political ideology seemed so antithetical to my own? Was it possible to separate literary and political values? How could Ezra Pound be such a great poet if he was also an anti-Semite, a fascist, and an eccentric economic theorist whose ideas about money and power seemed more appropriate to the hierarchial feudal order of the middle ages than they did to a contemporary society?

The occasion for my having to face these questions was that the Chairman of the Department of English at the Universita Cattolica in Milan had suggested I teach a course in modern American poetry "with emphasis on Pound" because, he told me, Italian students were much interested in what they called "the strange case of Ezra Pound." At the time I knew relatively little about Pound, having only taught some of his work in introductory poetry and American literature courses. But, after all, I was in Italy. What better place to read the Cantos than in the country that inspired so many of that poem's most memorable moments? Like many poets, professors, and assorted Poundians before me and since, I made a pilgrimage to many of the "sacred places" of the Cantos. With Hugh Kenner's The Pound Era as my guide, literary allusions of that densely allusive work were transformed for me to real physical settings. I sat on the dogana's steps in Venice looking out at the magnificent view of the Venetian harbor; I explored the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini and took pictures of the Monte dei Paschi in Sienna. I saw Mantegna's frescoes at the Ducal palace in Mantua and wandered about the alleys of Venice looking for the very apartment where Pound lived on Calle Querini 252. I felt much like the naive American tourist in Bernard
Malamud’s *Pictures of Fidelman* who, looking out at the ruins of Rome exclaims, “Imagine all that history!”

All of these trips changed the *Cantos* for me from an intellectual exercise to a nearly physical adventure. But since I was going to be teaching Italians about Ezra Pound, merely pointing out how thrilling it was actually to see the landmarks mentioned in the *Cantos* would hardly do. After all, they lived here. I needed more information about Pound’s life and work. Walking around downtown Milan one afternoon, I noticed a plaque on a building: “Centro per Studi d’Ezra Pound,” (The Ezra Pound Study Center) and was excited by my seeming good fortune. Here I was, having to teach a new course on Ezra Pound in Italy, and lucky enough to find a whole “center” containing materials that would be at my disposal. But after I walked up two flights of stairs and went in the center, it didn’t take long for disillusionment to set in. A few of Pound’s works were available there (in Italian translation), but for the most part the center was a library organized to propagate neo-fascist ideas. In this way I began to understand that much of the Italian interest in Pound had to do with his politics rather than his poetry.

**Strange and Disturbing Phenomenon**

Questions concerning the place of a writer with repugnant political ideas were particularly prominent in the academic-literary climate of the late ’60s and early ’70s. The general socio-political struggles of those years brought them to the forefront, and I remember hearing a lecture at San Diego State University by Bruce Franklin, a Melville scholar turned political activist, who concluded that graffiti of various sorts were more authentic and valuable poetry than, say, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” because they were an expression of “the people” and the author of “Prufrock” was 1) a fascist and 2) dead.

An influential book of the time, John Harrison’s *The Reactionaries*, raised these questions in a more systematic way. “It is a strange and disturbing phenomenon,” Harrison wrote, “that five of the greatest literary figures of this century, Yeats, (Wyndham) Lewis, Pound, Eliot, and Lawrence, were attracted by Italian and German fascism before the Second World War; and in Pound’s case, during and after the war. Why is it that great creative artists can totally reject a liberal, democratic, humanitarian society, and prefer a cruel, authoritarian and bellicose society?” (Harrison 15)

Harrison’s book never really answers the questions he raises nor even couches those questions in proper terms—the world is not so easily divided between the “liberal, democratic, humanitarians” (us) and the “cruel, bellicose, authoritarians” (them). But the issues he raised in connection with Pound have been explored in detail by a number of scholars.
since, notably William Chace, Cairns Craig, and Peter Nicholls. Craig’s book, in particular, restates Harrison as an assertion rather than a query, reminding us that the issue hasn’t gone away but has come to be widely accepted as a fact of the life of the modernist generation. “[T]he three major poets of the English-speaking world agree that democracy must be replaced by a society that is hierarchical, authoritarian and, ultimately, founded on purity of blood.” (Craig 3)

That Pound was a fascist sympathizer and anti-Semitic through most of his creative life seems to me, by the evidence offered by these writers and others, indisputable. Yes, he did, shortly before his death, tell Allen Ginsberg that anti-Semitism was his greatest error—a “suburban” prejudice he could never transcend; and he did imply a further retraction in the foreword to his Selected Prose, published in 1973, shortly after his death in Venice. And he did remark to both Ginsberg and Michael Reck that his writing was filled with “stupidity and ignorance all the way through” and insisted to his biographer Noel Stock that the Cantos were a “botch.” But these very retractions and reservations stress that fact that Pound’s work contains and expresses the pro-fascist, anti-Semitic identity he created for himself during his most productive years.

And so the teacher of Pound, if he or she confronts honestly these less than humanistic and humanitarian sentiments in Pound’s life and work, is faced with a dilemma; how do you teach, as an example of literary excellence, a writer, some of whose ideas are morally repugnant? Pound’s life and work epitomize the quandary of reconciling art, politics, and personal beliefs more than any other writer of this century, because he is, in my view and that of many others, this century’s greatest poet. How important, one may ask with Irving Howe, are the anti-Semitic and pro-fascist passages in the Cantos?

Are they central to the work, or more incidental blemishes? . . . Quantitatively the percentage of anti-Semitic passages is small, but thematically they are closely related to the whole political drift of the poem, which at some points is explicitly Fascist and at other points supportive of the Fascist myth. (Howe 112)

And just what is “the Fascist myth”? The word “fascism” derives from the old Roman symbol of power and authority, the fasces, a bundle of sticks bound together by thongs with an ax-head protruding from one end. One by one the sticks would be easy to break. Bound together, they are indestructible. Fascist ideology called for binding together all classes, all elements of an entire nation into a single organization with a single will. This aspect of the fascist myth was enormously appealing to Pound. Given his enthusiasm for great leaders—men who made a significant
mark on the historical direction of their own time—and given as well his love of Italy, a land that embodies the physical remains of a cultural tradition he sought to resurrect and extend—his virtual deification of Mussolini seems almost inevitable. In *Patria Mia* (1912) Pound states the following as the first principle of his credo: “The arts come into prominence and there is what is called an ‘age of art’ when men of a certain catholicity of intelligence come into power. The great protector of the arts is as rare as the great artist, or even more so.” (Selected Prose 130) Pound saw fascism, particularly in its Italian manifestation, as the culmination of historical processes designed to bring about an orderly society that would enable art and culture to prosper and flourish.

As William Chace points out, Pound’s social and economic crusades did not issue

from any truly egalitarian sympathies for the common lot of mankind. Rather, they issued from a belief that if only the correct ministrations were applied, all would be well and society could be left in peace forevermore, the better for art to prosper, the better for unruly men to be taught the pleasures of art. (Chace 35–36)

In the conclusion of *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* (1935)—a book that according to the copyright page was rejected by 40 publishers—Pound writes

The fascist revolution was for the preservation of certain liberties and FOR the maintenance of a certain level of culture, certain standards of living, it was NOT a refusal to come down to a level of riches or poverty, but a refusal to surrender certain immaterial prerogatives, a refusal to surrender a great slice of the cultural heritage. (*Jefferson and/or Mussolini* 126)

**Lover of ORDER**

In the final line of that book, Pound asserts his “belief that the Duce will not stand with despots and the lovers of power but with the lovers of ORDER.” That last word he capitalizes and sets in the middle of the page, then translates it into Greek. This emphasis on order, harmony, and the formal relationship of one thing to another permeates almost all of Pound’s written work and is surely one of the primary links between his aesthetic and political ideals. In the famous Confucian *Canto XIII* he specifies the idea rather exactly:
If a man have not order within him
He cannot spread order about him;
And if a man have not order within him
His family will not act with due order;
And if the prince have not order within him
He cannot put order in his dominions
And Kung gave the words “order"
and “brotherly deference”
And said nothing of the “life after death.”

Throughout the _Cantos_ there are references to historical figures that Pound saw as purveyors of order against the forces seeking to destroy that order. His sense of history was Emersonian: history is shaped by representative men, great leaders, who exert their will against the disintegrative processes that fracture societies, nations, and civilizations. In America’s history, Pound viewed Jefferson and John Adams in this way, and throughout the Adams _Cantos_ (62–71) there are examples of the manner in which Jefferson and Adams turned the chaos of war and revolution into the order and progress of an emerging civilization.

But more important for our purposes here, he viewed Mussolini in this same manner. “The heritage of Jefferson, Quincy Adams, old John Adams, Jackson, Van Buren, is HERE, NOW in the Italian Peninsula at the beginning of fascist second decennio, not in Massachusetts or Delaware.” (Jeff/Muss 12) And, in one of the most striking sentences of that strange book: “The fascist revolution is infinitely more INTERESTING than the Russian revolution because it is not a revolution according to preconceived type.” (Jeff/Muss 24) As Chace notes, Pound believed that a preconceived revolution

is one more bad result of abstract ideas, ideas that have no connection with specific needs and conditions—with real things like soil, light, and individual human desires—but only with a set of disembodied values. (Chace 63)

Pound had the characteristic modernist aversion to abstraction; he called it “the disease of the last century and a half.” Somehow he regarded the fascist potential to cope with the exigencies of national life in specific terms as greater than that of any other form of government, and perhaps the clichéd example of Mussolini getting the trains in Italy to run on time is the sort of thing he had in mind. It is clear that Pound felt Mussolini’s Italy was attempting to bring a sense of balance, order, and historical continuity to Italian society through the application of intelligence to social problems and priorities. That history has shown this to be an extremely naive view of the nature and character of fascism is equally clear, but then
Pound did not have—at the time he expressed these pro-fascist sentiments—the luxurious view of historical perspective.

When the fascist bubble burst and Pound found himself in the Detention Training Center at Pisa where he began to develop some historical perspective, the nature and character of his poetry change. Nowhere in the Cantos is the relationship between poetry and politics more cogent than in these Pisan poems, which chronicle the daily life of an artist bereft of political power or influence, alone in the tiger cage. More than anywhere else in the poem we see Pound's personality "breaking through" the guises that carry the narrative of much of the earlier Cantos. Instead of Odysseus, Malatesta, Adams, and the Chinese Emperors, we get the poignancy of old Ez alone here, talking to cats and crickets. The Pisan Cantos show a man trying to salvage a semblance of order, continuity, and tradition in a state of affairs conducive to none of these things. Like John Donne's Devotions on Emergent Occasions, they are the meditations of a great poet who believes he is near the end of his life, trying to discover what he loves most and to discover what remains when the remnants of human political and cultural life are taken from him.

From the first image in the Pisan sequence ("The enormous tragedy of the dream in the peasant's/bent shoulders") which depicts a spiritless humanity, burdened by hardships and bereft of ideals, Pound views the so-called progress of civilization in the 20th century as a catastrophic dissipation of constructive human energy. He himself becomes an emblem of that dissipation, "a man on whom the sun has gone down" repeating again and again the haunting words of Beardsley, "beauty is difficult," clearly an understatement in the context of the DTC.

Consider in this connection Canto 81, the climax of the Pisan poems, which contains the famous "What thou lovest well remains" passage that served as the name of this conference and that is surely one of the most memorable passages in all of 20th century poetry. So eloquent is the language here and so fully expressed is its revelation that it is easy to forget that the poem is not complete in and of itself but is rather the culmination of a long meditation on politics and poetry. Linking the two in this canto, Pound, a poet and political prisoner, alludes to Lovelace's famous lyric, "To Althea from Prison," which begins

When love with unconfined wings
Hovers within my gates
And my divine Althea brings
To whisper at the Grates

Here in Pisa, Pound finds "at my grates no Althea." But the mention of the Lovelace poem reminds him of the tradition of English lyric poetry to which he is heir, and he creates a musical libretto, evoking the spirit of
English musicians, composers, and poets in a lovely lyrical interlude. Plucking from the air "a live tradition," he feels a sudden illumination: "there came a new subtlety of eyes into my tent." This new vision is expressed in the inspired "What thou lovest well" passage that follows. Compared to the translucent and transcendent oneness achieved here, all divisive and destructive human efforts seem petty, trivial, and vain.

I offer here no defense for Pound's political views, which strike me as misdirected and certainly naive about the nature of fascism. I will defend at great length, however, his poetry—and the way to do that, as William Hazlitt said of Milton's verse, "is to take down the book and read it." Let me end this essay with these lines from *Canto 81*:

What thou lovest well remains,  
the rest is dross  
What thou lov'est well shall not be reft from thee  
What thou lov'est well is thy true heritage  
Whose world, or mine or theirs  
or is it of none?  
First came the seen, then thus the palpable  
Elysium, though it were the halls of hell  
What thou lovest well is thy true heritage  
What thou lov'est well shall not be reft from thee

The ant's a centaur in his dragon world.  
Pull down thy vanity, it is not man  
Made courage, or made order, or made grace,  
Pull down thy vanity, I say pull down.  
Learn of the green world what can be thy place  
In scaled invention or true artistry,  
Pull down thy vanity,  
Paquin pull down!  
The green casque has outdone your elegance.

**Works Cited**


Ezra Pound and the Jews

James E. B. Breslin

Don't start a pogrom. That is, not an old style killing of small Jews. That system is no good whatsoever. Of course if some man had a stroke of genius and could start pogrom UP AT THE top, there might be something to say for it.

But on the whole legal measures are preferable. The sixty Kikes who started this war might be sent to St. Helena as a measure of world prophylaxis.

Ezra Pound, Rome Radio, April 30, 1942

Ezra Pound's anti-Semitism was reprehensible. Almost as reprehensible have been the efforts of his friends and critics, who have dealt with his anti-Semitism by denying it, by ignoring it, or (most often) by dismissing it as a minor, aberrant offshoot of Pound's otherwise admirable thinking. This last position—a little like treating a malignant tumor by pretending it doesn't exist—is wrong on two counts. In the first place, Pound's anti-Semitism, far from being an unimportant tangent, actually provides us with one way to the root of his thought. Second, his anti-Semitism is no mere system of ideas or ideology; in Ezra Pound, anti-Semitism became a passion. True, among the modernist writers, Ezra Pound was by no means the only anti-Semite: we may recall the contemptible, weak Robert Cohen of Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises, the "ravenous" Meyer Wolfsheim of Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, the bestial Jewish landlord of Eliot's "Gerontion," the pushy Jewish husband of Williams' "A Face of Stone."

But what distinguishes Pound from his literary contemporaries is the fury of his racial hatred. My aim here is to locate the social and psychological origins of Pound's venom; and my argument is that Pound's anti-Semitism is one form of his phallocentrism.

In a poem called "The Garden" Pound contrasts the passivity, emptiness, and "emotional anemia" of an upper-class Englishwoman ("In her is
the end of breeding,” he says, both in the sense of reproduction and of cultivation) with “the filthy, sturdy, unkillable infants of the very poor,” who, he gloomily forecasts, “shall inherit the earth.” Pound’s picture of London—split between an effete culture and a graceless physical energy—derives from his family’s class position during his formative years back in America. “From the living members of my own family,” Pound recalled, “I know of types of phases of civilization that have not only passed from one belt of land, but are even gone entirely.” Pound traced his family back, on both sides, to 17th-century New England. At least some of the time Pound viewed this history as one of decline; in his April 30, 1942, radio broadcast, for instance, he laments the corruption of colonial architecture, wood-carving, furniture-making, and silversmith technique. Pound heroized his paternal grandfather, Thaddeus Coleman Pound, a wealthy lumber merchant, Congressman, and proponent of money reform; but Pound’s own family fell far short of the grandfather’s money, status, and achievements.

His father, Homer Pound, was an affable and inconsequential civil servant, the assistant assayer at the Philadelphia Mint; and his mother, Isabel Pound, was a proud, “formal” woman whose genteel pretensions exceeded her economic station. In Wyncote, just outside Philadelphia, the family’s life was comfortably bourgeois; but as Pound’s biographer, Noel Stock, points out, “there was no money to spare and Ezra was sometimes conscious of the fact that some of his friends and acquaintances were better off than he was.” Pound was conscious, in short, that his family’s status was one of downwardly mobile gentility.

In Patria Mia, Pound divided Americans into the “static and migratory”; “the former was marooned and left inert”—like the members of his immediate family—while “the latter pushed on to new forests, to mines, to grazing land”—like his grandfather. But from the mid-19th to the early 20th century the migratory type had degenerated. Before, the migrant was “a man of dreams, in a time when dreams paid, a man of adventure, careless”; now, he is “a close person, acquisitive, rapacious, tenacious”; his ideal “is the nickle-plated cash register.” Pound found the acquisitive, upwardly mobile migrant among (1) the plutocrats, some of whom were building “their medieval castles, renaissance palaces and Elizabethan manor houses” near his home in Wyncote, and (2) the numerous immigrants, many of them Eastern European Jews, coming to America in the 1890s and 1900s. Later, Pound was to collapse these two quite different classes into each other through his myth of the Jewish banker. In Patria Mia, however, he stressed the split between an inert gentility (associated with old Anglo-Saxon families) and the “animal vigour” of the new alien population (associated with Jews).
Displaced

Pound had been displaced. In an era when dreams no longer paid, "they"—not the grandson of Thaddeus Coleman Pound—"shall inherit the earth." Pound's anti-Semitism has often been linked to the anti-Semitism of American populism, but his hatred of Jews can be more accurately related to that of Henry Adams, Henry James, and T. S. Eliot. In *The American Scene*, James, for instance, speaks of the feeling of "dispossession" before what he called "the Hebrew conquest of New York." All these writers articulated the fear and anger felt by "old," once-powerful, Anglo-Saxon families toward the new immigrant population, and in their writing—not just Pound's—the Jew becomes a powerful and contradictory symbol. On the one hand, Jews symbolize an archaic strangeness; their customs, language, devotions, daily habits mark them as different, foreign, crude, even bestial; and their difference is thus imagined as a kind of uncanny survival of ancient, even primitive forces. From this point of view, the trouble with Jews is that they can never, will never, assimilate. As Pound says in *Patria Mia*, the Anglo-Saxon stock has been "submerged and well nigh lost in the pool of the races which have followed them"; "the Jew alone can retain his detestable qualities." Jews become a symbol of primitive strangeness. Yet, at the same time, they also become a symbol of a dangerous modernity. For the most part, European Jews were not permitted to own land, so they were urban; being oppressed, they were often politically left. Recently released from severe political and economic constraints, many American Jews wished to enjoy America's political freedoms and material pleasures. From the embattled standpoint of the declining WASP elite, the Jew became a symbol of the modern social forces that were usurping the elite's privileged position.

Pound, a modernist author who was disenchanted with the process of social modernization in America, felt forced into exile—rootless, cosmopolitan, solitary. In Europe, particularly in the aftermath of the first World War, Pound developed what he called a "new synthesis," an ambitiously global account of world history, politics, economics, religion, literature. In the 1930s and 1940s, as these imperial theories grew more vast, they had fewer and fewer ties to anything resembling evidence. The theories began to turn into diatribes. They grew more vehement, more rigid, more obsessive—the work of a grandiose and cruel crank. Pound had turned into a literary rebel who revered a few chosen authorities, an advocate of words clearly aligned with things who spoke in fuzzy abstractions and racist epithets.

In spite of the expansive character of Pound's theories, they are actually based on a kind of socio-political Manicheanism. Jews are mythologized as the demonic forces who have usurped Yankee privilege and have
displaced Pound; salvationist hopes are attached to authoritarian leaders—figures of strong personal will modeled on Pound’s idealization of his pioneer-capitalist grandfather. Pound’s conception of the artist was, moreover, less an avant-garde notion than another derivative of his romance of the old-style capitalist. “A man of adventure, careless,” the modern artist was mobile, energetic, migratory—never hoarding his achievements but continually re-investing his energies, continually “making it new.” But the modernist artist had been displaced by the modern audience—by persons who are “close,” “acquisitive, rapacious, tenacious.”

Pound’s adventurer-artist could, however, transform his marginal position into a central one. By infusing poetry with a manly energy, the writer would link the split opposites of inert culture and animal vigor and thus effect a “new synthesis.” Modernity would take shape, culture would get life: mind and senses, word and thing, would blend in clean, forceful utterance. The trouble was that the only model that Pound could imagine to accomplish this unity was one of phallic mastery. In the “Postscript” to his translation of Gourmont’s The Natural History of Love, Pound formulates a biological foundation for his theory of the poetic imagination. The brain, he asserts, is a “great clot of genital fluid held in suspense or reserve”; elsewhere, “mind is an up-spurt of sperm,”—a fact which explains, he says, “the enormous content of the brain as a maker or presenter of images.”

By physicalizing thought, Pound tries to integrate mind and senses; but what he accomplishes is not an integration but a repression, because the relation between his opposites—male and female, mind and matter—is always imagined as an antagonistic and violent one. “The power of the spermatozoid,” he declares, “is precisely the power of exteriorizing a form” (p. 169); “man” is “really the phallus or spermatozoid charging, head-on, the female chaos” (p. 170); “the sperm” is “the form-creator, the substance which compels the ovule to evolve in a given pattern.” (p. 173) At one point he offers an autobiographical aside that makes the analogy with artistic creation explicit: “even oneself has felt it, driving any new idea into the great passive vulva of London, a sensation analogous to the male feeling in copulation.” (p. 170)

Sexuality Mentalized

Beginning by physicalizing thought, Pound ends up by mentalizing sexuality, by making it an expression of will rather than eros. “Woman,” he pronounces “the conservator, the inheritor of past gestures (p. 179),” concerned with “utility” and “extreme economy” (p. 171); but the female is also unformed matter (“chaos”), passive physicality. In this way Pound feminizes both sides of his culture-physicality opposition, making the
"new synthesis" strictly a project of tough, iconoclastic, venturesome, and lordly males.

This dominance of the phallic-brain provides the Poundian model of governance—of the human body as well as the body politic. In the "Postscript" to The Natural History of Love, Pound specifies "three channels" for discharge of energy: "digestive excretion," "incarnation" (i.e., human reproduction), or "freedom in the imagination" (pp. 178-79) and his hierarchical structuring of this triad is made clear in his equation of them with "hell" (the digestive tract), "purgatory" (human reproduction), and "heaven" (the imagination). The phallic brain, Pound says, is "lord" of the body (p. 175); creativity involves not an integration but a masterful transcendence of the "lower" orders. But this synthesis replicates the split it was intended to heal and points toward the authoritarian order of the fascist state.

Pound's phallocentrism shapes his anti-Semitism. His vituperations against the Jews have very specific and characteristic themes. We hear no tales of ritualistic murders of the sort we might get from a Czarist officer; nor do we get stories of Jewish voluptuousness, a staple of propaganda of the Third Reich. Pound seldom, if ever, mentions Jewish women; he focuses on Jewish men, and one theme that does preoccupy him is circumcision. "Jews having been circumcised for centuries / it must have had some effect on the character," Pound wrote to William Carlos Williams, and he confided to Charles Olson that "there was a Jew in London ... a doctor ... and I used to ask him what is the effect of circumcision. That's the question that gets them sore ... That sends them right up the pole. Try it, don't take my word, try it ... It must do some-thing, after all these years and years, where the most sensitive nerves in the body are, rubbing them off, over and over again." Pound's dwelling on circumcision suggests that he sees Jewish males as castrated and weak. In Pound's bizarre account of the rubbing of the circumcised penis against a pair of pants, he imagines a condition that makes Jewish men simultaneously very sensitive and very insensitive. In Canto 35 Pound speaks contemptuously of "the warmth of affections, / the intramural, the almost intravaginal warmth of / hebrew affections, in the family." Absorbed back into a maternal warmth, Jewish males have "sensitivity / without direction." Incapacitated by this domestic softness, these men do not possess the personal force, the masculine hardness—the direction—of the Poundian heroic adventurer.

The Jew lacks manhood; the Jew also lacks mind. Of course, from Pound's perspective, lack one, lack both. In either case, Jewish males begin with absence—an angry, retributive lack; Pound describes it in Canto 52 as "big jews' vendetta on goyim." In his imagination, Hebrew tenderness turns into Hebrew vengefulness—a revolt of the weak. That is why Pound, in one of the Rome radio broadcasts, pronounced that "The
Jew is atavistic” —a beast. 12 Jewish desire is instinctual and boundless, and Pound warned grimly against “Semitic immoderation” and “Semitic instability,” speaking of the “Semite’s wobble from one excess to another.” 13

Sensitivity without direction wobbles between the excesses of abstraction and materialism, between law and money—the excesses of the weak. “All the Jew part of the Bible is black evil,” Pound declared. He traced Christian asceticism back to Old Testament prohibitions; 14 legal codes, another Jewish invention, were wrathful efforts, abstract and rigid, aimed at thwarting the venturesomeness of the heroic few whose sexual/creative core put them as far above the law as they were from the domestic hearth. But if one Jewish response to lack was a desire to make others feel want by institutionalizing taboos, another was to fill the lack by means of gross materialism—with money. In Poundian economics, accumulating money constitutes a “Black Mass,” a “satanic transubstantiation” of nature’s abundance into dead paper. 15 “Usury”—a term that becomes interchangeable with “Jewishness” in Pound’s writings of the 1930s and 1940s—is an activity that is at once completely abstract and completely material. It is abstract in the sense that an ungrounded symbol is empty and abstract; it is material in the sense that human excrement is dead, formless matter. In the hell of the digestive tract, the Jewish usurer parodies the heavenly sublimations of Pound’s phallic artist.

“Money-lust”

The “money-lust” can never fill the lack that set it into motion in the first place and so becomes an insatiable desire. That is why, in Patria Mia, the modern entrepreneur is a “close person, acquisitive, rapacious, tenacious.” 16 In Pound’s racist mythology, the Jew symbolizes usurpation, bestiality, greed; he is a modern savage, a figure of instinctualized abstraction. An usurper, the Jew had displaced the benign, old-style adventurer typified by Pound’s grandfather; but the Jew, whom Pound begins by imagining as soft and weak, swells into an all-powerful world conspiracy. “The Jews,” says Pound, “have ruined every country they got hold of. The Jews have worked out a system, very neat system, for the ruin of the rest of mankind, one nation after another.” 17 To him Jewish bankers were responsible for both World Wars; by 1943 Jews controlled Moscow, London, Washington, and were working in concert; for there was an “understanding between various sets of international yids, doing business simultaneously from various busnisch addresses located in different world capitals.”

Although he knew that the Protocols of the Elders of Zion was a forgery, Pound insisted it was true anyway; after all, “the program contained in them has so crushingly gone into effect.” Particularly distressing to him
were what he saw as "their definite campaign against history altogether, their declared intention to blot out the classics, to blot out the record." The Jews were now conspiring to usurp history and literature—writing; they are the "protocolaires": "those who are against the true word." 16

But by this logic the "true word" resides in a forged document; it is Pound, not the Jew, who is trying to blot out, or to invent, the historical record. Freed from the constraints of paternal law or the maternal hearth, Pound was becoming a law—or a Word—unto himself; and he admired others—Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler—who acted on such premises. His anti-Semitism allowed him to play the verbal bully while portraying himself as the beleagured saviour of western civilization. The Old Testament was "black evil"; usury was a "Black Mass"; money was a stinking dung-hill; Jews were "filthy," "rot," a "stench"—as if they too were so much human waste. All this darkness was blotting out the hard clarity of language, the "Dantescan light," those luminous moments of radiant vision that Pound cherished. 17

Stern measures were required—such as the "world prophylaxis" he mentions in the quote with which I began this essay. It is not clear what, if anything, Pound knew of the holocaust. He did affirm "the essential fairness of Hitler's war aims," 18 and he told one correspondent that "with 6 million jews on the premises, the U.S. has 5 million 900 thousand walking advertisements for the Nazi regime." 19 He believed that the Italian anti-Semitic laws of 1938 were "the right thing," 20 And he expounded theories of eugenic control:

You [the English] can, but DID NOT take proper measures against syphilis, tuberculosis, malnutrition NOR breeding itself, where RACE is a component. You have encouraged the most fatal admixtures. . . . Instead of concentrating on breeding of thoroughbreds, you went in for neo-Malthus, and the dirtier portions of Freudianism. . . . And if Mussolini stands for social justice, for breaking the usurper's bondage, the Nazi revolution was based on the BREED. Based on sane breeding, and on that basis Germany rose from her sepulchre. 21

Distinguishing the 19th from the 20th century business man, Pound says that "the first man dealt with men," while "the latter deals with paper." 22 By paper he obviously meant money. But Ezra Pound did not deal with men the way that Thaddeus Coleman Pound had done. Ezra Pound was a poet; he dealt with paper. Both history and his vocation determined that he began his career lacking the power, money, and status of his grandfather. Subsequently Pound became an urban wanderer, a cosmopolitan who repudiated national loyalties, a man who spent much
of his time thinking about money, a man angry with those he believed had disinherited him, a man more psychologically fixated than mobile, and more abstract than discriminating, and a man filthy in his racial vituperations. The difference between Pound and his stereotype of the Jew was always, one might say, paper-thin, which was one reason he became so passionate in asserting that difference. For the Jew symbolized an image of himself that Pound wanted to put outside of himself; but the more frantically he struggled to dissociate himself from this “double,” the more he collapsed back into it. In one of the Rome radio broadcasts in which he is reviling Jewish bankers, Pound suddenly breaks off and says: “The whole subject is so infernally boring. It is so sickening that we would rather pass over it. God knows, I don’t want to go into it”; and he concludes the broadcast:

And the worst of it is that, if you spend your time looking into it, it will prevent you from filling your mind with the light of the classics, and may tend to distract you from inheriting our cultural heritage. 23

In this brief, poignant moment, Pound has glimpsed the truth that by flailing against the darkness he is slowly sinking into it. But Pound can’t stop, can’t control himself. He later described his anti-Semitism as a “suburban prejudice,” 24 and he once called the bourgeoisie “the stomach and gross intestines of the body politic and social.” 25 His own bourgeoisie prejudice made him the one who ended up in the hell of the digestive tract, locked in a black fury, wallowing in filth.

Notes

1 Ezra Pound, Patria Mia (Chicago, 1950), p. 34.
4 The connection between Pound’s anti-Semitism and populism was first made by Chace, The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, pp. 19–20.
6 *Patria Mia*, p. 34; the sentence about the “detestable qualities” of the Jew was deleted from the book version and is quoted from Chace, p. 7.
9 Ezra Pound to William Carlos Williams, Feb. 8, 1936, Poetry Collection, State University of New York at Buffalo.
17 *Selected Letters*, p. 345.
22 *Patria Mia*, p. 35.
24 Quoted in Torrey, p. 281.
IT is a mistake, when we recall Ezra Pound's years of service to the fascist cause, to describe him merely as "pro-fascist," or as a "fascist sympathizer." Such labels suggest a passive political role. Rather, the poet's support for Mussolini, Hitler, and their regimes was based on several years of intense preoccupation with economic and political questions, which he expressed in a voluminous outpouring of articles, pamphlets, books, letters, and speeches. Far more accurately descriptive, then, is the term approvingly applied to him by the Fascist Ministry of Popular Culture at the time of his Rome propaganda broadcasts: collaborator.

Understanding il miglior fabbro's deep commitment to fascism—what it meant to him and why he believed in it—is obviously essential to an understanding of his life and work. Certainly, at the very least, the Cantos are not fully comprehensible without considerable knowledge on our part of their many references to ideas, events, and personalities of the fascist era. Yet there are difficulties in the path of reaching such an understanding. Some have to do with Pound himself, and others have to do with the larger question of attempting to understand the appeal that fascism exercised.

In the first instance, there is the obvious fact that Pound's incarceration in St. Elizabeths, following the declaration that he was not mentally competent to stand trial on charges of treason to the United States, stems exclusively from the efforts he made on behalf of fascism. His political writing and the broadcasts are characterized above all by their stridency and vituperative tone, with the latter particularly expressing racism of the basest and ugliest kind, and even on the subject he professed to know the most about—economics—are often so close to being incomprehensible that we can be tempted to dismiss altogether his attachment to the fascist cause as, in the end, simply the inexplicable aberration of a visionary artist. We could thereby be urged to distinguish sharply between Pound the man and Pound the poet, consigning his fascism to the former
category and taking it into account as regards the latter only when the references to it in the *Cantos* require explanation.

In a broader sense, the question of the nature of fascism itself presents barriers, in two ways, to an understanding of why Pound or anyone else was drawn to it. First, since fascism boasted that, unlike Marxism or liberal democracy, it did not proceed from a theory or a set of premises demonstrable through reason, it can be dismissed, in the words of Benedetto Croce, in the “Manifesto of the Anti-Fascist Intellectuals” of 1925, as an “incoherent and bizarre mishmash.” Such an ideology would then not repay any systematic effort to study its content. Second, the very attempt to examine that content has seemed to many equivalent to dignifying fascist doctrine by placing it at a level considered worthy of scholarly examination. Such investigators as the Italian historian Renzo De Felice, author of a massive modern biography of Mussolini, and the American political scientist A. James Gregor, who has produced several studies of the ideology of fascism, for example, have been accused of harboring covert sympathies for their subjects: why else would they proceed? These are formidable barriers indeed to an exploration of the intellectual underpinnings of fascism, and it is therefore perhaps not surprising that only one of the three conferences held in the United States last year to mark Pound’s centenary devoted any significant amount of time to consideration of his politics.

**Integrated Politics**

Given the relentless energy and great amount of time he dedicated to it, *il miglior fabbro*’s political activity was certainly not in any sense the casual preoccupation of an artist momentarily distracted from his central pursuits, and neither was it separated from his wider conception of art and life. His espousal of fascism is fully consistent with his aesthetic and economic views and perhaps is an inevitable outcome of them.

Historically, the immediate origins of fascism lay in bitter disillusionment with the results of the First World War and in rejection of the leaders and systems that were believed to have produced it. It has therefore often been remarked that both Italian and the later German fascism seemingly defined themselves more by what they were against—i.e., the Peace of Versailles, communism, internationalism, capitalism, egalitarianism, liberal democracy, and rationalism—than by any precise alternative which their ideologues offered to the existing order. But others who helped constitute the nucleus of Mussolini’s original followers were disillusioned not only by the catastrophe of the war but also by what they saw as far wider and deeper social trends in whose roots lay the causes of the loss of purpose and growing dehumanization that they believed characterized modern society. Many of these “Fascists of the First Hour”
who joined Mussolini in forming the movement in Milan in the spring of 1919 therefore expressed a deep longing for the pre-modern world. A major source of their inspiration was the poet, playwright, aesthete, nationalist, and military adventurer Gabriele D'Annunzio, who had cultivated in many of his works a nostalgic, romantic vision of the medieval order as a world untainted by rampant economic individualism and competition, one in which life was not artificially divided into separate spheres of existence and in which an almost mystical spirit of unity pervaded the whole. In such a realm, men and women lived and died by the force of their passions and ideals, not according to the crass calculation of self-interest. The major currents then prevailing in Italian intellectual life denied that the reconstruction of such a world was possible. Marxists argued that the laws of historical development operate only to propel human beings toward the culminating stages of socialism and communism; perhaps equally importantly, they maintained that the class conflict through which, in Marx's view, that progressive historical development is realized was fully present in the medieval world. The idealist Croce, Italy's leading philosophical defender of parliamentary democracy, revealed in History as the Story of Liberty his Hegelian-inspired belief that history ordained the triumph of the modern liberal state. Both positions agreed that any revival of an earlier epoch was prohibited by the progressive unfolding of the laws of historical development. Against these denials, D'Annunzio and other exalted the power of the will to transform and recreate reality.

Pound did not find D'Annunzio's voluptuous and perfumed poetry and dramas appealing, but he was powerfully attracted by the idea of restoring a pre-Renaissance world. Il miglior fabbro's lament in Patria Mia over what he saw as America's failure to guide its abundant energy toward a higher level of cultural development and his capturing so perfectly the essence of the times in Hugh Selwyn Mauberley imply by themselves no particular political views or action. For him, it was the search for the underlying causes of the Great War that led him to what became the foundation of his political views, the economic theories of Silvio Gesell, Alfred Orage, and, above all, Major C. H. Douglas and the Social Credit movement. Douglas had one, and almost certainly only one, quality in common with the great economists, but it is a compelling one: his system embraced a general conception of life and society.

Real Credit Explained

In its briefest terms, Douglas's notion was that what he called Real Credit arose from the total productive capacity of the people of a nation, but that the invention of Financial Credit, the product of those who controlled money, led to the latter's dominance over Real Credit. The result
of this domination was to place the most important decisions in a society in the hands of a fraction of the population, who decided according to criteria independent of the significance to civilization of the goods and services produced. The control of money by bankers and financiers thus debased the value of the arts and artists by making their worth depend solely on price. D'Annunzio had rebelled against such a condition, proclaiming that society was not justified in expecting artists to meet such conventional economic obligations as paying their debts. Acceptance of prevailing economic doctrines relegated artists to the margins of society, but their true vocation lay in the center—as it had in D'Annunzio's view of the Middle Ages—where they served as the voices and guides of civilization. For Pound, "usura" referred not simply to the interest charged on the lending of money but became his term for expressing the deepest flaws of modern society, as he does in *Canto LXV*:

no picture is made to endure not to live with
but it is made to sell and sell quickly
with usura, sin against nature,
is thy bread ever more of stale rags
is thy bread dry as paper,
with no mountain wheat, no strong flour
with usura the line grows thick
with usura is no clear demarcation
and no man can find site for his dwelling.
Stone cutter is kept from his stone
weaver is kept from his loom
WITH USURA

The origins of Pound's attraction to fascism lay therefore in his discovery of what he believed to be the fundamental cause of the evils of the modern world—not merely the evils of the war but the evil of the world's indifference to art and artists, and its failure to form a unified ideal that would direct the energies of all toward the highest purposes. To make the world whole again, to liberate the honest producers of goods and services from their dependence on bankers and financiers, to restore to things produced their true worth, to place the highest products of a people at the apex of the social structure—these projects would require a new kind of regime, one that was willing to break radically with the spent existing order to exercise the fullness of power and coercion essential to undertake such fundamental change. Bolshevism was a ready alternative for others with similar ideals, but its emphasis on class conflict rather than on the unity of a nation and its denial of a natural hierarchy made it an unsuitable vehicle for the realization of Pound's aims. And certainly the chief architect of modern poetry could not accept Bolshevism's lack of
interest in the psyche or its denial of free will.

Since fascism is usually categorized as a variant of the European right wing, it can be forgotten that Mussolini presented his nascent movement as “revolutionary” from the beginning. Moreover, adopting the vocabulary of the Socialist Party which had expelled him for his support of Italian entry into World War I (a vocabulary which he would never entirely desert), he referred to that revolution as “proletarian.” Throughout his career, Mussolini in fact continued to use terms and even programs of the left and did not strive to present fascism as an extension of the traditional right, whose leaders he scorned for their inertia, ties to the old regime, and powerlessness to affect the course of events.

The Italian fascist movement, then, embraced simultaneously a rejection of the forces that had led to the Great War and that proved unable to manage postwar Italy’s problems, a nostalgic desire for the reconstruction of a pre-modern past, and a presentation of itself as the only political force that was truly of the 20th century. On this final point, as Hannah Arendt has noted, Mussolini was indeed correct: totalitarianism became not only this century’s new creation but also the first new political form since the creation of the nation-state. What Pound desired from fascism, then, was to use the power of the modern totalitarian regime, itself the fruit of modernity, to recreate a semblance of a pre-modern (i.e., pre-usura) era.

It was not until ten years after the March on Rome that Mussolini agreed to produce a definitive statement of the doctrine of fascism for the *Enciclopedia Italiana*. There he asserted that fascism was above all a “spiritual” concept, opposed to the “flaccid materialistic positivism of the nineteenth century,” and declared:

> In the Fascist conception of history, man is man only by virtue of the spiritual process to which he contributes as a member of the family, the social group, the nation, and in function of history to which all nations bring their contribution. . . . The Fascist State . . . sums up all the manifestations of the moral and intellectual life of man. It is no mere mechanical device for defining the sphere within which the individual may duly exercise his supposed rights. The Fascist State is an inwardly accepted standard and rule of conduct, a discipline of the whole person; it permeates the will no less than the intellect. It stands for a principle which becomes the central motive of man as a member of civilized society, sinking deep down into his personality; it dwells in the heart of the man of action and of the thinker, of the artist and of the man of science: soul of the soul.
The absence of a specific program, which led Mussolini’s early socialist, liberal, and Catholic opponents radically to underestimate the fascist appeal, thus became a virtue in the eyes of his followers in that they boasted of their freedom from adherence to dogma or obedience to the rituals of a dead past. As Luigi Pirandello, also an admirer of the Duce, explained it: “Fascism has been the refusal of every preconceived doctrine, the will of adaptation to reality, the will to modify an action according to the modifications of reality.” This praise coincided exactly with Pound’s, when he said that:

The academic ass exists in a vacuum with a congeries of dead fixed ideas, or with a congeries of fixed ideas which may be “good” and not quite dead, or rather which MIGHT be useful were they brought to focus on something . . . Let us deny that real intelligence exists until it comes into action.7

Mussolini’s “Secret”

Interestingly, Pound was never primarily concerned with whether Mussolini actually adopted all the ideas of the Social Credit movement nor with the fact that the Duce’s model of past greatness was not the Middle Ages but was what he imagined the Roman Empire to be (though certainly the poet noticed): what mattered most was that the ground was prepared, that there was a leader in place who could grasp the necessity of acting in new and untried ways, that a start had been made. Mussolini’s “secret” lay in his “capacity to pick out the element of immediate and major importance in any tangle,” which would lead him eventually, Pound thought, to correct action. “Given the possibilities of intelligence against prejudice in the year XI of the fascist era,” he wrote in 1933, “what other government has got any further, or shows any corresponding interest in or care for the workers?” Fascist policies, thought Pound, were not aimed at benefiting bankers and financiers but improved the lot of common people:

Mussolini has persuaded the Italians to grow better wheat, and to produce Italian colonial bananas. This may explain the “Dio ti benedica (God bless you)” scrawled on a shed where some swamps were.

Even after the Duce had been in power for 11 years and had long since destroyed any vestiges of political opposition, Pound did not really fault him for lack of attention to usura as the root problem. In fact, Mussolini had little interest in economics, practically never mentioned it in the different editions of his autobiography or in interviews, and omitted
virtually any reference to it in the Enciclopedia Italiana article of 1932, which was meant to be the definitive statement on the meaning of fascism. Even the vaunted “Corporative State” of the regime’s propaganda received little institutional recognition until 1938, when the acquiescent Chamber of Deputies was renamed the “Chamber of Fasces and Corporations.” On the only occasion when Pound met Mussolini, in 1933, and presented him with a statement of his economic ideas, the Duce did not respond but contented himself with expressing admiration for Pound’s poetry. Mussolini’s banal observation on it seemed to Pound a perfect illustration of his ability to see directly into the heart of what was presented to him, and *il miglior fabbro* expressed his delight with the audience:

‘MA QVESTO’
said the Boss, ‘è’ divertente.’
catching the point before the aesthetes had got there.  

The poet’s manuscript for what became his best-known political work, *Jefferson And/Or Mussolini*, was rejected by 40 publishers before it was finally issued in 1935. This confirmation of Pound’s dogged devotion to the Duce advances the preposterous thesis that Mussolini and Jefferson have far more in common than they have differences. Although the book’s argument has not been treated at all seriously outside fascist circles, Pound’s vehement recounting of what he understands the similarities to be casts considerable light on why he never renounced Mussolini or his regime.

Neither leader, according to Pound, was “bamboozled by money.” Thus Jefferson’s rejection of Hamilton’s contention that America was essentially a commercial nation became here equated with Mussolini’s rejection of pre-fascist Italian politics as centering on petty squabbles over the distribution of material benefits and advantages. Similarly, Jefferson’s agrarianism was found to resemble Mussolini’s powerful political base among the farm and village population, which was alienated from and suspicious of—as was the Duce—the culture of the cities, with their commercialism on the one hand and their receptivity to liberal and Marxist movements on the other. In addition, because the modern Italian state was itself the creation of the 19th century commercial class of the Northern cities, great numbers of peasants and Southerners distrusted and opposed that state and its attendant values from the beginning, believing that it was fashioned to benefit its creators and their descendants, to the exclusion of the rest of the nation. Partly for this reason, Mussolini, the son of a blacksmith and the youngest prime minister in Italian history, knew how to capitalize on the long-standing resentment of the old governing classes and became, ironically, as the
creator of a dictatorship, personally more popular for a time than his parliamentary predecessors had been. But most importantly, Pound found the ex-journalist Mussolini to be like Jefferson in their multiplicity of interests, what was said to be their capacity to grasp the needs of the nation as a whole, their flexibility, and their sense of what is truly important, which the poet calls their Confucian sense of "root and branch."

Ultimately, however, Pound's fascism rested on his conviction that, unlike liberal democracy or Marxism, it sought to preserve the "cultural heritage" that Douglas had made the "fountain of value" in his economics. In a parody of Roosevelt's First Inaugural, the poet wrote that, "I assert my own firm belief that the Duce will stand not with despots and the lovers of power but with the lovers of ORDER." Curiously, Pound did not at this point, as might be expected, make much of any resemblance he saw between this praise of Mussolini as the restorer of a legitimate hierarchy and Jefferson's belief in a natural aristocracy. Fascism's mission necessitated the permanent crushing of dissent, and Pound vigorously defended Mussolini's suppression of a free press, ridiculing those who attacked fascism as the destroyer of Italian freedom: "A great deal of yawp about free press proves on examination to be a mere howl for irresponsibility." To this he added, tellingly: "I don't care a damn about a free Press if it means that every time I have anything to say that appears to me to be of the least interest or 'of exceptional interest' some nincompoop keeps me from publishing it."

Italy's Anti-Semitic Laws

Mussolini's introduction to Italy, at Hitler's behest, in 1938 of the anti-Semitic laws created unease among his followers as they confronted the question of how to defend the regime's official pronouncements that the concept of race was biological and that Italians were Aryan. But the issuance of such documents as the "Manifesto of the Racist Scientists" in that year only intensified Pound's fervid dedication. Mussolini's statements that the "Jewish problem" was the "burning question of the moment" and that "world Jewry for the last sixteen years had been an irreconcilable enemy of Fascism" corresponded exactly with the poet's deepest sentiments. Although earlier Mussolini had never mentioned anti-Semitism as a key element in the policy of the regime, his new-found advocacy greatly strengthened Pound's respect for what he saw as renewed confirmation of the Duce's perspicacity. Similarly, Hitler, whom Pound at first had seen as a merely "hysterical" imitator of his hero, rose in his estimation as Nazi persecution of the Jews increased.

Pound's English-language propaganda broadcasts over the Rome radio from early 1942 until shortly before Mussolini's fall from power in July, 1943, made at the poet's repeated urging, were primarily on Pound's
chosen theme of why the war fought by Hitler and Mussolini was a defensive struggle in which fascism was being attacked by powers directed by international bankers and financiers, almost all of whom were Jewish. Jews were, in this view, thus responsible not only for the principal evils of modern society but had brought on the greatest war in history. Again and again in the broadcasts, Pound assaults Jews in the vilest of language, condemning “kikery” while maintaining that “my job, as I see it, is to save what’s left of America and to help keep up some sort of civilization somewhere or other.” “And every sane act you commit,” he said of the Americans and British in 1942, “is committed in homage to Mussolini and Hitler.” To the English, he said: “You let in the Jew and the Jew rotted your Empire, and you yourselves outjewed the Jew.” Of Americans (citizens of the “JEWnited States”), whose President he variously referred to as “Franklin Finkelstein Roosevelt” or “Franklin Delano Jewsevelt” he asked:

Just which of you are free from Jewish influence? Just which political and business groups are free from Jew influence, from Jew control? Who holds the mortgage, who is the dominating director? Just which Jew has . . . nominated which assemblyman indebted to whom? And which one is indebted to Jewry or dependent on credit which he cannot get without the connivance of Jewry?

During the Holocaust, Pound stated:

Don’t start a pogrom. That is, not an old-style killing of small Jews. That system is no good, whatever. Of course, if some man had a stroke of genius, and could start a pogrom up at the top. I repeat . . . if some man had a stroke of genius and could start a pogrom up at the top, there might be something to say for it.

And by the time of his last broadcasts in the spring of 1943, he had descended to new depths, stating simply, “The Jew is a savage.”

Mussolini’s removal from power by King Victor Emmanuel III and his replacement with a military government which made peace with the Allies in September, 1943, resulted in one of the most tragic chapters in modern Italian history. The nation remained divided in two, with the Northern half under German occupation, administered by Mussolini (who had been rescued from captivity in a daring raid by a Nazi squad) as nominal leader of the “Italian Social Republic,” headquarter at Salo’ on Lake Garda. In these days Pound began the odyssey that made him a legend to the postwar neo-fascists. Ever loyal to the Duce and uncritical of
his Nazi allies, the poet made a more than 600-mile trek from Rome on foot, eventually returning to his home in Rapallo. Here he resumed energetically his writing on behalf of fascism, producing suggestion after suggestion in newspapers and in correspondence with officials of the Italian puppet state. As defeat neared, his outpouring of hatred toward Jews reached a point of hysteria:

... Our Tigullian nucleus has disintegrated... ignorance abounds... Of all the cursed Protestant sects (Jewified ones), the Quakers are the least Jewified for they do not sing.

The poet’s lament for the fallen Mussolini opens the Pisan Cantos, expressed as “The enormous tragedy of the dream in the peasant’s/bent shoulders (Canto 74),” and in Canto 80 he echoes Mussolini’s theme of his last days that his followers proved unworthy of him:

all of them so far beneath him
half-baked and amateur
or mere scoundrels
To sell their country for half a million
hoping to cheat more out of the people

Of Hitler, Pound declared to a reporter in 1945: “Hitler was a Jeanne d’Arc, a saint. He was a martyr. Like many martyrs, he held extreme views...”

Other Artists

Virtually all the artists of any stature who had supported or allowed themselves to serve Mussolini’s regime were at this point either dead, had recanted, or appeared convincing in their protestations that they had been motivated by patriotism toward Italy and not by devotion to fascism. Pound alone among them remained unrepentant. This stance won him the enduring admiration and support (not to say idolization) of Mussolini’s political heirs in postwar Italy, the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement). A party that has been included only once, and fleetingly, in a parliamentary majority—and then its inclusion caused the collapse of the governing coalition and the fall of the cabinet—it has nevertheless often been able to capture as much as five or six per cent of the national vote. The MSI was originally led by those who had been with Mussolini at Salò and placed supreme value on the loyalty of those who did not desert the Duce when his fortunes were at their lowest but remained steadfast until the end. Already greatly admired by the MSI, the poet further endeared himself to their movement upon his
return to Italy from St. Elizabeths by standing on the dock in Genoa and raising his arm in the fascist salute of old. As late as 1961 he marched with them in their Rome parade.\textsuperscript{13}

In more recent years, the MSI has made some efforts to portray itself as a party of traditional Italian values rather than solely as the inheritor of fascism, but for its adherents Pound remains (along with Giovanni Gentile, a leading ideologue and Mussolini's longtime Minister of Education who was shot by the partisans in 1945) the figure whose name is most often chosen to ornament their bookstores and meeting halls. Toward the end of his life, the poet expressed regret over many of his actions and "mistakes," but these declarations were rarely specific and never even came close to amounting to a renunciation of fascism; therefore, his status as a hero within the neo-fascist movement remains secure.

The great controversy over the finding that Pound was unfit for mental reasons to stand trial in 1945 obscures the important fact that what he was writing and saying about politics at that point was essentially what he had been writing and saying a dozen years earlier. Although expressed with greater stridency during the time of the broadcasts, Pound's political views remained remarkably consistent over a long period of time.  

*Il miglior fabbro* was not deceived about the nature of fascism; indeed, he supported it precisely because he understood its essential character very well. Unlike the many intellectuals of the 1920s who saw the crushing of dissent in the Soviet Union as a temporary expedient that regrettably had to be accepted in the name of a higher good, Pound never rationalized the fascist creation of a totalitarian state. He saw clearly that Mussolini's suppression of civil liberties and the killing and imprisonment of his opponents were permanent and central characteristics of the regime. He remained undisturbed by censorship; fascist freedom of opinion, he said at the time of the broadcasts, means freedom for those "qualified to hold an opinion." And on at least one major theme, anti-Semitism, Pound clung early to the views that Mussolini later endorsed.

Pound loved what he saw as the vitality and energy of fascism—its rallies, parades, its organization and discipline, and its massive reconstruction and public works projects. But the poet was not at all deceived by "the Boss's" lack of a concrete program or his tendency to improvise policy. Pound perceived early and correctly that Mussolini was an opportunist; but, he added, "To cut the cackle, you can have an OPPORTUNIST who is RIGHT."	extsuperscript{14} Also, he saw early and clearly that Mussolini ruled Italy not because he believed he was exercising power delegated to him by the people or in the name of some transcendent ideal, but simply out of what Pound saw as "the general fascist conviction that he is more likely to be right than anyone else is." Finally, Pound's belief that fascism was restoring the arts and artists to their proper place in the social hierarchy...
was substantiated by the honor and position given to those who designed its spectacular architectural, theatrical, and cinematic vehicles. More than any other 20th century regime, fascism employed its loyal artists on a grand scale, extending them reward and recognition.

Pound was a fascist because the core values of the Mussolini and Hitler regimes coincided with his own. He has been given many appellations: il miglior fabbro, the Great Bass, the Last Rower. To these, a final one should be added: Fascist of the Last Hour.

Notes

5 Benito Mussolini, “Fascism,” in Delzell, op. cit., p. 93.
8 Canto 41.
9 This and the next four quotations are from Pound, op. cit., pp. 64, 128, 41, 43.
10 Mussolini, Speech in Trieste, Sept. 18, 1938, in Delzell, op. cit., p. 177.
11 This and the next seven quotations are from C. David Heymann, Ezra Pound: The Last Rower (New York: Seaver, 1976), p. 116, 119, 116, 120, 118, 121, 335, 158.
12 The Italian Constitution prohibits the explicit use of terms from the fascist period. The initials MSI, however, obviously were chosen intentionally.
13 This and the next quotation are from Heymann, op. cit., pp. 273, 141.
14 This and the next quotation are from Pound, op. cit., pp. 17, 110.
A NYONE who has heard of Ezra Pound at all will probably know that he escaped a treason charge by pleading insanity or incompetence to stand trial and that he was some sort of economic crank. Of late it has become increasingly apparent that he had some rather peculiar religious notions. The following discussion addresses the second of those famous failings and its connection with his religious ideas. It will sketch the intellectual milieu Pound entered when he arrived in London in 1909, a sort of refugee from Crawfordsville, Indiana. We will find that intellectual milieu to combine radical political and economic speculation with occult religious and philosophical speculation. The observations offered here are built upon the foundations of my 1979 study of the Cantos of Ezra Pound, A Light from Eleusis. That book concerned itself most copiously with the occult sources of Pound's interest in myth and religion but also discussed his economic ideas. Following Pound himself, I called the complex of religious and mythic materials on which he drew, "Eleusis." I had not perceived at the time I wrote A Light from Eleusis that the sources of Pound's occult ideas and of his economic ideas were so closely allied.

For me there can be no separation between Pound's interest in myth—or rather mythography—and his interest in mystery religion, cultural history, and poetry. There can be no separation because the stories we call myths are, for Pound, esoteric writings that contain the essence of particular cultures—in that myths are thought to be records of the psychic experiences of the most perceptive and intelligent individuals belonging to those cultures. On this view the modern world no longer has myths—if myths are defined as stories about gods and goddesses—instead we have art: poetry, painting, sculpture, and music. I take this to be the sense of the well-known paragraph from "Psychology and Troubadours":

I believe in a sort of permanent basis in humanity, that is to say, I believe that Greek myth arose when someone having
passed through delightful psychic experience tried to com-
municate it to others and found it necessary to screen himself
from persecution. Speaking aesthetically, the myths are
explications of mood: you may stop there, or you may probe
deep. Certain it is that these myths are only intelligible in a
vivid and glittering sense to those people to whom they occur.
I know, I mean, one man who understands Persephone and
Demeter, and one who understands the Laurel, and another
who has, I should say, met Artemis. These things are for them
real.¹

I have often wondered who these initiates into the pagan mysteries
were. I have not been able to satisfy that curiosity, but I have learned that
Pound could have met them in The New Age offices on Cursitor street just
as easily as at the meetings of the Theosophical Society in whose journal
(The Quest) these remarks were first published. The burden of my song,
then, is to demonstrate that Pound's occult, London friends, who formu-
lated his interest in myth, and his New Age friends, who formulated his
interest in economics, were not two sets but a single set. Both sets of
friends contained men and women who maintained a serious interest in
the occult.

The man who most fully exemplified the union of the two seemingly
remote spheres of the occult and economics is the editor of The New Age,
A. R. Orage. Some twelve years Pound's senior, Orage was born January
22, 1873, in Fenstanton, Yorkshire, to a family impoverished by an
improvident father, who also inconveniently died soon after A. R.'s
birth.² Orage was educated as a school teacher through the good offices of
the Coote family. While a young teacher in Leeds, he developed a keen
interest in the mystical speculations of Mme. Blavatsky and became an ac-
tive member of the Leeds branch of her Theosophical Society. His closest
friends at Leeds were Holbrook Jackson and Arthur J. Penty—also
theosophists. The former introduced Orage to Nietzschean ideas and the
latter to socialism and economics. The three friends formed the Leeds
Arts Club and organized lectures on religious, philosophical, social, and
economic subjects.

Penty was the first of the three to depart for London where he estab-
lished handicraft workshops as part of a Ruskinian craft movement.
Orage and Jackson followed him in 1905 and were active in the founda-
tion of the Fabian Arts Group in that same year. In May of 1907 Orage and
Jackson purchased a failing magazine with money donated by the
prominent Fabian, George Bernard Shaw, and a wealthy theosophist,
Lewis Wallace—who also later contributed as "M. B. Oxon.⁴ That
magazine was The New Age, founded 13 years earlier by Frederic A.
Atkins. Before the year was out, Jackson had withdrawn from the
magazine and Orage was left in charge.

Lectures on Nietzsche

At the same time as he was establishing this magazine of political, economic, and cultural opinion, Orage was also publishing books on religious and philosophical subjects. The first two were lectures he had delivered at the Leeds Theosophical Society: Friedrich Nietzsche: The Dionysian Spirit of the Age, (London: T. N. Foulis, 1906) and Consciousness: Animal, Human, and Divine, (London and Benares: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1907). Jackson did not publish any books in this period and remained the least prominent of the three. But Penty published the first of his many Ruskinian socialist studies: The Restoration of the Guild System, (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1906). Orage opened the pages of The New Age to his occultist friends, but he never used the magazine as a platform for his theosophical ideas. It remained throughout his editorship, a journal of radical or avant garde political, economic, and cultural opinion—gradually moving across the political chart from left to right.

We will never understand the strange and potent mix of Orientalism, radical underconsumption economics, mythography, right-wing politics, and poetry that make up Pound’s career without a fuller knowledge of the kind of education Pound received in The New Age offices at 38 Cursitor Street. This essay indicates what might be revealed by thorough study of the intellectual milieu that Pound found on his arrival in London in 1909.

He joined Orage’s stable of contributors late in 1911, having been introduced to Orage by F. S. Flint. Pound and Orage were at that time poles apart in both style and interest so far as one could judge by their writing. In fact, Beatrice Hastings claims that

Orage . . . said, so late as Oct. 1913, nearly two years after Pound’s debut: Mr. Pound’s style is a paste of colloquy, slang journalism and pedantry. Of culture in Nietzsche’s sense of the word, it bears no sign. 6

Pound himself has put on record his lack of interest in Orage “mysticism,” and in the social and economic programs of The New Age prior to the arrival of Major Douglas (the founder of Social Credit) in The New Age offices in 1917. He also corroborates Hastings’s estimate of the distance between himself and Orage in literary taste. 7

To place against these explicit denials of any community of interest, we have two varieties of evidence. The first is the long association of the two men as editor and contributor. In the absence of any evidence of personal
friendship, it is natural to assume that a contributor and his editor share some opinions. Their shared support of Social Credit economic theory would account for their association only from 1917 forward. The second variety of evidence is their published writing, from which samples are indicative if not conclusive:

Here is a sample of Oragean “Nietzschean” culture:

Every organism, whether an individual, a people, or a race, belongs either to an ascending or a descending current. And its morality, art, form of society, instincts, and in fact its whole mode of manifestation, depend on whether it belongs to one or the other order of being. The primary characteristic of the ascending life is the consciousness of inexhaustible power. The individual or people behind which the flowing tide of life-force moves is creative, generous, reckless, enthusiastic, prodigal, passionate: its virtues, be it observed, are Dionysian. Its will-to-power is vigorous; in energy it finds delight. And the moral code of such a people will reflect faithfully the people's power.

But the prevailing characteristic of the descending life is the consciousness of declining power. The individual or people in whom the life-force is ebbing instinctively husband their resources. They are preservative rather than creative, niggardly, careful, fearful of passion and excess, calculating and moderate. And, in turn, their code of morality faithfully reflects their will.⁸

One can clearly hear echoes of these sentiments in the following paragraph from a series of articles on America that Pound wrote for The New Age in 1912:

... I see also a sign in the surging crowd on Seventh Avenue (New York). A crowd pagan as ever imperial Rome was, eager, careless, with an animal vigour unlike that of any European crowd that I have ever looked at. There is none of the melancholy, the sullenness, the unhealth of the London mass, none of the worn vivacity of Paris. I do not believe it is the temper of Vienna. . . .

One knows that they are the dominant people and that they are against all delicate things. They will never imagine beautiful plaisaunces.⁹

The whole series—an assessment of his native land for English readers—takes Orage’s Nietzschean historicism for granted and develops a case
that the American people belong to an ascending "order of being."
(Pound was not to retain such a favourable estimate of his countrymen.)

Economics alongside the Occult

But Orage was by no means just an occultist and mystic. From his Leeds
days he maintained a lively and informed interest in economic and social
thought alongside his occult activities. One can perceive the "economic"
metaphors in his characterization of the "ascending life"—generosity and
prodigality—while the "descending life" is husbanding and niggardly. He
maintained these two interests actively throughout his life except for
the ten-year period that he was a Gurdjieffian.¹⁰

Characterizing the mixture of speculative occultism and economics
that determined Orage's career does not in itself tell us much about how
Pound responded to that mixture. I argue in A Light from Eleusis that
Pound adopted many aspects of speculative occultism—which he called
"Eleusis"—as he found them in Josephin Peladan, G. R. S. Mead, and
Allan Upward. The arguments and evidence adduced in that study
support the supposition that Pound responded with enthusiasm and cre­
dence to the speculative occultism or theosophy that he encountered
both at the New Age offices and in the company of W. B. Yeats at the
Theosophical Society lectures—which it seems everyone in London
attended.¹¹

Social Credit also has a history which has not been adequately told
within Pound studies.¹² This is not the place to go into that history, but it is
important to recognize that poets, artists, and scholars of art have been in
the forefront of radical or reform economics in Britain virtually since the
birth of the discipline of economics in the 18th century. Notable names on
the artistic side are Bernard Mandeville, John Ruskin, William Morris,
Charles Dickens, George Bernard Shaw, and G. K. Chesterton. For the
most part this "aesthetic" branch of economic theory falls into the
"heretical" camp known to economists as "underconsumptionism" or
"welfare economics". It can be traced back to Malthus, who lost the argu­
ment with Ricardo over the possibility of a shortage of purchasing power
in an economy. Malthus's belief that such a shortage was possible was put
to rout by Ricardo and did not surface again in main stream economics
until the publication of J. M. Keynes's The General Theory of Employment,
Interest, and Money in 1936.

Underconsumption numbers among its theoreticians, Simonde de
Sismondi (Nouveaux principes d'économie politique, Paris, 1819), J. A.
Hobson, Major Douglas, and J. M. Keynes. The last name is, of course, the
crucial one, for Keynesianism is essentially a cleaned up and technically
sophisticated version of Sismondian underconsumptionism, while
Social Credit is an unreconstructed and technically naive version of that
theory. Here is how a Marxist scholar of underconsumptionism characterized the error of this theory:

............ we can see that the justification for this singling out of consumption demand is the idea that the object [that is, "purpose"] of production is to provide consumers with "utilities and conveniences." This is a point of some importance, because it seems to me that this is an idea which is subconsciously active in the heads of most underconsumptionists, inducing them to believe that the demand provided by immediate consumers as opposed to other purchasers occupies some special role in the economy, although there is no reason why this should be so in a capitalist society in which production depends upon the expectation of private profits. (Bleaney, p. 151)

Far from being "subconsciously active in the heads of most underconsumptionists," the idea that the purpose of production is to generate wealth is the fundamental principle upon which the whole edifice is raised. Ruskin coined the term "illth" as a label for those other things that economies produce—armaments, social dislocation, environmental degradation, political regimentation, depopulation of the countryside, urban congestion, and on and on, all of which could not be denominated "wealth."

"Welfare" and "Scarcity" Contrasted

In contrast to Sismondian or "welfare" economics, orthodox economics—the economics of Smith, Ricardo, Mill, and Friedman—is technically known as "scarcity economics," which assumes that the problem to which an economic theory must address itself is the insufficient supply of goods and services. Therefore its policies would privilege production even at the cost of social and environmental degradation. On the other hand, welfare economics assumes that the fundamental problem is distribution, not production, and that production will take care of itself if the problem of distribution is solved.

Distribution, of course, must be understood as an economic problem, not a transportation problem. Goods and services are distributed when consumers have the ability to command their delivery. In a capitalist society that command is possible only through economic exchange and is called "demand". In a socialist or collectivist society some goods and services can be commanded as a political or collective right independent of the consumer’s ability to pay. In the United States and Canada, such wealth is available in the form of freeways, fire and police protection, the
space program, education, parks, and so forth. Canada also has health care, but not the space program. In Russia they have all of those things plus guaranteed food and shelter. In Russia there is no demand mechanism, but they do have a "supply side" economy—no consumer loans, no inflation, but massive investment.

Marxist Communism is economically orthodox and for that reason adopts a political solution to the problem of distribution. The economic heretics like Sismondi and Douglas recommend a technical solution. In Douglas's case the solution was simply to issue everyone a claim on goods and services in the form of a special currency, their "social credit." Another heretic dear to Pound, Silvio Gesell, planned to "doctor" standard currency so that it could not be hoarded. It would disappear through negative interest. (As Keynesians would say, Gesell would increase the "velocity" of money.) John Maynard Keynes's solution was to "stimulate" demand by expanding the money supply through the banking system—especially by means of easy credit (including consumer loans) and low interest rates. Of course, Keynes's solution prevailed for nearly forty years but has of late been significantly displaced by Friedman's doctrine of controlled inflation. However, the consumer loan as an instrument to stimulate consumption, unknown before Keynes, is still with us.

The link between underconsumptionism and theosophy or mythography is to be found in their common faith in mankind as an essentially profligate, creative, generous, generative being. They believed that neither incentives (such as profit), nor compulsion (such as vagrancy laws), nor moral suasion (such as slogans like "the greatest good for the greatest number") are required to induce men and women to be productive. On the contrary, what is required is freedom from restraint so that those profligate creative forces can be released. The embodiment of those generative and explosive forces, those procreative violations, is the artist. Pound managed to catch the social conscience, the "spiritual", and Orage's Dionysian energy in a well known poem from Lustra, "The Garden":

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

And round about there is a rabble
Of the filthy, sturdy, unkillable infants of the very poor.
They shall inherit the earth.
In her is the end of breeding.
Her boredom is exquisite and excessive.
She would like someone to speak to her,
And is almost afraid that I
will commit that indiscretion. 13

Notes

1 This essay is a revised version of a paper delivered at the Ezra Pound Centennial Colloquium, San Jose State University, November 6–9, 1985.
5 Flint is well known to literary scholars for the central role he played in the poetic movement known as “Imagism,” launched in Poetry Magazine of Chicago in 1912 by Pound and Flint. The movement was later taken over by Amy Lowell under whose energetic guidance it permanently altered the style of poetry written in North America.
6 Beatrice Hastings, The Old “New Age”: Orage and Others (London: Blue Moon Press, 1936), p. 7. Beatrice Hastings had been Orage’s mistress from 1907 to 1914. By the time she wrote this memoir, she was an embittered casualty of Orage’s romantic life. Among Hastings’s other works are Defence of Madame Blavatsky Vol. I (Worthing, Sussex: The Hastings Press, 1937)—Volume II never appeared—and Our Own Business from the same press in 1938.
It is clear from her memoir and her Defence of Madame Blavatsky that Hastings herself was an occultist like Orage. She accuses him of sorcery: I first met Orage at a theosophical lecture he gave in 1906, when on a visit to London from Leeds. Afterwards in the smoking room I rallied him on his perverse loquacity (of the
which I later detected every trick). A year or so after, when Aphrodite had amused herself at our expense, I found in his rooms a collection of works on sorcery. (The Old "New Age", p. 19.)


9 Selected Prose, p. 104.

10 Gurdjieff is the Armenian guru who invented the technique of "encounter groups." His London missionaries were the Russian P. D. Ouspensky (brought to London in August of 1921 by Lady Rothermere) and the Yugoslav M. M. Cosmoi, whose byline in The New Age, called "World Affairs," Orage "Englished" for him. Orage left London in 1922 to join the Gurdjieffian "Institute" at Fontainebleau called Le Priere. He remained there until December of 1923, at which time he sailed to New York as a Gurdjieffian missionary. He remained the American head of the movement until 1930 when he broke with Gurdjieff. He returned to London and, in April of 1932, founded The New English Weekly as a Social Credit journal, whose pages he immediately opened to his old London friend, Ezra Pound.

11 G. R. S. Mead was editor of The Quest, a theosophical journal, and organizer of regular lectures on religion, mythology, mysticism, and the like. Among the regulars at these meetings were Orage, W. B. Yeats, Olivia Shakespeare, and her daughter, Dorothy (who became Mrs. Pound), Ezra Pound, Jessie Weston (whose book, From Ritual to Romance, inspired Eliot's Waste Land), and Evelyn Underhill (whose book, Mysticism, was also admired by Eliot).

These social and "educational" associations in themselves do not establish a community of belief or even of interest. The evidence for community of interest between Pound and these self-declared occultists and mystics is to be found in Pound's poetry. The slightest familiarity with Pound's poetry confirms a shared interest in mythology and in occult traditions such as Hermeticism, Neoplatonism, Albigensianism, and Free Masonry between Pound and the occult circle. The common interest is beyond dispute. What remains in dispute among scholars is Pound's "propositional attitude" toward the occult materials to be found in his writing.

12 Until recently, the most ambitious discussion of Pound's economic thinking (which derives primarily from Major Douglas's Social Credit theories) was Earle Davis's, Vision Fugitive: Ezra Pound and Economics, (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1968). Useful as Davis's study is, it does not give an adequate account of either Social Credit or economic theory in general. Peter Nicholls's recent study, Ezra Pound:

The best study of Social Credit is John L. Finlay, Social Credit: The English Origins, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1972). It supercedes C.B. Macpherson's helpful, Democracy in Alberta, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953) insofar as Social Credit in England is concerned. Both these books are by Canadian historians whose primary motive is the interest in the phenomenon of Social Credit as a political party in Canada. As a result they provide no direct guidance to Pound scholars and—moreover—are not very thorough on the side of the history of economic theory. For the history of economic theory relevant to Social Credit one must go to Marion Bowley, Studies in the History of Economic Thought before 1870, (London: Macmillan, 1973), and to Michael Bleaney, Underconsumption Theories: A History and Critical Analysis, (New York: International Publishers, 1976). However, both of these books are written for an audience of professional economists and are heavy going for literary scholars. Furthermore, it should be noted that Bleaney is a British Marxist, committed to demonstrating that underconsumptionism is in error. Bowley, as a British Socialist, is willing to entertain the underconsumptionist heresy.


Anger and Poetic Politics in Rock-Drill

Peter Dale Scott

Critics have noticed the "positive progression of spirit" in the Pisan Cantos, a "restorative effect...not merely organic, sensory, aesthetic [but] also moral." The same "mysterious process of restoration" has been detected in Rock-Drill as well; but is often presented as (in the manner of the Pisan Cantos before it) a merely personal rescue, like that of Odysseus at the hands of the saving sea-goddess Leucothea.

Thus presented, the restorative effect of Rock-Drill will be seen as redundant, even anticlimactic, after Pisa. The Pisan Cantos are indeed a hard act to follow. I shall argue, however, that the restorative process in Rock-Drill is more conscious and above all more epic, based as it is on a restorative vision or recognition like that of Dante's, not just of self (and of those about him) but of all humanity ("that men are naturally friendly," 93/626).

This process can be misleadingly summarized as just that Confucian struggle towards 仁 jen, or benevolence, which Pound had earlier described, from a distance, in his China Cantos (55/290, cf. GK 18ss) and identified in the Pisan Cantos, on a personal level, with western humanitas (82/525). As this vision of natural friendship interacts with his personal process of outrageous crankiness and repentance, it also becomes more recognizably assimilated to an intermediate vision of an efficient companionship (the semina motuum) to bring benevolence about. Both visions have recognizable antecedents in the western epic tradition: in Virgil, Dante, and, as I hope to show, in Wordsworth. Though there is still a politics or "agenda" (93/625) to the poem, this agenda becomes, after the conversion of Pound's polemical energies, not so much practical ("the true base of credit, that is / the abundance of nature" 52/257) as poetic, the elucidation of this second vision.

For years critics have complained about the disjunctiveness and
fragmentation of Rock-Drill. More recently, a new generation of deconstructive critics has seen in the fragmentation an opening of the poem's structure for readings "across and against" the Logos of the poet's conscious intentions. I shall argue that this movement to a more open structure represents not a failure but a fulfilment of the poem's earlier impetuses: that in Rock-Drill, for the first time in the Cantos, the conscious Confucian intentions of the middle cantos and the more fluid, personal, poetic process of the Pisan Cantos discipline and humanize each other.

The Two Voices in Rock-Drill

Faced with the blizzard of linguistic fragments in Rock-Drill, one response of critics has been to isolate an integrating theme. For Michael Andre Bernstein this is "the link between a healthy society and a care for words." For the Companion of Carroll Terrell, it is about exemplifying the will of heaven in men. For Hugh Kenner it is "natural growth," leading in Thrones to "philology: luminous words and their meanings, seeds of mental growth." Massimo Bacigalupo discerns Sagetrieb, or chiao4, "oral and written communication from one generation to another."4

On the thematic level, Rock-Drill is indeed about all of these themes, but as they are converted to human action, by advisers or ministers to those in power. The "seeds of movement" in Rock-Drill, to which Kenner alludes, are not just words and their meanings; they are above all those seminal intellects who are allied in what Pound once called a "conspiracy of intelligence" (GK 263). This chain of luminaries and advisers is sustained in The Cantos from I Yin at the beginning of Rock-Drill to Apollonius at the end of it, and is extended thereafter to Pythagoras and Coke at the end of Thrones. The dissolution and "block" of the poet's subjective identity and conscious intentions in Rock-Drill are in the end compensated for by identification with this larger global fellowship.

But any purely thematic perspective (and perhaps most conspicuously that of the interaction between verba and res, language and politics) soon establishes its own inadequacy. It leads us to recognize a discordant dialogue in Rock-Drill between two quite different voices already present earlier: a coherent, integrative voice of benevolence, jen2, or humanitas, and a more problematic, dysfunctional voice which Pound might call a voice of energy, li4, but whose polemical invective rises at times to the level of anger:

The pusillanimous
wanting all men cut down to worm-size
Mr. Roosevelt chose Dexter White (85/548)
Infantilism increasing till our time
attention to outlet, no attention to source.
That is: the problem of issue (87/569).

Considered out of context, this angry voice is both politically and aesthetically a disaster. No sane person reads the Cantos to enjoy it; critical responses range from those of the politely benevolent, like Hugh Kenner, who ignore or obscure it, to those hostile responses which would on the basis of such statements down-grade or even dismiss both the Cantos and the author.^5

My own response to such lines is to see them as not declarative but expressive. We learn from them, not about the New Deal, but about the paranoia of the inmate of St. Elizabeths: the hostile, clearly very disturbed man who alienated even would-be admirers like Charles Olson and taxed the more-than-professional patience of his Jewish psychiatrist. By recording such hostility, and ultimately its dissipation, Rock-Drill is indeed, as Noel Stock wrote of it dismissively, “a kind of mental diary.”^6

Pound himself seems to have deliberately acknowledged, if not prepared for, such a process of dissipation or conversion. As he quotes near the end of Rock-Drill from Confucius, li⁴ hsing² chin⁴ hu¹ jen² “energy is near to benevolence” (93/628–29; cf. CONF 155).^7

The conflict between the two voices of energy (anger) and of benevolence is reminiscent of, and indebted to, the dialectic that Paul de Man perceived between the “two incompatible narrators” in Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy. The result is also the same: a deconstruction of intention, but a deconstruction that leaves what de Man called “a residue of meaning.”^8

Benevolence and Deconstruction

Pound himself defined the theme of Rock-Drill by reference to Dante, in such a way as to make its progressive evolution of theme inseparable from its refinement of voice:

This is the major theme [of Rock-Drill] as the Cantos move into their third and final stage: “the domination of benevolence”... we think of the Thrones of Dante’s Paradiso.^9

My own topic is not so much this “theme” as the conversion of voice that achieves it. What may be called the “Pisan” voice, non-linear, fragmented, turns from self-revaluation to the social issues of the Chinese and Adams cantos. This has the particular effect of dissolving the programmatic Confucianism of the middle cantos and the Guide to Kulchur (epitomized by Pound as “Humanity is to love men. Knowledge, to know men” GK 18,
cf. Analects XII.xxii, CONF 248), from a doctrine into a state of benevolent mind.

In this way the "negation, inscription, and fragmentation" which deconstructionist critics have stressed in Rock-Drill can be seen as a maturation of the polemical Confucianism of the middle cantos ("a Nordic ethic . . . against semitic insanity and against Socrates," SPr 96) into a fuller, neo-Confucian benevolence into which Taoism and Buddhism have been assimilated. In this process the loss of polemical partisanship and the effacement of identity go together; Pound's position can no longer be easily named. The poet's subjectivity, so much in the Pisan foreground, becomes inconsequential. For the first time, we have truly moved into the "open" or "field" poetics that will be praised by Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan.10

It is, however, going too far to assert, as Kuberski does, that in Rock-Drill "personal transcendence through self-denial is replaced by an entire effacement of the self and the restitution of the stylus." Bacigalupo's more moderate judgment is closer to the mark: in Rock-Drill a continuous dialectic is established between Pound's questionable intentions and the "freedom of linguistic flux" . . . which is . . . the emergent datum in [the Pisan Cantos].11

In Rock-Drill this linguistic flux will lead not only to dissociation but also to association, not only to deconstruction but to realignment: the emergence of the rose in the steel dust.

I propose to look at one such passage in Canto 87, where the fragmentation of language, far from being a Derridean annihilation of the subject, is on the contrary part of a process of association whereby both theme and voice are "saved" by being altered. What occurs in the Cantos after Pisa is consequently not so much an abandonment of politics as the refinement of polemics into what I shall call a poetic politics, a non-polemical identification with a global community of communicators.

**Canto 87 and the Seeds of Movement**

It is possible to see in Rock-Drill a kind of seam separating the earlier "civic wisdom" cantos (85-89) from the later personal or healing ones (90-95), celebrating "the inspirational and redemptive power of Amor."12 But the Confucian program of the former has been presented at the outset as a matter of "sensibility" and the refinement of desire. In this context we hear Pound's voice of anger relaxing, by its own associations, into the voice of benevolence:
and the squirmers plunder men's mind
wanting all men cut down to worm-size.
"A few" said Jean Cocteau.
"gros légumes" [qui profiten de tout, Spr 436]
[uomini vivono] in pochi, [Macchiavelli, GK 266]
causa motuum,

pine seed splitting cliff's edge.
Only sequoias are slow enough.
BinBin "is beauty".
"Slowness is beauty." (87/572) 13

The transition here from the voice of anger to that of peace, from li4 to jen3, from energy to benevolence, from the immediate to the long view, is the Latin causa motuum, the cause of movement. Cocteau's gros légumes or "big cheeses who profit from everything" are contrasted with Macchiavelli's pochi or few from whom the rest of humanity finds life. In turn the Macchiavellian tag that men live in a few (the causa motuum) is rhymed with the Chinese character 森 (M411: "changes, motions, origin, moving power"), consisting of the character 木 (M4593, trees), next to the character 森 (M409, "hidden"). This is set in 105/746 next to the Latin semina motuum and translated by Pound from the Ta Hsueh or Great Learning as follows:

One humane family can humanize a whole state; one courteous family can lift a whole state into courtesy; one grasping and perverse man can drive a nation to chaos. Such are the seeds of movement [semina motuum, the inner impulses of the tree, (森)] That is what we mean by: one word will ruin the business, one man can bring the state to an orderly course (Great Digest, IX.iii, CONF 59–61, cf. 13/59).

What we see in Canto 87 is a change or relaxation of focus, from the short to the long view, from practical and polemical politics to a poetic or visionary politics: a politics which supplies a framework, Weltanschauung, or paideuma for action, rather than a detailed political program or commitment. Some may find the notion of a "poetic politics" trivial, even oxymoronic. I find it consistent with developments in post-war social thought of which Pound was probably unaware, notably the "communication theory of society" which the philosopher Jürgen Habermas has opposed to traditional power politics. The Cantos can be located in a post-war dissociative trend common to conservatives (Daniel Bell's The End of Ideology), liberals (Karl Popper's The Open Society and Its Enemies), and above all radicals (Herbert Marcuse's Eros and Civilization).
The late cantos, which are second in greatness only to the Pisan Cantos, are usually much less appreciated and much more misunderstood. Canto 87 is a case in point. On the one hand are the critics who see it as a retreat from current politics, into "the private realm of the poet's own consciousness"; on the other are those who see it as unrepentant "propaganda" for Social Credit, fascism, or the occult Rosicrucianism of the Ur-Cantos, to which he had been exposed by Yeats and the works of Peladan.14

The truth, while it does not wholly exclude either of these readings, lies in fact exactly between them. The canto begins with the bellum perenne

but ascends swiftly, by associations like those we have just seen, to the Confucian 上 chih3 (M939: "stop"), translated by Pound in the Great Digest as "the point of rest" (87/571; CONF 29) and linked in Canto 93 to the ninth (unmoving) heaven which is "the agenda" (93/625).

The canto focuses on the "interaction" (Pound's word) between the two. The sustaining theme of the canto is what he calls elsewhere chiao4 (M719: "to teach, teaching") or Sagetrieb (85/559), the teaching tradition of those who "build light" (87/571), a light transmitted into politics by advisers or luminaries outside it. Examples of such advisers in this canto include the minister I Yin who "sent the young king into seclusion... to think things over" (85/543, 87/571), and the San Ku or "Three Solitaries" (87/570) who in the Chou dynasty were appointed "to illuminate the productive action of heaven and earth," thus aiding the emperor to put principles into practice and "govern the whole empire."13 These are rhymed historically with those "resisters" in the West whom Pound in his Guide to Kulchur had called a "conspiracy of intelligence" whose job was to maintain "the cultural level" and who "outlasted the hash of the political map":

Avicenna, Scotus Erigena in Provence, Grosseteste in Lincoln... the real history went on (GK 263).

This insistence that "what counts is the cultural level" (81/518) has been called elitist, but it is an elitism that embraces not only thinkers and writers but also builders and craftspeople. Tradition also survives, for example, in the madonnas carved by Herr Bacher's father, in Mary de Rachewiltz's village of Gais (74/448, DISC 192). Pound, unlike Eliot, is no lover of aristocracies, even if he sees their patronage as a cultural necessity:

History presents no more imbecile a series of spectacles than
the conduct of aristocracies. Without whom civilization is impossible. And after one imbecile lot of these lepidoptera is destroyed the whole of woodenheaded humanity has to concentrate its efforts on production of another lot, equally piffling and light headed (SPr 213).

**Poetic Politics and Practical Politics**

Thus the long-range visionary politics encoded by *Rock-Drill* is ultimately benign and optimistic. The transition from "parliamentary history" (89/604) to "amor" (90/605) is not so much a change of theme, as a progress in enlightenment, where self-purgation is rewarded with erotic vision. The Dantian precedent in the *Purgatorio* becomes increasingly explicit: the historic references to mountains at the close of Canto 89

I want Frémont looking at mountains
or, if you like, Reck, at Lake Biwa, (89/604)¹⁶

are "answered" by a language of landscape that is identifiable as Dante's alpine *paradiso terrestre*

And from this Mount were blown
seed
and that every plant hath its seed

The ensuing allusions to Heydon's Rosicrucian alchemy suggest a "sea-change" (92/618) that is not just personal but also civic, reaffirming Dante's vision of man as *compagnevole* (93/626; 95/643), and, for the first time in many cantos, the city of Dioce/Tai Wu Tzu (94/633). The solitary inundation of Homer's Odysseus (95/647) is thus communalized by its Dantian context: like Dante ritually confessing before the vision of his beloved Beatrice, so Pound recapitulates his own isolation amid the society of his inspired predecessors.

More importantly, the poem begins to relax, or revise, some of its earlier certainties. The greatest such revision (one so large it might almost be called a confession) is in his attitude towards the Christian ethos. Compassion had been absent or derided in the earlier, phallocentric cantos ("none may seek purity / Having for foulnessse pity," 30/147); and is first introduced, at Pisa, in explicitly non-Christian or anti-Christian passages.¹⁷ In *Canto* 93 "compassion" becomes the motif of Pound's saving reconciliation with the female, in the passage about his daughter:
By the horns of Isis-Luna,  
compassion.
The black panther lies under his rose-tree.  
J'ai eu pitié des autres.  
Pas assez! Pas assez!  
For me nothing. But that the child  
walk in peace in her basilica,  
The light there almost solid (93/628).18

This confessional note gives a Christian tone to our Confucian tag which follows ("energy is near to benevolence," 93/628–29; cf. CONF 155), reminding us that Pound's first translation of jen², "humanitas" or "benevolence," had (in the more Buddhist context of the Noh dramas) been "compassion" (TRANS 220).

It is of course not Christianity, but a larger humanitas from which Christianity is no longer excluded, that is the sustaining collective vision of Rock-Drill. Analogously, the role played in Dante’s paradiso terrestre by the church militant is replaced in Canto 95 by the fellowship of the chi², or semina motuum:

And damn it there were men even in my time  
Nicoletti, Ramperti, Desmond Fitzgerald  
(the one alive in 1919)  
That the crystal wave mount to flood surge. . . .  
(95/644, cf. 89/599)

Dionisio et Eleutherio  
"the brace of 'em  
that Calvin never blacked out . . . (95/647)

Superficially this fellowship looks like a return to the phallic communities of troubadours and activists in Cantos 6 and 7, but there are significant differences. On the one hand the chi¹ of Rock-Drill are no longer an anti-establishment faction of vorticist resisters, but an eirenic fellowship of the best of all factions, in an empowering alliance with nature and with truth. More importantly, from the point of view of voice, Pound himself, not some disembodied persona, is now comfortably established in their company.

Within this optimistic framework the voice of anger is now subordinated but nonetheless still problematic. In Thrones the practical politics of anger, never completely suppressed, resurges with much of its former combinatory mania. We see this in Canto 105, which traces the chi¹ or semina motuum down into the present. The line begins with Hou⁴ Chi²
(M2144 “prince” of M504 “millet”), the Chinese “john barleycorn” (98/690) or minister who was later worshipped as a god of agriculture, “stando nel Paradiso Terrestre” (105/747). This nourishing tradition ends, not just with Mussolini saving “il salvabile” in Spain (105/746) but also with two American racists, Crommelin and del Valle.

It is clear, unfortunately, that the health-giving poetic vision has led in Thrones not to the extinction of Pound’s practical political machinations but to a sly renewal of them. But on the practical level, Pound’s politics are as dissolved in static as on the surviving records of his radio broadcasts. I know of no one who was roused to political activism by a reading of Pound’s poetry. Because of what he has to offer, I believe that in time we will no more judge Pound’s poetic politics by his St. Elizabeths entanglements than we would Dante’s by his plottings with the Florentine Whites or Wordsworth’s by his long obsessive crusade against the locomotive.

**Pound and Wordsworth: the Poetics of Humanity**

I choose the last example advisedly, for, in my view, Pound has given us the first and only capacious epic vision in English since Wordworth’s 1805 Prelude. Like The Prelude, the Cantos are indeed “a poem including history” and as such have assimilated the furors as well as the beauties of that impure subject. They are also, as David Simpson has noted, the process of “a mind writing its own history,” which, in the end,

with its agonising vulnerability, and its resifting, rewriting of its own materials, has come to understand, implicitly, Wordsworth’s “endless maunderings.”

Indeed the similarities in structure and ultimate consolation between the 1805 Prelude and the Cantos are arresting. Books IX and X of The Prelude play a role as pivotal as that of the Pisan Cantos. Both epics record a personal breakdown in the context of the frustration and eclipse of a political cause turned awry in violence; and both acknowledge personal deflections of compassion, or jen, in an overwhelming political furor. For both poets an unprecedented crisis is the declaration of war between their native country and that of their elective residence where their daughter resided. In Wordsworth this crisis produced a “shock... to my moral nature” that “threw me first out of the pale of love / Soured and corrupted upwards to the source” (X, 233, 760–61). In the case of Pound it led, alas, to the notorious broadcasts. But the epics of both poets struggle back to analogous compensating visions of humanity in the present and future. Pound has his chi, his conspiracy of intelligence; Wordsworth, his “great family” of humanity “scattered through the abyss of ages past” (XI, 62–63), and cemented by scattered
"poets, even as prophets, each with each / Connected in a mighty scheme of truth" (XII.301–02, 308). Thus both poets, in a world of “idolatry” and “servitude” (XIII.432–33), where “the living were made of cardboard” (115/794), can still see themselves as “joint labourers” in the work of human redemption (XIII.439), as part of “the fight” (109/774) “To make Cosmos” (116/795).

Wordsworth, like Pound, has been found wanting as a humanist: his idealized shepherds stalking through the fog have been called “abstractions, as far as possible from the ordinary interests of mankind.” In an adroit polemic, Wordsworth’s anticipatory riposte to just such criticism was to appeal from the “dead letter” to “the spirit of things” (VIII.432); from the “deformities of crowded life” (VIII.465) to man as an outwardly ennobled “index” of a spiritual, imaginative ideal (VIII.410–19). Likewise Pound’s more conflicted concern was not for the “usual filthiness” (78/481), the lopsidedness which men still lust after and try to build on (99/700), but for jen, humanitas, the “clear spring of rightness” that is “man’s phallic heart . . . from heaven” (99/697–700,711). The anger of both poets can be traced to the frustrations of their unusual expectations of humanity.

Book X of the 1805 Prelude deals with the furor of Robespierre’s terror and the furor of Wordsworth’s response to it; the anger of Book X underlies its apocalyptic energy and more relevantly its elevation from a personal to a higher voice. In the end Wordsworth repressed his anger and the concerns that had aroused it; eventually the snorer of “claims of wealth or blood” (X.226) made his peace with the family of Lowther, Earls of Lonsdale. Instead he returned to the dead poets who, as he wrote revealingly, “will speak to thee / More perfectly of purer creatures” (XI.69). It was just his ultimate rejection of an imperfect and impure poetry, and with it an imperfect and impure politics, that led him away from the epic agitation of the 1805 Prelude to the more pedestrian Excursion (dedicated to the second Earl of Lonsdale) and the sometimes disastrous revisions of the 1850 Prelude.

Timing the Thunder: the Using of Poetic Anger

Pound, in contrast, continued to articulate and make poetic use of his epic anger. Many critics disagree and try to read Rock-Drill and Thrones as a pentimento, an exorcism and rejection of past furor. They point to the presence in Canto 91 of the figure Lear, next to the character for chen from the Book of Odes (M315: “to shake, to excite, to terrify,” the radical for “rain” over a character for “time”), and explicated by Proud as “timing the thunder” (91/613). This storm signal leads the critic Michael André Bernstein to write:
Like Lear on the heath, the Pound persona plunges through madness away from earlier hatreds, conceit, and political error and towards a redeeming vision of love.\textsuperscript{21}

But "timing the thunder" is as much an Apollonian as a Dionysian moment.\textsuperscript{22} It recalls

\begin{quote}
Frobenius der Geheimrat
der im Baluba das Gewitter gemacht hat (74/436)
\end{quote}

the white man who made the tempest (38/159)

rhymed in \textit{Canto 53} with the emperor Ch'eng T'ang, a builder of light (93/629) who brought rain, and wrote 號 (hsin\textsuperscript{1}-jih\textsuperscript{4} “Make it New”) on his bath-tub. It recalls Allen Upward’s shamanistic Divine Man who, as quoted by Pound,

when he felt the storm gathering round his head . . . put on his symbolical vestment, and marched forth to be its Word, the archetype of all heroes in all Mysteries.\textsuperscript{23}

Above all it merges Lear’s solitude into fellowship with "Confucians [who] observe the weather / hear thunder / seek to include" (99/702).

Toward the end of \textit{Rock-Drill}, Pound appears to use his benevolent Confucian perspective as a framework for distancing, literally italicizing, his voice of anger. For example, after the Lear moment in \textit{Canto 93}, Pound is roused once again to prophetic denunciation: "Democracies electing their sewage / till there is no clear thought about holiness / a dung flow from 1913 . . . " (91/613–14) But this complaint is diminished within its highly structured context: the rise and fall of the Brut dynasty. Pound’s anger rhymes with the last king Cadwalader’s complaint ("Waes Cadwaleder. that he wes on liue. / leofere him weore on de th," Layamon 15979–80) on abandoning his native land for Italy (a close rhyme with Pound’s ultimate exile). “So hath Sibyle a boken [hit] isette” (91/613), “So hath Sibyl set it in a book”: Cadwalader’s acceptance on faith of the long view is ratified by \textit{Rock-Drill’s} opening celebration of his Tudor successor, Queen Bess (85/543). By italicizing or textualizing his complaint, and rhyming it with Cadwalader’s, Pound apparently subordinates his passing anger to his benevolent acceptance ("Over harm / Over hate," 91/613) of the mandate of heaven. ("Pound marked the passage in italics to be set in a somewhat smaller type: ‘carattere un poco piu piccolo,’” Terrell, p. 551.) In pairing the last British king with Layamon’s praise of his dispossessor Athelstan ("And yelden he gon rere") Pound may mean to show his reconciliation to his own place, like Cadwalader’s, at a cusp in history, wit-
nessing the ordained decline and fall of his dynasty. In noting this "italicizing" use of historic perspective, I do not mean to imply that it is successful in the sense of justifying the language italicized. It is however important in the accommodation of Pound's subjective, angry voice to the community of later personae, which are little more than de-italicized texts, quotations without quotation marks.

Pound had the sensibility or "ling, another Chinese character with the rain radical, to sense and respond to this storm, a storm which was within him, because it was around him. It is true that he did not, like his hero Apollonius, prove to be a "master of tempest and fire" (94/638), but he did far more than just present "the image of his own... hate" (LE 46). In 1919 Pound had written that "Universal peace will never be maintained unless it be by a conspiracy of intelligent men." By presenting his poetic vision of a global philanthropic fellowship, Pound had indeed contributed to that project, one which could be shown to enlarge not only Wordsworth's vision of a "great family" but also the humanism of the western epic tradition.

Though it is commonplace today to talk of the global family or global village (of which Pound might be seen as the first village explainer), we should not forget that Pound is perhaps the first to have aimed at writing a global epic. Eliot's fragmentation of Western culture in the Waste Land, and subsequent reaching out to just one Asian culture, the Upanishads, were once thought ambitious enough to make him "the International Hero." But they seem in retrospect a much more modest, partisan project. By linking the Apollonian/Dionysian dialectic of western epic to that of Confucianism, Pound has effectively "decentered" the epic genre that once was a vehicle for the virtues of nation, paradigm, and war. His project for a humane global high culture (i.e. a decentered humanities curriculum for our institutions of higher education) may in fact be the only project that can justify high culture in today's world, or for that matter save it from its own deconstruction.

There are those today who hope to downgrade Pound's own status in the high cultural canon, because of his voice of anger, with its fascism, anti-Semitism, and phallocentrism. For such to be the case, it will not be enough to anthologize his angry passages and present them in conjunction with the rhetoric of the radio broadcasts. What must be discredited is his healing vision of benevolence, a vision which, for all its obvious faults, seems likely to endure.

Notes

2 *Jen*, composed of the radical for *man* and the character for *two*, is commonly translated as "virtue," "benevolence," "charity," or "humanity." A Confucian definition is "loving men without selfishness," supplemented in Confucian schools by the explanation that *jen* is what is needed for two people to coexist properly together.


5 It was of course the presence of the same voice in the *Pisan Cantos* ("Petain defended Verdun while Blum / was defending a bidet") that led *Partisan Review* to mount a protest against the award of the Bollingen Prize to Pound in 1948. It asked, rhetorically, "How far is it possible . . . for technical embellishments to transform vicious and ugly matter into beautiful poetry?" ("A Prize for Ezra Pound," *Partisan Review*, XVI, 4 [April 1949], pp. 346-47.) My answer to their question would be, "Not possible at all: the function of the poem, as a process, is not to embellish these lines but contextually to move beyond them."


7 The passage is from the *Chung Yung* (Unwobbling Pivot) XX.x, translated by Legge as "To practise with vigour is to be near to magnanimity."


9 Blurb for *Rock-Drill* on the dust jacket of *Women of Trachis*; quoted by Bacigalupo, p. 232n.


Michael André Bernstein, *The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra Pound and the Modern Verse Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 154. If I take issue here and later with Bernstein’s treatment of the post-Pisan cantos as a record of "failure" (p. 136n), it is because I so thoroughly agree with his larger case for a historical reading of the Cantos that I do not wish to see *Rock-Drill and Thrones* exempted from that reading. Other critics are far more sweeping: cf. Leon Surette, *A Light from Eleusis: A Study of Ezra Pound’s Cantos* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 229: "the later cantos drop the pretense of including history... They represent the nadir of the poem’s didacticism—a mumbling over of unexplained verities, the *disjecta membra* of a political and religious philosophy known only to Ezra Pound"; or "Cantos 85–89... are the ghost of what might have been had not the Pisan Cantos intervened: further propaganda for a build-your-own political ethic combining Confucianism, imperial peace-keeping, and agrarian resistance to usury" (Alexander, p. 206). For the occult allusions in "Mont Ségur, sacred to Helios" (87/574), cf. Surette, p. 37. The third meaning for M411 *chi* in Mathews is "Secret Occult, Cunning."


Note that Canto 89, far from simply closing a division of the Cantos, "ends" with a comma.

"Shun the compassionate" (74/429); "At Ephesus she [Diana] had compassion on silversmiths" (80/500; cf. Acts xix.24–28).

Discussions of Pound’s "phallocentrism" seem appropriate to the early cantos. But I find deconstructionist critics like Smith and Durant extremely reductive when they quote the word "phallos" from Canto 99 out of context, ignoring the sense of the Buddhist passage Pound is representing. To take this open, self-questioning text as "phallocentric," merely because the word "phallos" is used, strikes me as not criticism but a new prudery.

David Simpson, "Pound’s Wordsworth; Or Growth of a Poet’s Mind," *ELH.* XLV (1978), pp. 682, 684. Writing in 1949, in response to the *Pisan Cantos*, John Berryman was one of the first to suggest comparing the Cantos to *The Prelude*; but this was unfortunately in support of an anti-historical, personal reading of the Cantos as "only apparently an historical
or philosophical epic, actually a personal epic” ("The Poetry of Ezra Pound," *Partisan Review*, XVI.4 [April 1949], p. 394; quoted in Surette, p. 283). In Bernstein’s valuable rebuttal to this approach, the same restrictive, anti-historical reading of Wordsworth leads to the claim that “Pound was not attempting to write a modern Prelude” (p. 165n, cf. p. 13).


21 Bernstein, p. 69. Cf. Flory, p. 251: “Pound, like Lear, is a man who, by judging wrongly, brought suffering upon his own head, and this is surely the main reason for Pound’s reference to Lear at this point.”

22 Recall that Pound saw Dionysian “parallels” between his own birth in a storm and that of Fracastor for whom “lightning was midwife” (L 84, 5/20; cf. “Semele’s personality shot to atoms,” 92/621). Two others in this Apollonian/Dionysian fellowship may be King Edward I and his wife Eleanor of Castile (“and in 1288 a thunderbolt passed between them,” 93/641).


Ezra Pound and Hermes

Robert Casillo

At the heart of Ezra Pound's conception of nature and culture is his belief that the "gods exist" (GK, 125) and that classical mythology contains permanent truth. For Pound, a god is at once an immanent presence in phenomena and an "eternal state of mind" (SP, 47). Within the Poundian if not the Olympian pantheon few gods are more important than Hermes, whom tradition identifies with commerce, trickery, writing, and a host of other activities. First appearing in the early poems "Surgit Fama" and "The Lake Isle," Hermes presides with Circe over Odysseus's descent to Hades in Canto 1. He figures covertly in the Malatesta Cantos, in the satire on Baldy Bacon in Canto 12, and in the Venetian sections of The Cantos, in each instance linked inextricably to Pound's economic themes. Canto 24 concludes with a brief but resonant translation from the Homeric Hymn to Hermes. In Cantos 39 and 47 Hermes is instrumental in Pound-Odysseus's conquest and reconciliation with Circe. Absent in the Chinese and Adams Cantos, Hermes reappears at Pisa as a symbol of fertility, healing, and the vagaries of trade, and in the later Cantos he at once sanctions and complicates Pound's use of language.

Despite Hermes' prominence in Pound's works, only Lewis Hyde has sought to define his significance to Pound. In The Gift, Hyde shows that Hermes may take his place with such Poundian gods as Artemis, Athena, Persephone, Dionysus, and Apollo. Nonetheless, Hyde's analysis is historically limited and often misguided. Failing to consider the full range of Pound's references to Hermes and focusing on Hermes largely as an economic figure, Hyde ignores many cultural activities with which Hermes is associated in Pound and classical tradition. Reducing Hermes to a transhistorical and cultural monolith, he neglects Hermes' mutations in cultural and economic history and their effect on Pound's representa-
tion of the god. Finally, Hyde treats Hermes as virtually a Jungian archetype, a collective psychic content. This assumption, which is belied by Hermes’ changing historical status, leads Hyde to dehistoricize Pound’s anti-Semitism; he argues mistakenly that Pound’s image of the Jews is identical with the Hermes figure, and thus transforms his anti-Semitism from a uniquely personal and historical phenomenon into a supposed manifestation of mythical essences.

Hyde distinguishes small, primitive, and tribal or communal cultures of the gift from modern, detribalized cultures of large-scale commerce and profit. In the first men are essentially brothers, bound by personal ties of reciprocity and largesse. Exchange rather than the accumulation of wealth is emphasized; gifts are given freely, with affection and love, and without stipulated reward or certainty of profit; and wealth takes the form of concrete goods instead of the abstract commodifications of money and the market. To be sure, Hyde admits that early society knew gain and advantage, yet he finds it essentially different from our world. Now economic conditions are impersonally contractual and profit is openly acknowledged as a chief motive; an object’s worth is confused with its money or market value; and usury no longer inspires condemnation as a crime against Christian fraternity or universal brotherhood. As Pound too seems to have recognized, tolerance of usury marks the modern West as a “universal other-hood,” consisting of strangers united by little more than a system of exchange, profit, and accumulation.

According to Hyde, Hermes belongs to that later stage of culture when commerce and empire, the market, the profit motive, trickery, theft, and an ethos of non-reciprocity supplant the closed, tribal culture of the gift. Hyde concedes that Hermes does not perfectly represent modern culture, for, in Hyde’s view, he always favors exchange, the constant loosening and interchange of cash, rather than greedy accumulation. Still, Hermes is god of transactions between strangers and might thus well symbolize modern economics in its impersonality and alienation. Though he gives and exchanges gifts and is capable of generosity, as in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes, he is for Hyde no true god of the gift, since he lacks “lasting affection.” His chief modern representative is probably the urban huckster or shyster. Hyde’s Hermes is essentially a demonic figure, an “amoral connecting deity.” Hyde furthermore believes that Hermes has this status in Pound’s works: Hermes is Pound’s dangerous “shadow,” typifying dark forces not only in Pound’s psyche but also in Western civilization.

Protects Traders

Up to a point Hyde’s portrait of Hermes as the “God of Commerce” is accurate, for Hermes is traditionally the protecting god of traders on the
highway, of barter, communication, merchants, and thieves. But Pound’s and the Greek Hermes have more than a chiefly economic significance. Nor is Hermes, as Pound recognizes, demonic or disturbing in all his manifestations. The disturbing is only one aspect of the god, the result of a major mutation in economic life.

Norman O. Brown notes that Hermes first emerges as a rustic and pastoral god within the tribal and familial cultures of ancient Greece. He is associated with the boundary stone, which divides one group or village from another and across which trade is conducted between strangers. Insofar as early Greek society does not recognize individual property rights, it makes no distinction between commercial trickery and thieving and honors Hermes as a trickster and thief. Unlike the robber, who employs violence, Hermes works by stealth in all that he does. Yet Hermes also reflects the generous and communal spirit of primitive societies, in which trade is a collective enterprise; he promotes not private accumulation but gift-giving and the mutual exchange of wealth between tribal groups. Being crafty, he is also an early god of handicrafts. Hermes thus receives religious sanction as a lesser version of the Promethean culture hero, a “giver of good things” and a “bringer of joy” to mankind at large.4

This description, however, corresponds to the god’s original pastoral and agricultural form, within the limited, non-monetary, non-market economy of the village, characterized by close personal relationships. With the rise of commerce and the city, beginning in the ninth and eighth century B.C., trade becomes individualistic and secularized, and Hermes is transformed into that shady, unattractive figure to whom Hyde has largely reduced Pound’s god. Though Hermes retains his rustic associations, now he is also the god of the urban market, merchandising, the profit motive, commercial handicrafts, and the accumulation of limitless personal wealth in the form of money. Hesiod, whose advice on farming is quoted in Canto 39, was perhaps the first to lament this transition to a market economy. Whereas Homer, coming from a culture of heroic reciprocity and largesse (for example, the Bellerophon narrative, Glaucus and Diomedes in Iliad), saw Hermes as the “friendliest” of gods, Hesiod, an impoverished Boeotian farmer suspicious of the city, damns Hermes and his greedy, selfish ways.

Praising agrarian life for its self-sufficiency, Hesiod contrasts archaic gift-giving with the “satanic” Hermes of the agora, for whom trickery is only a means of profit. Brown finds the values of the new commerce most vividly reflected in the “Homeric” Hymn to Hermes, which he traces not to rustic origins but to Athens in the late sixth century B.C. In Homeric times Hermes had been a loyal herald subordinate to Zeus and Apollo; the Hymn celebrates him as an upstart infant who steals Apollo’s cattle, gets the better of him in exchange, and charms Zeus into granting him
equality with the other Olympians. Hermes now stands for self-interest, the absence of scruple, and the doctrine that money makes the man, in short, the anti-aristocratic values of the Athenian merchant and craftsman. Brown's analysis undercuts Hyde's assumption that Hermes lacks greed. As Brown later argues in *Life against Death*, the classical Hermes evolves into the Christian Devil, through which medieval writers and Martin Luther expressed the "satanic character of commerce," especially usury. Traditionally the Devil is associated with excrement and anality, symbolizing "filthy lucre" and mere material accumulation.

Although concerned chiefly with Hermes' economic role, Brown establishes him as an ambiguous, multivalent figure reflecting different historical contexts.

The difference between Brown's complex historical and evolutionary view of the god and Hyde's simplistic one is evident in Hyde's assertion that the Greek Hermes and the Roman Mercury are essentially the same. They are related, but the name Mercury (from *mercare*) testifies to the later Roman god's primary status as the god of trade. Mercury seems less various than the earlier rustic Hermes and more the unattractive god of the urban economy. So he appears in Pound's "The Lake Isle."

Doubleness and slipperiness characterize the Hermes of *The Cantos*. Not only does Pound seem aware that Hermes varies with the historical and economic circumstances in which he appears, but his Hermes conforms to the rule governing Pound's other gods. Each is what Edgar Wind, following the Orphic theology of Pico della Mirandola, would term a *deus ambiguus*, motivated by his or her own law of self-contrariety. Hermes' ambiguity is notably expressed in the caduceus, his gift from Apollo. This is Hermes' herald's wand, and with its opposed yet interlocking snakes it has been appropriated for centuries by the medical profession as a sign of healing; in *Canto 77* Pound notices as evidence of the persistence of myth the caduceus of Mercury, the Roman Hermes, on a U.S. Army Medical Corps packing case. The caduceus is also a symbol of homeopathy, the rule that likes are cured by likes. Hermes can thus counteract his virtues and his evils; like the doctor and pharmacologist, man must determine the dosage in which Hermes is most beneficial to culture.

In another sense, the gods produce good or evil depending on how humanity perceives and receives them. The didactic Pound illustrates this idea through the myth of Baucis and Philemon in his early poem "The Tree" and later in the opening of *Canto 90*. Baucis and Philemon were an old couple who treated hospitably two strangers whom the rich had turned away: the strangers were Zeus and Hermes in disguise. In reward for their piety, Baucis and Philemon were granted immortality and transformed into two elm trees growing side by side. This legend of that "god-feasting couple old / That grew elm-oak amid the wold," proves that
the gods must be "kindly entreated, and ... brought within / Unto the hearth of their heart's home" (SPEP, 3), that is, the human heart, before their gifts can be received by humankind.

Pound's Hermes' is often a beneficent figure, especially in Homeric contexts. Canto 1 finds Odysseus in Hades on the good advice of Circe. Insofar as Hermes had given Odysseus the charm "molu" (C 47/237) or moly to protect him from Circe's wiles, he aided the voyage. Moreover, Hermes in one of his major manifestations is the psychopompos, the conductor of souls to the underworld by means of his golden rod or wand. Few return from such a journey, but Canto 1 refers to Hermes' wand as a "golden bough" (C 1/3) and thus identifies it with the talisman that permitted Aeneas to enter HELL and reascend to the light; implicitly Hermes has granted Odysseus the same privilege. Although Hyde dissociates Hermes from free and affectionate gift-giving, in Homer and the later Cantos it is Hermes who enables Odysseus to leave Calypso's island after seven years. Hermes is also associated in the first Canto and the Pisan Cantos with Aphrodite, Pound's revered goddess of sexual love and germinal nature. Mistranslating the Hymn to Aphrodite in Canto 1, Pound gives to the goddess the "golden bough of Argicida" (C 1/3), an allusion to Hermes' wand and his role as slayer of Argos. In Canto 79 one of Aphrodite's lesser incarnations is Maia, mother of Hermes.

**Phallic God**

The connection of Hermes with Aphrodite figures as well in classical tradition and consorts with another aspect of Hermes which Pound, a consistently phallocentric thinker, could only have admired. In pre-Hellenic and pre-Dionysian religion, Hermes was a prominent phallic god, and in the view of some scholars (though not Brown) he symbolizes fertility. In Homer, Hermes cautions Odysseus not to refuse the bed of Circe, for, once mastered, the goddess affords vital knowledge of sex and nature. This is the meaning of Cantos 39 and 47. Hermes' presumed role as fertility god would explain his traditional link with Persephone or Kore and Demeter, goddesses of the bountiful earth. Hermes bore the message to the underworld that Persephone should be released in the spring; hence the simultaneous appearance, in the early poem "Surgit Fama," of Hermes and the returned Kore. Hence too the conjunction in Canto 79 of Kore and Maia as aspects of Aphrodite. Pound indicates Hermes' high status at the end of Canto 79, in which the puma is "sacred to Hermes" (C 79/492). The cat is Pound's totemic animal and that of his personal god Dionysus, with whom Hermes is associated in classical myth. Not only are they both phallic and fertility gods, but Hermes saved the young Dionysus from the wrath of Hera, and would therefore be worthy of special honor in Pound's eyes.
Nonetheless, Pound’s Hermes can be uncannily disturbing. Having used his wand or rod to kill the many-eyed monster Argus, Hermes brings sleep and death. To quote Ruskin, he is not only the herald of the bright sky but, as Argus-killer, the “killer of brightness,” for the thousand eyes of Argus represent the stars. There are no stars in the Cimmerian lands in *Canto 1*. One finds the same sinister ambiguity in Aphrodite, whose beauty brings destruction, and in Persephone, whose fertility is mingled with winter barrenness. For Pound, Hades typifies all places in which the darker Hermes belongs. In this realm of lifeless accumulation, filled with “sickly death’s heads” (C 1/3), all capital (deriving etymologically from the Latin for “head” and encompassing the idea of the generative phallus) has grown permanently sterile.

Still, in the main radicals of *The Cantos*, Pound prefers Homer’s view of Hermes as the “friendliest” and most helpful of gods. Apart from Athena, no god is more helpful to Odysseus. Such aid may reflect Hermes’ identification with the hero, an identification even stronger than that of the other gods, who, as Pound noted happily, recognized Odysseus as “one” (GK, 146) of their own. Odysseus is himself a sort of Hermes figure. He is multi-talented, crafty, secretive, libidinous, resourceful, and generous to his men, at least up to a point. As Hermes crosses boundaries, being the only god associated with the Olympian, terrestrial, and infernal regions, Odysseus has commerce with the high and low, divine and human, living and dead. In his travels he outwits strangers constantly. As Hermes is a thief, Odysseus steals the Palladium, the cause, according to a source noted by Pound, of the wanderings and sufferings inflicted upon him. Hermes and Odysseus are both “polumetis” (GK, 146), manysided. Their connection is underlined in *Canto 12*, in which Baldy Bacon or “miraculous Hermes” (C 12/54), a modern commercial parody of the god, receives Homer’s description of Odysseus: “Pollon d’anthropon iden”: “he saw many men [and cities]” (C 12/54).

Within the economics of *The Cantos*, Hermes has a double aspect corresponding largely to the antithesis defined by Brown. Although Pound does not altogether reject capitalism or the profit motive, he suspects unlimited acquisition as anti-social and has a profound nostalgia for agrarian and corporate civilization. He attacks all monetary abuses, views agriculture, as did the Physiocrats, as the primary and essential source of wealth, and in his fascist writings even advocates autarchy, economic self-sufficiency based on agriculture. Culturally and socially Pound’s “good” Hermes belongs to an agrarian, feudal, and heroic world. He is a folk hero or Robin Hood, a resourceful man of largesse who steals from the rich but gives to the poor, usually in the form of concrete goods and services rather than money. But in his degraded and parodistic version, Pound’s Hermes is a shyster, usurer, city slicker, a merchant specializing in the barren multiplication and accumulation of money. Of
the first type, *The Cantos* offer Odysseus, the Cid, and Sigismundo Malatesta. Mistakenly betrayed by his king, and deprived of funds, in *Canto* 3 the Cid schemes to pay his soldiers without recourse to violence or plunder. Two Jewish money lenders, Raquel and Vidas, agree to provide the Cid with money in exchange for a box which, supposedly containing treasure, is filled with sand. Having tricked the usurers, the Cid has money to pay his "menie" (C 3/12), his loyal military retinue, and to pursue his career as the future national hero of Spain.

**The Cid's Actions Questioned**

But are not the Cid's actions reprehensibly fraudulent? In tricking the usurers, is he not descending to their level? And is he not inconsistent with rural values in making use of money, that despised substance? Pound would probably justify the Cid's fraudulence on the grounds that the usurers' foreign origin and religion places them outside the Christian community and its laws. Similarly, the early Jewish laws on usury permit the taking of it from strangers but not from tribal brethren. The Cid's trick also serves a communal good, whereas the usurers are supposedly selfish. Nor is the Cid unjustified, at least in Pound's eyes, in spending the usurers' money; for this is conceived as the product of a prior theft and should be redistributed throughout the community. Finally, one is to understand that money, in the hands of the usurers, is inert and sterile matter; the sand which the Cid places in the box is a metonym for the barrenness of usury. But the Cid, a "factive" (GK, 194) Poundian personality, translates money into goods, services, and deeds. For Pound, the usurers' victimization differentiates good from bad fraud, the good from the bad Hermes.

Pound probably identified personally with the outlaw-thief, since (like Hermes) he spread the false story that he was related to the Loomises, a gang of horse thieves in upper New York State. One is reminded of Pound's hero Sigismundo Malatesta, a native of the province of Romagna, "teeming with cattle thieves" (C 8/32). Malatesta in *Canto* 9 plunders the basilica of San Appolinare in Classe to provide marble for the Tempio, a temple dedicated to Malatesta's personal cult. When the Ravennese protest the theft to Doge Francesco Foscari of Venice, Sigismundo tells them: "Casus est talis" (C 9/36), "that's the way it is." Although the Tempio proves its creator's egotism, Pound views Malatesta as neither greedy nor overwhelmingly selfish. Just as the Cid uses stolen, "dirty" money to drive out the Moors, the enemies of the Christian community, Malatesta builds a lasting example of beauty while helping the greatest artists of his age. Pound identified with Malatesta, for like the Tempio *The Cantos* are a mosaic of "stolen" fragments welded together through craft and resourcefulness. Both works exist under the
sign of Hermes.

Consciously or unconsciously, Pound sometimes questions the antithesis between heroic generosity and the base greed and chicanery of the urban merchant. Peter Makin notes that in the 12th century the Provençal barons despised the new money economy of the deracinated urban merchants and identified true wealth with the land and its produce. But the barons needed money for their wars and to stay financially afloat. Bertran de Born tells the barons to pawn their castles before hostilities: "Baros, metetz vos en gatge!" According to Pound, Bertran would borrow the usurers' money to make war. If successful, he will retain his castles without payment; if not, he will be unable to pay his debts anyway. In "Near Perigord," Pound gives this passage an anti-Semitic twist lacking in the original and anticipating his identification of the pawnbroker with the Jew: "Pawn your castles, Lords, / Let the Jews pay!" (PER, 152).

With its folk tale overtones, Bertran's ruse resembles the trick that the Cid plays on the Jews in Canto 3, and yet there is a major difference. Although the Cid's fraudulence is perhaps justified by the collective interests of the Spanish people, Bertran's motives seem as selfish as those of his shyster enemies. Yet Pound probably approved of Bertran's trickeries. Apparently in his eyes any means are justified to preserve such concrete wealth as a knight's castle and his traditional lands against the abstract wealth of the usurer. As in Canto 3, the double Hermes typifies good and bad fraud. In keeping with Hermes' homeopathic nature, the antidote to the Jews' "bad" fraud is not honesty but more fraud, in its positive form.

Even Odysseus might be viewed as selfish, exploitative, and indifferent to his "menie" or band. To be sure, he is capable of showing sympathy with his men and sorrow for their misfortunes, as in Canto 1. Yet in Canto 20 Odysseus' sailors lament their fate: "Chained to the rowing bench, living by stolen meat" (C 20/93-94), they enjoy neither Odysseus' fame nor his sexual adventures with Circe and Calypso. Nor did the sailors enjoy the special protection and help of Hermes and Athena: they were punished harshly for their foolish theft of Apollo's (or Helios') cattle, while Odysseus escaped. Canto 20 is probably the only instance in which Pound at least questions the social benefactions of the "good" Hermes.

By Canto 102, Pound gives final endorsement to Homer's judgment of Odysseus in Book 4 of the Odyssey: "keinas... e Orgei. line 639" (C 102/728). The entire line in Homer, which is actually line 693 in Book 4, reads: "Never at any time did that man do anyone harm." Pound seems to have forgotten Odysseus's unprovoked attack on the Cicones, which he mentions in Canto 79. In any case, Pound preserves his antithesis between the "factive," agrarian, heroic, and generous folk hero, and the socially
malignant urban shyster-huckster, whose only "interest," Pound says punningly, is "bisnis" (C 12/53). Pound finds early historical instances of the second Hermes in the philosopher Thales, who bought up all the olive presses in Ionia in anticipation of a big harvest, thus making a fortune, and in Zenothemes, whom Demosthenes condemned for maritime fraud. These tricksters have their modern analogues in the Rothschilds and J. P. Morgan, manipulators of currency; Sir Basil Zaharoff (known as Metevsky in The Cantos); the short-selling "liar" in Canto 38; and Baldy Bacon or "miraculous Hermes" (C 12/54), an actual person whom Pound knew in New York before World War I. In Canto 12 Baldy concocts a usurious scheme to buy up all the copper pennies in Cuba. Interested only in "bisnis," unlike the many-sided Odysseus and Malatesta, Baldy finds his true home in "Manhattan" (C 12/53), the massive urban center where monopoly feeds parasitically on the genuine wealth of the countryside. Baldy anticipates Pound's representation of the Jews, whom Pound links to the urban center (New York, Wall Street, London), and whom he views as representatives of acquisition and abstract wealth as opposed to the concrete, authentic wealth of agriculture. According to Pound, the urban usurer steals the peasant's traditional lands through exorbitant mortgages, rents, and interest rates.

Pound's conception of modern usurers and international gun-runners resembles Brown's characterization of the Hermes of the agora. Pound shares Dante's view that usury "breaks through walls and arms" (SP, 329) ("rompe i muri e l'armi"). Demosthenes compared sharp practice in commerce with the "wall-boring" by which Athenian thieves broke into houses. Pound also attacks gun-runners for selling to all nations. Aristophanes put into Hermes' mouth the cynical remark that wherever a man can do business, there is his country.

The Impudent Thief

Yet the best example of the bad Hermes in Pound is the god himself: not the Hermes of Homeric epic but the impudent thief depicted in the Hymn to Hermes, who challenges the traditional hierarchy of Zeus and Apollo. In short, Pound in Canto 24 arrives independently at the same conclusion as Norman O. Brown, that the Hermes of the Hymn stands for the profit motive in its destructive disregard for honesty, scruple, communal values, and genuine wealth. Toward the conclusion of Canto 24, Pound surveys the decline of Renaissance Ferrara from the benevolent rule of the Este family into selfish greed and luxury. He then translates the following lines from the Hymn to Hermes, in which the infant god, having stolen and hidden Apollo's cattle, tries to evade responsibility by lying:
"Is it likely, Divine Apollo,  
That I should have stolen your cattle?  
A child of my age, a mere infant.  
And besides, I have been here all night in my crib."

(C 24/ 114)

The conclusion of Canto 24 evokes the fate of the Room of the Months in the Schifanoia Palace of Ferrara at the hands of this Hermes' worshippers. Decorated with priceless paintings by Cosimo Tura in celebration of the agricultural order achieved by the Este, the room had been transformed in the 19th century not, as Pound has it, into a tannery, but into a tobacco-curing operation. Unlike the signed capital in San Zeno, which remains undisturbed and is signed with the name of its proud creator, the Room of the Months tells of the degradation of craft and beauty in the interests of profit: "‘Albert made me, Tura painted my wall,  
/ And Julia the Countess sold to a tannery’" (C 24/ 114). There is perhaps a pun on "Countess," for she prefers to count her money instead of fulfilling her aristocratic duties.

It is most appropriate that the next canto brings us to Renaissance Venice, which above all places in The Cantos figures under the sign of the satanic Hermes, the god of gain, accumulation, and the underworld. Venice would monopolize wealth as Hades monopolizes souls. In Canto 35, the city claims control over all Adriatic trade and reaps inordinate profits through customs duties—an exploitation of the cultural boundary over which the good Hermes, god of exchange, presides. Pound associates Venice with theft. The two famous columns in Cantos 10 and 17 were stolen by the Venetians from the Greeks; in Canto 26 Vittore Carpaccio's sketch of Jerusalem is stolen; and in the same canto Pound may allude to the Venetians' theft of the skull of St. George from the island of Siesina. Apart from misrepresenting goods by false labels in Canto 35—an anticipation of deceptive modern advertising—the Venetians are associated with betrayal. Canto 17 mentions the Venetian condottiere Carmagnola, whom the Venetians captured by trickery, summarily tried, and beheaded between the two columns. Canto 17 may also import Hermes the craftsman in referring to the Venetian glassmakers, vitrei. As Pound implies, these men distilled an image of Venice as an unstable environment of endlessly shifting sea-surfaces and dazzling reflections—just the place which the unplaceable Hermes would like to inhabit.

Since these passages evoke Hermes in his worst aspects, one understands why Pound treats Venice, as it declines into Renaissance usury and luxury, as a kind of Hell. Whereas the good Hermes enables Odysseus to escape Circe and Hades, few escape the Venetian inferno or "bolge" (C 25/ 118), the second term signifying "wallet" and the circular pits in the
lower reaches of Dante's Hell. Like Carmagnola and unlike the more cautious Borso d'Este and Malatesta, Polenta was "swallowed up in that city" (C 24/113). Canto 17 depicts a beautiful yet sinister Venice, an hypnotic place of profound silence and a "light not of the sun" (C 17/77). This perhaps refers to illumination by gold, which belongs to the realm of Pluto, whose name means gold.

The scene then shifts to a pastoral landscape, presumably the agricultural order which the usurious and maritime Venetians rejected, where Zagreus feeds his panthers in the company of gods and nymphs. Conspicuous among the gods are Athena and Hermes, balanced perfectly as by the "shaft of compass" (C 17/77). This is the positive, rustic Hermes, for Pound associates him with vital nature: fauns, a doe, spotted deer, low wood, and broom plants. But this landscape fades into a funereal seascape of cypresses and silent Memnons, which in turn fades into Venice, where nature seems frozen mysteriously into stone. At the conclusion of Canto 17, Pound mentions another voyage which, reminiscent of greedy Jason's ill-starred quest for the Golden Fleece, takes place amid the "splendor of Hermes" (C 17/79), the god of shepherds, and culminates in Renaissance Venice at sunset. With its references to Carmagnola, Borso, and Malatesta, victims or near victims of Venetian avarice, this conclusion is a descent to Hell, the negative Hermes acting as psychopompos.

Hermes has special reference not only to Venice but to Pound's larger theme of the city, of which the archetypal symbol in The Cantos is Troy. For Pound, the city develops out of agricultural civilization and is based on that sense of distinction, hierarchy, and limit which emerges with agriculture. The earliest pastoral cultures of ancient Greece honored Hermes in the form of a erma or stoneheap and with rude blocks of stone in the shape of a phallus; these served as protective devices at boundaries and crossroads where the guardian Hermes facilitated trade. In later periods these boundary stones were replaced by phallic busts of Hermes set up before private homes and gardens over the boundary and threshold; these too were believed to have protective powers. The termini or boundary stones of the ancient Romans correspond to the Greek hermae, just as the god Terminus is a version of Hermes, a concentration of the numen of all boundary marks. Each year the Romans reaffirmed these boundaries by honoring Terminus with sacrifices. Thus at every point the ethos of the rural Hermes corresponds to Pound's key social and cultural values: his demand for distinctions and limits; his worship of the phallus as symbol of fecundity and the basis for precise demarcations in nature and culture; and his insistence on ritual and sacrifice as essential to the preservation of social order.
Opening of Canto 4

One can now understand the opening of Canto 4: “Palace in smoky light, / Troy but a heap of smouldering boundary stones” (C 4/ 13). War curtails peaceful exchange between nations and destroys those cultural distinctions (the city and the country) on which trade depends. The Trojans and Greeks repudiate Hermes in favor of Ares. But these lines also apply to the modern world. By the 1930s Pound believes that modern militarism reflects an imbalance between city and country, commerce and agriculture. Ignoring the earliest laws of Hermes, which teach exchange and limit, and giving itself to endless, exploitative accumulation, typified by the bad Hermes, the city sucks the country dry and gives nothing in return; instead of extending life or sustenance it increases its military and financial power, centralizes for ultimately self-destructive purposes.

Canto 48 contrasts the usurious centers of modern New York and medieval Paris, both enemies of the local rights of agrarian regions, with the once thriving but long eclipsed agricultural civilization of Provence, which “wd. not be under Paris” (C 48/ 243). Provence affords only glimpses of a vanished culture faithful to sacrificial ritual and the idea of limits: a “stair,” symbolizing hierarchical order, “still broken,” and by a wheatfield “a milestone” and an “altar to Terminus” (C 48/ 243), the god appearing as a sort of forlorn scarecrow. Pound, however mistakenly, hopes for the restoration of this culture through fascism, which figures in Canto 48 as an avenger-savior, simultaneously restoring lost boundaries and sacrificial ritual in a moment of cultural apocalypse.

When Pound glimpses his paradise in Canto 16, he emphasizes the agricultural boundary stone, the foundation of his urban utopia:

Then light air, under saplings,
The blue banded lake under aether,
an oasis, the stones, the calm field,
The grass quiet,
and passing the tree of the bough
The grey stone posts,
and the stair of grey stone,
The passage clean-squared in granite:
descending,
And I through this, and into the earth: patet terra,
entered the quiet air
the new sky,
The light as after a sun-set:
and by their fountains, the heroes,
Sigismundo, and Malatesta Novello, 
and founders, gazing at the mounts of their cities. 

(C 16/69)

With its carefully defined boundaries and agrarian tranquillity, its heaps of stones and phallic posts (hermae), this landscape belongs to Hermes in his beneficent form. The "bough," conducting one not to Hades or infernal Venice but to a subterranean Paradise, is the "golden bough," identified in Canto 1 with Hermes' wand. Appropriately, one of the founders of this Paradise is Sigismundo Malatesta, himself a Hermes figure. "Mounts of their cities" may pun on Venus mount, for Pound views cities as feminine and as the products of Eros. If so, in its connection with the phallic hermae or boundary stones, this Paradise harmonizes the masculine and feminine, patriarchal and matriarchal, urban and agricultural, as in Siena in the Monte dei Paschi Cantos. Hermes is once more a culture hero signifying interchange and reciprocity.

Yet the gods are motivated by their own law of self-contrariety. An amorous phallic god, expert at seduction and fond of sexual promiscuity, Hermes would provide a model and justification for those unbridled desires which led to the Trojan War and destroyed the order which Hermes helped to establish. Toward the conclusion of Canto 1, Pound mistranslates Giorgius Dartona's interpretation of the First Hymn to Aphrodite, in which Aphrodite relates that she has been abducted by "chrusorrapis Argeiphontes . . . ," that is, Hermes, the slayer of Argus, with the golden bough or wand. Insofar as his thieving and trickery encompasses the abduction of the goddess of beauty, Hermes reminds one of Paris, who "raped" the willing Helen and set off the Trojan War. Indeed, Hermes conducted the three goddesses (Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite) to the Judgment of Paris, probably the ultimate cause of antagonism between the Greeks and the Trojans.

Still, it is evidence of the ambiguity of the god's powers that Pound does not define such abductions as good or bad, culturally helpful or harmful. Perhaps their status depends on whether the abductor or abductee are motivated by lust or eros. Although she committed the sin of adultery with the poet Sordello, so strong was the love of Cunizza da Romano that she found her way into the eighth sphere of Dante's Paradiso, the heaven of Venus. In another historical reprise of Helen-Paris, Pound alludes in Cantos 5 and 23 to the abduction of the wife of the aristocrat de Tierci by the troubadour de Maensac. Although Pound normally advocates patriarchal rules and distinctions, which include marriage, he sympathizes with the Hermes-like abductor rather than with the dull and impotent husband. It is probably impossible to reconcile or rationalize these paradoxes, for they are essential to the slippery nature of Hermes and the homeopathic, incalculable law which governs
his mercurial being. Sometimes sexual passion throws society into confusion; sometimes it proves necessary for cultural revitalization.

Hermes and Writing

Although Hyde notes the connection between Hermes and sexual license, he ignores Hermes as abductor and rapist. Yet he fails more seriously to point out the link between Hermes and writing, a link found in classical tradition and of obvious importance to Pound the poet. As Christine Brooke-Rose has shown, Pound’s treatment of writing and literature gains considerable clarification from Plato’s Phaedrus, in which Plato tells the story (or myth) of Thoth, Egyptian counterpart of Hermes, who supposedly introduced writing into Egypt.20

Hermes-Thoth manifests a fundamental ambiguity. The inventor of writing, he would confer an enormous benefit upon mankind. But, as the Egyptian king tells Thoth in rejecting his invention and banishing him from his kingdom, writing is a bad and delusive drug which substitutes the written for the spoken word. For Plato, speech or logos properly has primacy over writing and a higher claim to truth. Where the spoken word has an utterer and father, and is thus supported by presence and being, the written word is both parricide and orphan, cut off from its origin in voice and reality. Endlessly repeatable, the written word is fated to wander endlessly from its origin, to which it adds itself as a kind of falsely generated, usurious increase.21 The logic of this argument resembles that which underlies the crucial Poundian connection between linguistic and economic representation. As Hyde points out, Hermes introduces money into the “natural” economy of concrete goods as a form of abstraction and symbolization, a shifting of counters whereby the sign becomes detached from reality.22 For Pound, usury and “bad” writing alike constitute the multiplication of signs without basis or relation to reality or actual goods. Like money, writing has the potential to intrude upon the “natural” and to distort its inherent truth.

Plato further argues that writing, in its convenience and capacity to multiply ideas and opinions, undermines the fixed wisdom and truth contained in tradition. Writing threatens the rites, which Plato, like Pound, considers essential to the maintenance of culture and religion. Writing is thus implicated in one of Pound’s major themes, the cultural breakdown that occurs when men fail to call things by their right names (Cheng Ming). When words no longer adhere closely to things, men cannot perform ritual observances properly; false wealth is confused with true, and usury goes unchecked. In “A Visiting Card,” Pound argues that the rampant usury of the West results from a “beclouding” (SP, 332–333) of language. It is not irrelevant that Hermes, a bringer of false dreams and phantasms, is also, as Ruskin recognizes, the elusive god of
the endlessly metamorphic clouds.\textsuperscript{23}

Even so, Plato and Pound employ writing not merely to show the ills of writing but to teach "solid wisdom" (CON, 97). Again Hermes' law of self-contrariety and homeopathy is at work. As Plato teaches, and as Pound acknowledges in Canto 98, writing is a "pharmakon," a drug which is good or bad depending on dosage or application.

The Cantos early and late record the dangers of writing. The reference to fallen Troy in Canto 4 is followed by an allusion to Cadmus, who introduced the Phoenician alphabet into Greece and who resembles the Egyptian Thoth. Perhaps Pound implies that writing contributes to social breakdown. In The Cantos, Pound twice delivers a verdict which suggests a deep pessimism towards his own work: "Litterae nihil sanantes" (C 33/161 / C 116/795), "Literature curing nothing." In other forms, chiefly Semitic, literature is for Pound a "poison" (SP, 320) secreted in the body of Europe. Even the troubadours, whom Pound admires, may be accused of questionable linguistic practices. The trobar clus can often seem as obscure and cultist as the allegorical and Cabbalistic forms of interpretation which Pound condemns. Such poems as "Cino" and "Near Perigord" link the troubadours with rootless wandering, the fetishization of verbal objects, insincerity, fulsome flattery (a form of usury), deception, and greed.\textsuperscript{24}

Metaphor as Usury

Writing recapitulates the dangers of the uncanny Hermes, god of boundaries but also a wandering god of unexpected meetings with strangers. Pound would free writing from what Derrida terms dissemination: the semantic (and usurious) increase of metaphor, whereby one thing is falsely exchanged for another and meaning grows estranged from itself; the loss of presence, or univocal meaning, through the differential operations of language; the interminable wandering or play of the sign, whether in the text or interpretation. Pound wants words to adhere closely to things, so that meaning is determinate, univocal. Once writing attains adequate specificity, literalness, and transparency, it discourages and even conquers the hermeneutic play of endless interpretation, whereby the literal becomes metaphorical and allegorical, and the closure of meaning is endlessly deferred.\textsuperscript{25} Hermes thus presides over two kinds of writing, one characterized by semantic limits, in which word is fairly or justly exchanged with its referent or meaning, in terms of equivalence; the other characterized by semantic drift and verbal excess. To quote Canto 80:
To communicate and then stop, that is the
law of discourse
To go far and come to an end  (C 80/ 494)

Such writing would theoretically avoid the linguistic distortions and
mutations of truth associated with Hermes in "Surgit Fama." The process
of verbal "spread[ing]" defined in this lyric is comparable to Derrida's
idea of uncontrollable linguistic "dissemination," whose chief metaphor
is the endless growth and doubling of plants. Appropriately, this lyric is
set in spring, when Demeter and her returned daughter reawaken ger-
minal nature:

The tricksome Hermes is here;
He moves behind me
Eager to catch my words,
Eager to spread them with rumour;
To set upon them his changes
Crafty and subtle;
To alter them to his purpose;
But do thou speak true, even to the letter.  (SPEP, 73)

Despite Pound's suspicion of the written word, this passage reverses
Plato's hierarchy of speech and writing and grants truthfulness to the
second. Rumor, or the spoken word, distorts meaning; the same
anecdote, exchanged from person to person, grows unrecognizable in its
eliminations and additions. For Pound, the alternative to Hermes' tricks is
true speech but especially true writing "even to the letter," for the letter,
though it may conceal truth, may also fix it against Hermes' playfulness.

Committed to writing a monumental epic, Pound cannot but place
himself under the protection and tutelage of Hermes-Thoth; he must
accept the possibility of semantic drift, uncontrollable metaphor, divorce
of word from determinate meaning or referent. But though writing
remains potentially poisonous, Pound hopes that, through writing, he
will find for culture its needed cure. In Canto 80 Pound considers the
theory that "Homer was a medic / who followed the greek armies to
Troas" (C 80/ 503). If writing is a good and bad drug and if Hermes' ca-
duceus symbolizes homeopathy, Homer is the best of literary doctors
thanks to his linguistic accuracy. To quote ABC of Reading: "The sheer
literary qualities of Homer," by which Pound means above all his preci-
sion, "are such that a physician has written a book to prove that Homer
must have been an army doctor" (ABC, 43). Meanwhile, Pound always
attempts in his own poetry to avoid the empty repetition of the letter,
mere writing. The motto "Make It New," which Pound introduces in con-
nection with "pharmaka" and literature in Canto 98, is precisely an injunc-
tion to avoid such repetition without difference, to vivify language
through contact with that which is different or other than itself, namely
reality. Rose and other critics also note that Pound's poetry has an oral
dimension; punctuated by and culminating in moments of oracular
intensity, The Cantos contain numerous voices and are meant to be read
aloud. In order to counteract writing's tendency to erode cultural
memory, Pound often employs mnemonic tags, gists, and piths, the basis
of a new rite and culture. Finally, Pound would heal the division between
linguistic abstraction and concrete reality through pictorial signs such as
the ideogram, which Pound views as a vivid expression of the essence of
things. Such measures are undertaken against Hermes but also, again
paradoxically, at his behest.

**Psychoanalytic Interpretation**

It is now time to consider Hyde's psychoanalytic interpretation of the
relation between Hermes and Pound. Hyde sees Hermes as essentially a
commercial shyster, an uncanny and demonic trickster, and thinks that
Pound viewed Hermes in the same way. Thus for Hyde one of Pound's
key texts is "The Lake Isle," an amusing parody of Yeats, in which Pound
addresses Mercury (the Roman Hermes, identified preeminently with
commerce) and asks ironically for a mercantile career in a "little tobacco
shop" free of the cares of poverty and art. The tobacco shop is identified
with commercial standardization ("bright little boxes / piled up neatly
upon the shelves"), deception in weights and measures ("a pair of scales
not too greasy"), and sexual impropriety ("the whores dropping in for a
word or two in passing," SPEP, 96). Likewise the references to tobacco
and grease imply that trade is a dirty, polluting activity. Hyde argues that
Pound's harsh rejection of Hermes' "approach" had serious con-
sequences. Like any other rejected god or repressed psychic content,
Hermes grew all the more formidable and tormented Pound as his
rejected shadow-self. Instead of rejecting the shadow, says Hyde, Pound
should have integrated it with his ego. 26

Hyde's interpretation requires us to accept not only the literal reality of
the gods, in which Pound believed, but the actuality of Jungian
archetypes and a collective unconscious—reckless assumptions indeed.
For in what other sense might Hermes be said to "approach" Pound? In a
less occult sense, however, Pound does in fact "come to terms" with
Hermes. Far from repressing Hermes as his "shadow," Pound honors
him selectively and in various forms.

On the other hand, Hyde rightly notes that, despite the poem's light
and comic tone, it reflects Pound's antagonism toward commerce and
anticipates his representation of the demonic capitalist. Apart from his
attacks on abuses in retail trade, Pound charges that the filthy usurers have "brought whores" (C 45/ 230) to the sacred rites of Eleusis. Hyde is no less correct in suggesting that Pound, instead of relying heavily on a phobic and overly symbolic image of the villainous shyster, should have tried better to comprehend the economic system in its complexity: this might have prevented the violent excesses of his economic criticism, which he directed against supposed modern embodiments of the bad Hermes, such as the Jews. Yet it is unclear how Pound should have accepted this "shadow" or integrated it with his ego. Should Pound have grown more tolerant of economic malfeasance simply because he misidentified its real causes and agents? Should he have kept a shop and sat behind the till? For all his simplifications, Pound shares Luther's, Ruskin's, and Brown's legitimate insight into the "satanic" nature of modern economic life.

Hyde further argues that Pound's image of the Jews has "little to do with the Jews," being "an almost verbatim description and elaboration" or "version" of the "classical Hermes." Pound's figure of the Jews does sometimes resemble Hermes, even in ways that Hyde does not suspect.

Concentrating on Pound's Jew-Hermes as a monopolist of communication (the press), Hyde neglects the crucial relation between the Jews and Hermes as the god of writing. As Andrew Parker has shown, post-exilic Jewish culture accepts the absence of the origin, the unrecoverable presence of the first Temple. A culture of books, writing, and interpretation, it suspects semantic closure or fixed interpretation and tolerates the wandering of the sign, which Parker views as a linguistic analogue of the Jew's nomadic fate. Although Parker does not establish the connection, such physical and linguistic rootlessness has its analogue in Hermes. Here is a major reason for Pound's antagonism to Jewish culture. Just as Plato identifies Hermes' invention as a drug (pharmakon, at once remedy and poison) that clouds the minds of men, Pound blames the Jews for the linguistic and intellectual corruption of Europe. The Jewish linguistic "poison" (SP, 320) encompasses such abstract forms of writing as allegory and symbolism as well as interpretation, whereby a univocal meaning is corrupted so as to yield several meanings. Still, this resemblance would not confirm Hyde's argument for the identity of Hermes and the Jews, since Pound identifies the Jews exclusively with "bad" writing. On the other hand, Hyde does mention an instance in which he believes that Hermes and the Jews fail to correspond: "Hermes himself is not marked by the greed that Pound finds" in the Jews. But Brown has shown that endless accumulation characterizes the later, anal Hermes, the inspiration for the filthy Devil of Christian mythology, with whom the Jews were identified in the Middle Ages. In Pound the Jews are satanic hoarders and monopolists and are associated with filth and excre-
ment, symbols of anal retentiveness and greed.27

But on the whole, it is a mistake to explain away Pound’s anti-Semitism or to lessen its actuality by absorbing it into an abstract (and bloodless) archetype. Such reductionism would once again exculpate Pound’s anti-Semitism as a simple misconception, error, or mistake, when it is in truth a highly characteristic, individualistic, and disturbing element in Pound’s ideology. Hyde has added one more fruitless contribution to the long list of sometimes ingenious apologetics for Pound’s anti-Semitism.

It is unclear how the Jews in Pound are an “almost verbatim description of the classical Hermes,” for there is no simple description that one might quote. Pound’s anti-Semitism is based on a powerful hatred for certain essential features of Jewish religion and culture, features which Pound largely understood and for which there is no analogue in Greek paganism.28 Among these are monotheism, denial of the concept of the saints and the “mother of god,” and the rejection of religious images. What underlies the equation of Pound’s Jew with the classical Hermes is, first, the virtual reduction of Hermes to commerce, and, second, the false assumption common to Pound criticism, that Pound’s anti-Semitism is mainly economic. Once one makes these assumptions, all the links fall into place. Like Hermes, the European Jew has often been a merchant and homeless wanderer. Being a stranger among strangers, he has often an uncanny, demonic aspect. Being associated with money and usury, he stands in the common mind for individualistic, anti-social gain. But despite these resemblances, all of which Pound evokes, Hermes has never been associated with a great variety of religious and cultural practices for which Pound condemns the Jews: the spreading of diseases,29 hatred of light, sexual deviance, the racial and biological contamination of Europe, tribalism, the Protestant religion in all its presumed sadistic and repressive evil, hatred of nature, cultural sterility—a host of accusations that escape Hyde’s narrow equation and that may be traced not to paganism but to medieval, Enlightenment, and modern sources.

The anti-Semitic accusations that Pound (and Hitler) draw upon from post-classical sources have only a few analogues in the classical Hermes. Nor is there a significant connection between Hermes and the anti-Semitic cultural mythologies that Pound derives from Voltaire, Thaddeus Zielinski, and other writers.30 Pound’s anti-Semitism must be understood not as an archetype but as a varied constellation of beliefs in their historical and personal specificity, lest Pound’s hatred, through its absorption into mythology, itself come to be treated merely as a myth.

Notes

1 The following is a list of abbreviations of works by Ezra Pound cited in
For Pound's representation of the gods as immanent in phenomena, see Canto 2; see also his discussion of Allen Upward in SP, 407-408.


4 See Norman O. Brown, Hermes the Thief: The Evolution of a Myth (Madison, Wisconsin: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1947), pp. 3-51.

5 Brown, pp. 52-132. For Diomedes' and Glaucus' heroic exchange of gifts, see The Iliad, Vol. I, ed. and trans. A. T. Murray (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1937), Book VI, 11. 232-236. This exchange, though, is not perfect, for Zeus takes away Glaucus' wits which causes him to trade gold armor for bronze.


8 However, despite similar properties and associations, Hermes' golden wand is not to be confused with the golden bough in Book Six of The Aeneid. On Hermes' rod, see Brown, pp. 15, 17n.


phallic-shaped herm not as a symbol of fertility but as an apotropaic charm. He further denies that the fact that Hermes is chthonic, like Demeter, also signifies fertility. See Brown, pp. 14, 14n, 34, 34n, 35, 35n, 36, 36n. Pound, however, identified Hermes with fertility (as in Canto 79), as have many scholars down to the present.


12 See Pound, “Hell,” in LE, pp. 212–213. Discussing the blemished character of Ulysses (Odysseus) in Canto 26 of the Inferno, Pound mentions his “perfectly useless, trifling, unprovoked sack” of the Cicones in the Odyssey as well as that Dante “definitely accents the theft of the Palladium.” There is a “crime and punishment motif to the Odyssey.”

13 On Pound and the Physiocrats, see Carroll F. Terrell, A Companion to The Cantos of Ezra Pound, I (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980), p. 200; for Pound’s autarchism, see SP, pp. 245, 279, 341.


17 For Thales, see SP, 172; C 77/ 468. Demosthenes’ oration against Zenothemes’ attempt to defraud creditors is alluded to in C 43/ 218, in the phrase “Out of Syracuse.”

18 In the radio broadcasts the Jewish usurer is linked with Wall Street and is the enemy of agriculture, the peasant, and the homestead; see RB, 5, 22, 31–32, 71, 72, 73, 152, 155, 164, 165, 175–176.

19 For Pound on agriculture as the basis of civilization and the key to clear distinctions, see my “Anti-Semitism, Castration, and Usury in Ezra Pound,” Criticism, 25 (Summer, 1983), pp. 243–244, 251–255.

20 Hermes’ cognate figure in early Chinese civilization is the governor Souan Yen (fl. 2722 B.C.), mentioned in Canto 53, who taught the Chinese how to make “signs out of bird tracks” (C 53/ 262). Hermes is also the god of oratory, a skill which he manifests even as an infant in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes.

21 This discussion is indebted to Brooke-Rose, A ZBC of Ezra Pound (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1971), pp. 148–150, and Jacques Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” in Dissemination, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 63–171. During the late classical period Thoth became known as Hermes Trismegistus, the supposed author (in Greek) of a number of influential philosophical writings which entered European culture through Marsilio Ficino.
Hermes has nothing to do with the classical god and is ignored in this essay. It is possible, however, that Pound was influenced by these hermetic works, which were known to G. R. S. Mead and other mystical writers with whom Pound had contact during his London years. On Hermes Trismegistus in the West, see Ernest Lee Tuveson, *The Avatars of Thrice-Great Hermes: An Approach to Romanticism* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1982), *passim*.


23 For Ruskin on Hermes as the god of clouds, see *Works*, Volume 19, pp. 322, 324; Volume 20, pp. 145, 150-151. Ruskin was obsessed by clouds not only for their beauty but as symbols of human ignorance, phantasmatic delusion, and the deceptiveness of life.


27 Hyde notes that there is no equivalent to the charge of disease which Pound levels against the Jews, but argues vaguely that the accusation is relevant to Pound’s Hermes; for what is repressed supposedly becomes associated with disease. In all probability Pound’s accusations of Jewish disease trace historically to the Middle Ages, when Jews, conceived as devils, were charged with spreading plague. See Hyde, *The Gift*, p. 251.

Mythic and Archetypal Methods: a Reading of Canto IV

Alan Williamson

The "mythic method" of the great modernists, like other conventions peculiarly rooted in the unquestioned assumptions of their age, grows more and not less mysterious with the passage of time. T. S. Eliot, in his famous essay on Joyce, taught readers to see the method as an essentially moral convention, in which the past provides a standard for, brings "order" to, a present viewed with suspicion and hostility. He refers to "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history." The relation between the now and the then is primarily ironic, and it was in that light that most early commentators read Eliot's The Waste Land and James Joyce's Ulysses.

But when hatred of the present, and unqualified praise for "order," ceased to be unquestionable premises, we began to wonder if that was really what—or all—the modernists were about. When the protagonist of The Waste Land finds the injunction of the thunder, from the Upanishads, partly fulfilled in the most risky and unwarrantable passages of his own life—"The awful daring of a moment's surrender" by which "only, we have existed"—Eliot's own sense of where value resides, whether in the past or in the self, in order or in disorder, becomes more problematic, and richer, than we had thought.

Ezra Pound is ready enough to instruct us, quite explicitly, with superior examples from past history. But when he turns to the less explicit method of a mythic overlay of two periods and two stories, he shows the difficulties of the mythic method—as well as showing an anarchic, ecstatic possibility in it by archetypal appeals—much more clearly than the early Eliot does.
The overlay of a classical and a Provençal story in *Canto IV* will serve to illustrate the point. The Lady Seremonda, wife of Raimon de Castel Rossilho, has an affair with a troubadour named Cabestan. Raimon finds out, kills Cabestan, and has his heart cooked up and served to Seremonda, who, when she finds out what she has eaten, throws herself out of a tower window. The cannibalistic retaliation suggests the story of Procris, who feeds her son Itys to her husband, Terreus, to punish him for the rape and mutilation of her sister Philomela—after which they are all transformed into birds. (The story, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, also figures in *The Waste Land*.)

The parallel between the Canto's story and the Ovid one is immediately difficult, if approached in moral terms. In Ovid, the husband is the target of the revenge; but his sexual offense is so terrible that we sympathize with the wife, even though she kills her own child. In the troubadour story, the sexual offense is sympathetic, and the husband—who is now the perpetrator, not the victim, of the cannibalistic meal—remains the villain. But if, instead of looking for moral or even narrative parallels, we ask what gives the juxtaposition its poetic energy, the comparisons gain power. For that energy lies entirely in two things: a pun on the name "Itys" and the words "It is"; and the association of Seremonda's mode of suicide with bird-metamorphosis:

And she went toward the window and cast her down,
   'All the while, the while, swallows crying:
   Ityn!
   'It is Cabestan's heart in the dish.'
   'It is Cabestan's heart in the dish?'
   'No other taste shall change this.'
And she went toward the window,
   the slim white stone bar
Making a double arch;
Firm even fingers held to the firm pale stone:
Swung for a moment,
   and the wind out of Rhodez
Caught in the full of her sleeve.
   . . . the swallows crying:
   'Tis. 'Tis. Ytis!

There is no judgment, and almost no horror. There is the lady almost playfully swinging in the window; birds, bird-calls, the sleeve like a wing; winds and the distances they come out of—an ideogram of untrammeled erotic energy, released or perfected at the moment of death.

The passage will form a larger ideogram, later, with two other passages of equal intensity. The first is the Chinese parable in which a courtier
flatters his king by telling him he owns the wind:

So-Gioku, saying:
'This wind is the king's wind,
This wind is wind of the palace,
Shaking imperial water-jets.'
That Ran-ti opened his collar:
'This wind roars in the earth's bag,
it lays the water with rushes;
No wind is the king's wind.
Let every cow keep her calf.'

The king, unlike Raimon, wisely refuses to own the uncontrollable. A few lines later the phrase "What wind is the king's" recurs in conjunction with Danae, who, like Seremonda, was locked away in a tower, but whose lover was a god and impregnated her in the form of a "golden rain." By this exquisite series of modulations, the transcendent aspect of Seremonda's suicide is more and more emphasized, until it is associated with the Canto's climactic vision of Pound's equivalent of the Platonic realm of Forms, the raining sunlight, idea and energy at once, "the liquid and rushing crystal / beneath the knees of the gods."

And here I must hesitantly take issue with a man whose knowledge of Pound and Pound's sources is infinitely greater than mine, Professor Guy Davenport. Impressed with the "impiety" and "havoc" of both the Cabestan and the Terreus stories, Davenport is inclined to place the story of Danae—set, be it noted, in Pound's ideal city of Ecbatan—against them as a moral norm. To do so, he puts much store by a conjunction. The passage in question is this:

Cabestan, Terreus,
It is Cabestan's heart in the dish,
Vidal, or Ecbatan, upon the gilded tower in Ecbatan
Lay the god's bride, lay ever, waiting the golden rain.

Davenport's commentary, in Cities on Hills, is as follows:

Follow rapidly Cabestan the eaten, Tereus the rapist, Vidal the dangerous fool. "OR Ecbatan;" the conjunction differentiates between order and its loss.

With all respect, I cannot quite accept this reading of the conjunction—or that "order and its loss" is really the issue. The sequence of modulations connecting Seremonda's "wind out of Rhodes" with Danae's "golden rain" leads to the inescapable conclusion that both deal not with "order"
but with what order cannot contain: the mysterious and transcendent "light" that "rains"—at once sexual energy and Platonic Idea—of the visionary central stanza.

The point of my divergence from Davenport is that Pound's juxtapositions need to be read not by a "mythic method," in which the early period sets the standard for the later one, but by an archetypal method, in which the norm is beyond history, beyond consciousness, and in which all ages are equal—equally to be valued, equally incomplete—in their approaches to it.

The final movement of Canto IV constitutes in a way a large metaphor for the archetypal vision. First there are the two rivers, the "Adige, thin film of images," recalling the river that flows "beneath the knees of the gods," and the more opaque, earthly river, "The Garonne ... thick like paint." Then, beside the Garonne, the procession, a river of people, in which the phrase "Salve regina"—or, to be exact, "sa'ave Regina"—"Moves like a worm, in the crowd." This movement offers an image for the whole movement of the Canto: the figure of marriage to a god, of a saving Eros, disappearing and reappearing, always distorted by the local dialect, in the human river of history, that mirrors and distorts the celestial river. In this context, the last lines of the canto—"And we sit here ... / there in the arena ..."—take on a new meaning. It is our position as spectators that changes through history; the spectacle itself remains unchanged.

The term "archetypal" is used here mainly to emphasize the timeless, ahistorical final level of Pound's mythic overlay—not to invoke specific archetypes of Jungian or any other psychology. And yet there are intriguing similarities between Pound's thought and Jung's concerning the realm of Forms. According to Jung's "On the Nature of the Psyche," archetypes, like biological instincts, are beyond the reach of consciousness, "irrepresentable." The endless "representations (images and ideas)" they generate—which are our only evidence that archetypes exist—"should not be confused with the archetype as such." Although Jung conceives of archetypes and instincts as opposite poles of the psyche—the purely spiritual and the purely material—they are not unconnected, for him. The "numinous" archetypal image, being an object of longing or fascination, is one way that instinct is given form and allowed to enter consciousness. The archetype is both an "image" and a "dynamism." As a dynamism it involves instinct, so that in Jung's color symbolism the archetype is represented as violet, a blend of red (passion) and blue (spirit).

Pound's way of thinking and Jung's have two rather striking similarities. The first is that Pound's Platonic realm is neither purely idea ("crystal") nor purely energy ("liquid and rushing"), but both at once. And it is everywhere compounded with instinct. The "light" that "rains,"
"The liquid and rushing crystal / beneath the knees of the gods," is a sexual fluid, as the Danae story makes clear, and as Davenport elucidates: "Knees were holy to Greeks (one supplicated by grasping them, one swore by them); in them was the same potent and fertile liquid as in the testicles and the head—Greeks thought with the heart and lungs." One could hardly find a better metaphor for the Jungian conception of the mind than this idea that the highest and lowest parts of the body meet, in a pure, almost formless, generative principle, whereas thinking is done in an intermediate, more contingent place.

But, in addition to Davenport's point, the river of light runs "beneath the knees of the gods" because the gods themselves, like Jung's archetypes, are "irrepresentable." What appears in consciousness is only a "thin film of images," an ever-changing, "shallow eddying fluid."

The second intriguing point of coincidence between Pound's thought and Jung's is the danger that attends the encounter with the archetype. This peril is an insistent theme in the early Cantos: Dionysus and the sailors, Dionysus and Pentheus in Canto II; the murder of Ignez da Castro in Canto III. It is this element in Canto IV—the "impiety" and "havoc"—that inclines Davenport, despite his keen sense of the numinous, to a moralizing reading. To reject such a reading, however, does not necessarily lead to a Jungian one. The Freudian explanation, for instance, would be that the eroticized encounter with the divine takes from an original Oedipal paradigm both the aggrandizement of feeling and the sense that punishment must accompany—and, in a way, permit—the fulfillment of desire.

But Jung's explanation is more philosophically consoling, though not necessarily incompatible with Freud's, and would have appealed more to Pound. Jung contends that archetypes are not meant actually to enter into life, except as a kind of signpost, an indication of direction. The dialectic between the ego, the principle of individuation, and the archetypal principle is not meant to be resolved. Those who believe that their individual experience is archetypal experience die or go mad—like the man in Jung's "The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious" who breaks into an observatory because he has had such a powerful intuition of the stars as the beauty and love missing in his life. Such a "literalization of the image"—to borrow a phrase from Robert Hass⁴—appears in the other troubadour story in Canto IV, the story of Vidal, who almost suffers the fate of Actaeon when he dresses himself up as his lady's totem animal, the wolf. The Vidal story offers a kind of double plot, a comic transposition of the high tragedy of Seremonda, the sacred marriage of Danae. It underlines our sense that to be at the boundary of the human and the superhuman is dangerous, inundating, demonizing to the individuated psyche—though without such experiences there would be no religion, no art.
Perhaps that sense of danger is one reason that Pound so insistently stressed his own firmness, classicism, extroversion, and insistently denied (as some of his critics go on denying) the Romantic or psychological character of his art. If that is so, he did not escape demonic possession; it came to him in rational disguise. But for those who are not professional Poundians, the poetic fascination of the *Cantos* lies—apart from the confessional element, from Pisa on—mainly in their Romantic side: the sense of the numinous; the archetypal energy lurking in the sacred places; the dangerous, erotic, revivifying boundary-areas of experience.

**Notes**


Metre and Translation in Pound’s Women of Trachis

Marianina Olcott

In Guide to Kulchur Pound states that... “if one greek [sic] play can claim preeminence over the best dozen others (which probably it cannot) that play wd. [sic] be the the Agamemnon.”

But when he turned his own hand to translating a Greek tragedy, the play he chose to confront was The Women of Trachis, a play infrequently studied and even less frequently performed, by a playwright, Sophocles, whom Pound came to appreciate only in later years. Furthermore, that the play was translated during Pound’s ten-year incarceration in St. Elizabeths Hospital in a ward for the criminally insane should alert us that this opus should not be dismissed as a mere hobby nor as something dashed off to set the academic establishment aflutter, although it certainly did. Rather, Hugh Kenner and Eva Hesse have remarked on Pound’s personal involvement with the material. To Kenner, “We cannot doubt that the Mask Heracles is Pound’s persona, strange, remote, primitive....” And Hesse calls Pound’s version of the play “stark autobiographischen.”

In Heracles’ death agony, then, we are perhaps meant to see expressed symbolically the agony of Pound’s own situation. Here is not the place to argue either Pound’s position or the government’s. Rather I would like to consider the play from Pound’s view of reality however distorted that point of view may be. For example, that Heracles’ agony is the tragic consequence of a love potion gone wrong may perhaps for Pound have stood for the tragic mistake of his own predicament. Indeed, Heracles, the central figure of The Women of Trachis, represents the tragic hero as suffering
in ways no other Greek dramatic figure does.

In opening portions of Sophocles' play, a messenger announces that Heracles is on his way home, having successfully accomplished the last of his twelve labors, the campaign against King Eurytus (1.80ff; 180 ff); from this time on Heracles is destined, according to a prophecy from Zeus, to live in peace and security or to die. Pound's own situation could obviously have found a parallel in that of the ancient hero.

Having survived World War II, which could be seen as a parallel to the completion of Heracles' labors, Pound is brought home to stand trial for treason. Next, convicted of treason, he is imprisoned in a hospital for the criminally insane. A typical day at St. Elizabeths, which brought constant assault to Pound's sensibilities, which might well find a parallel in Heracles' death agonies that are the tragic consequence of his wife's mistake. She, Deianira, in an attempt to rekindle Heracles' love, sends to him, on his triumphant way home from his last battle, a garment dipped in a love potion that she believes will help her to recapture her husband's attentions. In reality, the potion, brewed from the blood of the centaur Nessus, will cause Heracles to die in agony as he curses his wife. Thus the play revolves around twin ironies; first, that of a man who thought as he proceeded home triumphantly that his sorrows had ended. And so they had. But their end was death not happiness. The second irony concerns Deianira who hopes to regain his love, but instead gains only his curses (and those of her son, also) and causes his death.

Perhaps Pound saw in this double tragedy aspects of his own situation. Like Heracles, his own "labors" had not come to a happy end: ten years in St. Elizabeths would forever haunt him. And it may be that in the tragedy of the cursed and rejected Deianira he saw reflected his own humiliation and rejection. Clearly if Pound's choice of The Women of Trachis was a way for him to express through the metaphor of the play this tragic phase of his own life, that translation warrants much more serious and extensive discussion than it has so far been given.6

The Critical Literature

Critical literature on Pound's The Women of Trachis has been both scarce and sporadic; usually one finds such comment only in brief references in books or articles devoted to Pound.7 Succinct dismissals marked the popular critics.8 The two most extensive discussions of Pound's translation are Hugh Kenner's review of the work in Poetry, July, 1957, and two articles by H. A. Mason "The Women of Trachis," Parts I and II.9 Neither author, however, comes to grips with the value of Pound's translation in any systematic way, preferring for the most part merely to quote other translators' renderings of select passages as examples of bad translation. But aside from a few references to the actual Greek,9 Mason, whose
appreciation is more concrete in its approach than Kenner's, never systematically compares the various translations using the Greek text as arbiter, even though in his view:

The surprising merits of Pound's "Women of Trachis" will come out best when the Greek text is printed opposite Pound's...\footnote{10}

Any precise estimation of Pound's achievement demands a close comparison of the Greek with Pound's translation. Furthermore, comparison must be made not only with the text of the Greek but also with the meres of the Greek. Finally, the best way to estimate Pound's accomplishment as translator is to view his renderings of the choral lyrics rather than the iambic portions of the dialogue because, as Mason has noted,\footnote{11} Pound achieved only a qualified success with the latter. Despite the opening remarks to Pound's translation, where the editor, S. V. Janowski, states:\footnote{12} "Pound's choruses are a creation of his own in both language and in rhythm," it is my contention that Pound did not use his words without connection to the text. Rather, Pound presents an acceptable rendering of the Greek text of the choral lyric portions. Certainly, his is no freer than the other translations offered for comparison. But perhaps what is more important and least analyzed is his ability to represent so well the meres of the choral lyrics of the Greek original.

While his own poetic sensibility led him to appreciate the rhythms of the Greek original, that same sensibility cautioned him against trying to render those meres in a language, English, inappropriate to the complexity of the Greek. Rather, Pound in his translation both of Greek text and Greek meres "interpreted" that text in what he himself described as:

\begin{quote}
... an absolute rhythm... a rhythm that is in poetry which corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed. A man's rhythm must be interpretive; it will be, therefore, in the end his own, uncounterfeiting, uncounterfeitable.\footnote{13}
\end{quote}

Thus since Sophocles' rhythms were impossible to copy exactly, Pound as the translator needed to interpret the rhythmical text in his own terms, but in terms that somehow still reflect the Greek original. His achievement, then, in The Women of Trachis is not so much concerned with the text of the Greek as with the rhythmical text of the Greek choral lyrics.

The choral section chosen for comment, 517–530, is crucial to the understanding of Sophocles' play; for in it the chorus offers to the audience the myth of Heracles' fight with the Centaur Nessus who has just attempted to rape Deianira, Heracles' young bride. And it will be the
blood of the dying Nessus which Deianira, who has been fooled into thinking it is a powerful love charm, will use in an effort to recapture Heracles’ lost love but instead she will tragically destroy her husband. Thus, this epode is well suited as the focus for our discussion because of the tone of doom that also characterized Pound’s own situation.

In so far as translation from the Greek is concerned, a consideration of an extremely literal translation, 1 A, (see illustration) will show that R. C. Jebb’s translation, 14 3, and Jameson’s, 1 5 5, are very close to a literal reading of the Greek. However, they lack the terseness of that language. For example 1.519 in the Greek reads:

ταυ ρειων τ’ άνάμυγδα κεράτων.

These three words are rendered by Jebb as:

and the noise [not in the Greek] of a bull’s horns therewith.

Jameson’s economical and apt “and confusion of bulls’ horns” 1.2, is marred by the insistent use of “and” five times in his translation while the Greek uses the less obtrusive postpositive δὲ as a connective only three times. Although Storr’s translation, 4, 16 “crash of horns” is equally terse, subsequent lines are flawed by his frequent departures from the Greek original. For example, lines 5, 6, and 11 of his translation have no counterpart in the Greek text. In addition in numerous places, Storr adds words to complete his translation. Admittedly Pound’s rendition of the Greek noun 1.525 ακοιταυ (which literally means “bed-fellow” or “husband”) by “to stave her and prove her” 1.13 is a bit strong and can also be faulted for over-expansion. However, this phrase of Pound’s does capture some of the intent of the scene as a whole. On the other hand, Pound’s rendition of ἀμφινεικτητον 1.527 by “prized for a day” 1.16 is clearly an improvement over Jameson’s prosaic “over whom they fought” 1.10. Storr omits the word entirely while Jebb’s “the prize of the strife” is somewhat archaic. Finally, Pound’s rendition of εὔοπτος 1.524 by “wide-eyed” 1.9 is clearly superior to Jameson’s “with the lovely eyes” 1.7. Meanwhile, both Jebb and Storr omit that word entirely from their translations.

Metric Superiority

When attention is turned to metrics, Pound’s superiority to the other translators as a transmitter of ancient rhythms becomes immediately obvious. And it is in this last area that the strongest claims can be made for Pound as an outstanding translator of Greek poetry. A close comparison of the metres of the other translations will show that only Pound’s rendi-
Then there was of hand and bow a clattering and a纷 up of bulls' horns; and there were inter-twined grapples and there were fatal blows of the foreheads and a groaning to both.

But the fine-eyed dainty one stood on the hill, waiting for her husband-to-be.

Then she was gone from her mother, like a calf that is lost.

Comparison of Translations
tion approximates the rhythms of the Greek.

Jebb’s translation can be at once discounted since it is prose. Jameson’s rendition is reminiscent of Pound’s own words from “A Retrospect”: 17

Do not retell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose. Don’t think that any intelligent person is going to be deceived when you try to shirk all the difficulties of the unspeakably difficult art of good prose by chopping your composition into line lengths.

For my own part, I have great difficulty scanning Jameson’s version. As for Storr’s remarkably Housmanesque rendition, perhaps the less said the better, but it may be noted that Storr’s employment of rhyme a/a/a/a/b/b// is in complete contradiction to classical Greek and Latin poetry, neither of which ever employs rhyme.

When, however, we consider the scansion of the Greek text, we note an opening rush of double shorts balanced by a series of pendant closes (double long) in lines 517, 518, 519, 521, 523.

This rhythmic series called aeolo-choriambic 18 by the ancient Alexandrian metricians is approximated quite well in Pound’s translation 1.1 through 8. Here again a quote from Pound is appropriate:

I think progress lies rather in an attempt to approximate classical quantitative meters not to copy them. . . . 19

At 1.9 both Pound and Sophocles mark the shift in perspective from the males fighting to the maiden Deianira by a sharp change in rhythm. In the Greek, two successive baccaics with molossus 523–524 in an aeolic environment have already excited comment by the foremost modern scholar on Greek lyric metres, A. M. Dale. 20 Here the slower rhythms of the Greek 1.523 are neatly approximated, in the succession of three stresses of the trochaic opening to Pound’s 1.9. Pound’s 1.12 continues the slower rhythms of the Greek with a series of four stressed or long syllables, “who shall have her?”

Line 13 “to stave her and prove her” appears to be influenced by the Greek meters of 526 and 527. And Pound’s 1.14, 15, and 16 echo the scansion of the Greek metrics l. 530. Again a quote from Pound finds illustration in this section:

. . . I believe in an absolute rhythm. A rhythm, that is in poetry, which corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed. A man’s rhythm must be interpretative. . . . 21
Finally once again Pound’s own words on the art of poetry may be applied to him as a transmitter and translator of Greek choral lyrics by way of showing his notable skills. To read aloud Pound’s version of the epode 516–530 provides a clear expression of what Pound meant by melopoeia:

Melopoeia is that kind of poetry wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning.

Melopoeia is admirably reflected in many of Pound’s lines, such as:

Slug, grunt and groan...

and

But the wide-eyed girl on the hill out of it all, frail.

Notes

3 E. Pound, The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound; T. S. Eliot, ed. (New York: New Directions 1968) 27n. “E. P.’s later and unpublished notes revise all this in so far as they demand much greater recognition of Sophokles.”
4 See B. Dick, Classical World 54, 1961, (236–237)
7 For example, Hesse, op.cit, 30, 107 et passim. Kenner, op.cit. 150, 217.
8 From The Times, Nov. 23, 1962, see above. “It is difficult to decide
whether the thing produced amounts to any thing but Pound foolishness."


10 See Mason, Trachis Pt. II p. 144 et. seq.

11 Mason, Anthology; p. 287. There is no doubt that the dialogue portions of the play do not present a uniform excellence in Pound’s translation. Mason’s discussion of Pound’s qualified success in translating the iambic dialogue portions is recommended.


13 Pound, Literary Essays, p. 9


16 F. Storr, Sophocles: Trachiniae in Complete Plays; (New York: Loeb Classics 1924).

17 E. Pound, Literary Essays, p. 5.


19 Pound, Literary Essays, p. 13. Pound dates the comment "20 Aug. 1917".


21 This reference is from Pound, Literary Essays, p. 9; the ensuing is from p. 25.
Ezra Pound and *Trobar Clus*

Carl Grundberg

In his essay, "Psychology and Troubadours," written about 1916, Ezra Pound probes the inner meaning of the troubadour love lyric. He finds a ritual, mystical significance encoded in that tendency of troubadour verse called *trobar clus*.

What is *trobar clus*? In a technical sense, it is one of about twelve styles or textures of the courtly lyric, categories mentioned in passing by the troubadours themselves. Other examples include *trobar ric*, *trobar prim*, *trobar braus*, and *trobar leu*. The specific meaning of all these terms is elusive; perhaps the best analysis is in Linda Paterson's book, *Troubadours and Eloquence*.¹ There is no real agreement among scholars concerning which troubadours and which lyrics fall into which category, or even if such categories should be taken seriously.

*Trobar clus* refers in a general way to the closed, obscure, or hermetic style of composing. Since different courtly lyrics have appeared obscure to different readers, from the troubadours' time to our own, the definition is necessarily fluid. It seems most fruitful to take Pound's lead, to understand *trobar clus* not as a convenient trough into which various poets and lyrics may be shoved but as a living quality that may be recognized on various levels of meaning.

The literal definitions of the two words *trobar* and *clus* begin to open up a wider view.

The word *trobar*, in Old Occitan, means to invent, to compose, to make, in relation to the act of poetry. The craft of the maker is emphasized, skill at both words and music. *Trobar* as understood by the troubadours means *work*, like carving a statue. It requires a feeling for one's materials and a flair for invention. Arnaut Daniel, for instance, speaks of planing and finishing his words, polishing them with his file. (*En cest sonet coind'e leri. He borrowed the file image from Raimbaut d'Aurenga's Cars dous efenhs.*)
In the razos, the legendary biographies of the troubadours, the highest judgment of a poet's work is given in the phrase, saup ben trobar, "he knew how to compose well."

There is more to it, however. Back of this special definition of the word trobar lies the root meaning: "to find." Trobar bos motz e guis sons, "to compose good words and gay sounds," was also to find the right words, to find the right sounds, to find the right combination of both.

To find something means that the finder must be searching. To search means that the searcher must be moving, moving through the unknown. To search means that everything must be looked at in a new way, so that the familiar becomes unfamiliar.

Trobar, then, is necessarily a function of what Pound calls the "germinal" consciousness. It does not know in advance where it is going. The creative act becomes quest, a journey with no goal in sight.

Trobar could be expressed in different ways. In Arnaut Daniel's verse, aleatory firecrackers of sound lead one to another, carrying the sense of the poem on a breathless ride. Bernart de Ventadorn, rejected by his lady, shuffles off poetically into wretched exile, no sai on—he knows not whither. "It grieves me," says Raimbaut d'Aurenga to his fellow poet Giraut de Bornelh, "it grieves me that you're leaving already for another court, and in the dead of winter." Like the Grail knights, the troubadours had to keep moving, in search of an elusive brightness.

It can be seen how the spirit of trobar pervades Ezra Pound's life work. The singleminded pursuit of craft in the early years, of whatever will work in the poem, leads to the beginning of the Cantos. At that point a ship is launched outward to an unknown and uncertain destination. Pound as Odysseus finds he must relinquish control of the ship to the ship. His advice to Robert Duncan is indicative: "Follow the tone-leading of vowels." Trobar means the poem is free to wander as its own emerging articulations guide it, beyond the control of the maker.

Trobar, to find. Paradoxically, finding means losing. The music of the poem carries the poet's mind out of itself. "I have lost myself," Bernart de Ventadorn cries, "as fair Narcissus lost himself in the fountain." Raimbaut d'Aurenga, at the end of a poetic debate, declares that he doesn't know anymore what he's talking about. The troubadour Peire Vidal, so the dubious legend relates, goes mad with love and poetry, dons wolfskin and flees to the hills on all fours.

Ezra Pound, having gone through his own storms of madness, declares at the end, "I cannot make it cohere." But again: "it coheres all right." The path is the body of the god.

Let us return now to the word clus. The term is usually translated "obscure," but a more literal translation might be "closed" or "sealed up." Clusa means "an enclosure". Related words are claure, to keep hidden,
and clau, a key, to open up what is hidden.

The quality of clus has the nature of a riddle: not saying all that one means, or veiling it, or disguising it, or simply saying it but without explanation—"direct presentation," as Pound would say. This hide-and-seek quality can operate on many levels, from the most microscopically technical facts of prosody to the widest considerations of meaning.

A genre exists in troubadour verse called the devinalh, or riddle poem. The first known troubadour, Guilhem IX, composed a humorous variation on the devinalh form, Parai un vers de dreyt nien, "I will make a vers of simply nothing." After a series of gnomic non sequiturs, stanza after stanza, Guilhem closes with a tornada or envoy: "I’ve made the vers, I don’t know what about, and I’ll pass it on to someone, who’ll pass it on to someone else near Anjou,—

que m tramezes del sieu estuy
la contraclau

—and let him send me from (or for) his little box, the passkey."

The nervous sensibility of the troubadours loved the complications of their craft. Raimbaut d’Aurenga, a self-described proponent of trobar clus, writes:

Cars, bruns e tenhz motz entrebesc
Pensius—pensanz . . .

"Thoughtfully thinking, I intertwine words, rare, dark, and highly colored . . ."

On a technical level, trobar clus is sometimes defined by its lexicon: using out-of-the-ordinary words. One can also find a clus quality in devious syntax such as Raimbaut often uses. The aural picture can be clus—for example, the rhyme form called rima esparsa, in which no apparent end rhyme exists within a stanza—each line is answered only by the corresponding line in all the other stanzas of the poem, so that rhyme haunts the poem while remaining invisible. The landscape of sound is so highly charged in many courtly lyrics that the linear sense of the words breaks into pieces: each syllable asserts its own independent presence (much as did the obstreperous troubadour Bertran de Born).

There is more to the meaning of clus, however, than a display of cleverness in composing. Pound writes:

No student of the period can doubt that the involved forms, and the veiled meanings in the "trobar clus," grew out of living conditions, and that these songs played a very real part in love intrigue and in the intrigue preceding warfare. 3
So far, so good. Even the most sober Provençal scholars admit some connection between the troubadour lyric and the social fabric in which it grew. As Frederick Goldin has pointed out, a certain complication and multiplication of meaning result when the troubadour is called upon to address simultaneously the various members of the courtly goldfish bowl.

Pound, however, goes much further. The love lyric of trobar clus, he declares in “Psychology and Troubadours,” “is a ritual. It must be conceived and approached as ritual. It has its purpose and effect. These are different from those of simple song. They are perhaps subtler. They make their revelations to those who are already expert.”

Expert in what? Pound is considering more than verse form here. He is tackling the great unsolved mystery at the core of the troubadour lyric: fin’ amors, what has come to be labeled “courtly love” or “the love code.”

One must understand first of all that not all troubadour verse is love poetry. The troubadours sang about every part of human existence, from food to politics to catching colds. The classic troubadour love lyric, however, such as Bernart de Ventadorn’s verse, is devotional poetry, in the same way Rumi’s or Kabir’s or Hildegarde of Bingen’s verse is devotional. It is directed to a beloved who is perceived as having the power to transform utterly the life of the lover, to carry him or her to a different plane of existence.

Pound saw fin’ amors as a mutual magical practice between men and women: sexuality as gnosis. It is the human alchemy by which the body of fire becomes the body of light, passion becomes vision. Again, from “Psychology and Troubadours”: “surely we come to this place where the ecstasy is not a whirl or a madness of the senses, but a glow arising from the exact nature of the perception.” And again: “Sex is, that is to say, of a double function and purpose, reproductive and educational; or, as we see in the realm of fluid force, one sort of vibration produces at different intensities, heat and light.”

Pound speculates what sources underlie this encoded ritual, and finds, among others, the Greek mystery cults. He assumes a Mediterranean culture whose mysteries combine and wash up on different shores. The important point is the survival of inner traditions that speak to a certain heightened sensibility that can recognize them.

Pound’s recipe for what went into the love code may be distorted or deficient in its details, but no one can deny that the Occitan culture of the 12th to 13th centuries was a soup of different hidden traditions. It was a tolerant landscape in which Catharist heretics, Jewish Kabbalists, heterodox troubadours, and an instinctively pagan peasantry could live side by side, for a brief moment of history.

The importance of all this in terms of clus has to do with the sense of
such traditions require, sacred ground fenced off from the outside. When the tradition goes underground, the physical *temenos* becomes a state of mind evoked by certain cues. The boundary may be an apparent obscurity, a riddle the mind must leap. It functions both to protect the mystery from outside attack by the ignorant and to provide a concentrated intensity in which events can happen that cannot happen otherwise.

A dance song has made its way into the canon of troubadour poetry, a version based on folk ritual practices held on May first in Southern France and elsewhere, to welcome in the spring. Its first line reads *A l’entrada del tens clar*: at the coming in of the clear season, or the season of light. The song describes a ring of girls dancing around a central figure, a slightly older woman elected to be *la regina avrillosa*, the “Aprilish” queen. While celebrating the voluptuousness and power of the queen as the embodiment of spring, the girls take care to defend their charmed circle from another ritual figure—*gilos*, the jealous one, the aged king of winter who skulks around the circle’s perimeter. The chorus sings:

> On your way, on your way, jealous one,  
> let us be, let us be,  
> to dance among ourselves, among ourselves, among ourselves!

A smooth young bachelor, however, may be granted admittance, to dance with the queen. Presumably in the ritual’s earliest pagan forms, the two figures inside the ring did much more than dance.

That this kind of song made its way into early anthologies, side by side with the most sophisticated courtly lyrics, means that the devotees of *fin’amors* felt a rhyme between their own practices and the Mayday celebrations of the peasants. The description of spring blossoming and the figure of *gilos*, the jealous one, are constant formulaic motifs in troubadour verse.

Within the boundaries of the ring the season of light can begin to hold court. The vision of the Earthly Paradise haunts the medieval mind. “Paradise,” it should be remembered, comes from a Persian word meaning a garden or park surrounded by a wall.

In poetry marked by the quality of *clus*, whether that of Pound or the troubadours, the wall of the garden is the texture of the verse itself. The repetitious formulas of the troubadours, the puzzling fragments of learning that compose the *Cantos*, all form a barrier to comprehension that the mind must overleap. The key is close attention to what Pound called “the subtle joints of the craft.”

“There are distinctions in clarity,” he writes in *Canto 84*. And from an earlier poem, “The Flame”:  

123
There is the subtler music, the clear light
where time burns back about th'eternal embers.\(^6\)

This is a music of overtones and undertones, of meaning beneath or above meaning. "The Princess Ra-Set... has entered the protection of crystal." Within the boundaries of protection, paradoxically, the language of light dissolves the solidity of boundaries. Articulations occur as movements of emotional force, ever circling. Usura, the stagnation and thickening of power into possession, dissolves. "We have gone forth beyond your bonds and borders."\(^8\)

Hugh Kenner relates how Ezra Pound, upon his arrest by Italian partisans at the end of World War II, stooped just once to pick up something on the path, as they led him away. It was a eucalyptus pod. "Eucalyptus", in Greek, means "well-hidden"—or, stretching the definition, "the beautiful hidden." The pod has a cap that conceals the flower before the flower opens. This was to be his one souvenir salvaged from the wreck of Europe.\(^9\)

In the Cantos, Pound left us another kind of eucalyptus pod, also gathered from the wreck of Europe, a self-secret enigma packed with seed-information. The life work of this poet manifests the spirit of trobar clus as the troubadours had known it: trobar, restless search, clus, the signifier that conceals as it reveals. In the end is a great silence that speaks volumes.

"Beauty is so rare a thing./So few drink of my fountain," Pound wrote.\(^10\) The strange beauty of trobar clus is not a barrier but a challenge, an invitation left largely unanswered.

Notes

4 This and the next three quotations are from, respectively, Pound, The Spirit of Romance, pp. 89, 91, 94, and 88.
7 Pound, The Cantos, p. 611.
8 Pound, Personae, p. 50.
10 Pound, Personae, p. 158.
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Contributors

James E. B. Breslin professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley, is author of Something New To Say—William Carlos Williams and Younger Poets (New Directions, 1985) and of two books published by the University of Chicago Press, William Carlos Williams, an American Artist and From Modern to Contemporary: American Poetry, 1945–1965. He is now at work on a biography of Mark Rothko.

Robert Casillo's essay stems from a long interest in Ezra Pound. Northwestern University Press is publisher of his forthcoming work, The Genealogy of Demons: Anti-Semitism, Fascism, and the Myths of Ezra Pound. Associate professor of English at the University of Miami, Fla., he holds a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University. He was born in Rome in 1951.

Carl Grundberg, a poet, typesetter, and calligrapher, received an M.A. in Poetics from New College of California, with a thesis on the 12th century troubador, Bernart de Ventadorn. He has been published in small magazines such as Acts, Soup, and Zephyr. He teaches classes in Hebrew calligraphy and guided visualization at the San Francisco Institute of Magical and Healing Arts.

James Laughlin is publisher of New Directions. Author of Selected Poems, 1937–1985 (City Lights) he is an adjunct professor of English at Brown University. He has been awarded a number of honorary degrees, including Litt. D.'s from Yale, Brown, and Colgate Universities.

William McCraw, professor of political science and American Studies at San Jose State University, was a Fulbright scholar at the University of Rome, has written essays on Italian politics, and since 1973 has taught a course in the government and politics of Italy. He holds B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees from Stanford University.
Fred Moramarco, a professor of English at San Diego State University since 1969, has written extensively on modern and contemporary poetry for *American Poetry Review, Journal of Modern Literature, American Literature, Mosaic,* and *Western Humanities Review,* among other periodicals. He is the author of *Edward Dahlberg* (Twayne, 1972). His Ph.D. is from the University of Utah.

Marianina Olcott is assistant professor of classical and New Testament Greek at San Jose State University. She has also taught at Santa Clara University and at Stanford University, where she received a Ph.D. in 1974. *The Journal of Baltic Studies* will publish an article she wrote on Tacitus.

Peter Dale Scott, professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley, holds a Ph.D. in political science from McGill University where he studied the social and political ideas of T. S. Eliot. His *Rumors of No Law: Poems from Berkeley 1968–1977* was published in 1981. He is also co-author of *The Politics of Escalation in Vietnam* (1966) and involved in the development of peace studies.

Leon Surette, professor at the University of Western Ontario, is author of *A Light from Eleusis: a Study of the Cantos of Ezra Pound,* published by The Clarendon Press in 1979. His articles have appeared in such journals as *Bucknell Review, Hudson Review, English Studies in Canada,* and *Canadian Poetry.*

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