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MANGUM, GEOFFREY CARLYLE. Nature and Eleusis in Ezra Pound's Cantos 1-11. (1977)  
Directed by: Fred Chappell. Pp. 70.

This study concentrates on the significance of nature in Cantos 1-11. The purpose of the Cantos is understood to be the formulation of a permanent hierarchy of values for a new culture by returning to the origins of Western civilization. Pound finds those origins in the Eleusinian mysteries of ancient Greece. An understanding of Cantos 1-11, since they are "preparation of the palette," is essential to an understanding of the Cantos as a whole.

After correlating Pound's thought on epic poetry, culture in general, and the Eleusinian tradition as "secret history" informing Western values, the study proceeds to a detailed examination of individual cantos. The Eleusinian tradition is considered in the three determinative phases of Western civilization: ancient Greece and Rome, medieval Provencal, and Renaissance Italian. Coordinating Pound's prose writings with the poetry, one finds that these cantos portray Eleusinian consciousness as intimate awareness of "the germinal universe of wood alive, of stone alive."

Pound's use of the Circe episode from Homer's Odyssey dramatizes the necessity and the difficulties involved in properly relating man's will with the forces of nature. The basic polarity in these cantos is between man's will and the dualistic power of nature--at once creative or destructive, depending on the will of the individual. The reading developed for Cantos 1-11 is checked for Cantos 39 and 47 and is found to be valid.

Two main conclusions are reached. First, focusing on the relation between man's will and consciousness of the vital universe is a fruitful and illuminating approach to the Cantos as a whole. Second, a proper respect for sexuality through a balanced appreciation of its positive power and its dangers is the primary benefit of Eleusinian consciousness; and as such, sexuality in the Cantos can lead to that intimate knowledge of the vital universe necessary to the formulation of a permanent hierarchy of values.

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

1977

Approved by

Paul R. Giff  
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NATURE AND ELEUSIS IN EZRA POUND'S CANTOS 1-11

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee  
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Greensboro:

by

Geoffrey Carlyle Mangum

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

Ezra Pound's Cantos have for their purpose the regeneration of culture for the modern world.<sup>1</sup> The motive is an ethical one, though he proceeds without an established code of ethics to serve him as guide. The Cantos proceed in the hope of regenerating modern culture on the faith that a code of ethics is discoverable by a return to sources. For Western culture, a return to sources is equivalent to a return to the wisdom and values of classical culture.

Pound finds in the classics evidence of a lost consciousness once common to the whole culture--a consciousness in intimate contact with the creative forces of life. He came to see that consciousness symbolized in the mysteries at Eleusis. For over two thousand years, the agricultural cult sacred to Demeter and Persephone fulfilled the religious needs of vast populations in the Hellenic world. The cult was most closely associated with Athens.

European culture, for Pound, had reached its end by World War I, its inner vitality spent. The Cantos make a clean break with the dead, and return to the well-springs of vitality.

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<sup>1</sup>Ezra Pound, The Cantos of Ezra Pound (New York: New Directions, 1972); all citations of canto number and page number are incorporated in the body of the text in the form: (C.#/page).



The present study is a detailed examination of Pound's understanding of those well-springs as presented in Cantos 1-11. In these first eleven cantos, Pound develops the leading motives and ground-rules that determine the principles of growth for his epic-in-time. My thesis is that these eleven cantos are based on Pound's intuition that the vitality of a culture depends on a conscious awareness of man's interdependence with the organic totality of all creation and that, therefore, the Cantos' purpose of regenerating modern culture depends on a regeneration of this germinal consciousness.

As will become apparent, Pound isolates three primary phases of Western culture for his concentrated presentation of essential history: Greco-Roman, medieval Provençal, and Renaissance Italian. These three phases in the history of the West Pound sees as containing the essential outline of the mind of Europe (which is the repository for achieved culture, whether presently active or latently potential).

The present study begins with some preliminary definitions that serve as an introduction to the Cantos, and then examines the Eleusinian consciousness as it relates in turn to Greco-Roman, Provençal, and Italian material in the first eleven cantos. Next, Cantos 39 and 47 are examined in the light of the reading developed from the first cantos as a kind of litmus test that the interpretation generated in Cantos 1-11 applies later in the poem. In fact, while these two cantos are necessarily modifications of earlier themes,



the Eleusinian interpretation works well in these cantos, shedding light back on the earlier ones confirming hints the reading had suggested.

Pound's prose writings are the most complete and trustworthy guide to the Cantos; and I have availed myself freely, maintaining the chronological integrity of his expressions on certain matters when appropriate (such as in the case of Pound's developing thought concerning Eleusis). My understanding of Pound and the Cantos is indebted to several sources more heavily than is evident in my notes because they have been instrumental in forming attitudes and approaches (focusing the picture of the whole) rather than in being applicable to the topic specifically at hand. Hugh Kenner's two books, The Poetry of Ezra Pound<sup>2</sup> and The Pound Era,<sup>3</sup> are the two indispensable works for all Pound criticism. Donald Davie, reviewing The Pound Era, has assessed the scope and impact of The Poetry of Ezra Pound:

It was his Poetry of Ezra Pound that then, in the 1950s, broke the ground that all his elders had quailed before, so flinty as it was, so densely overgrown with ignorance and misapprehension and prejudice. Every book and article since then has built upon his.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Hugh Kenner, The Poetry of Ezra Pound (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1951; rpt. New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1968).

<sup>3</sup>Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1971).

<sup>4</sup>Donald Davie, "The Universe of Ezra Pound," Paideuma, Vol. I No. 2 (Fall and Winter, 1972), 263.

The Annotated Index to the Cantos of Ezra Pound: Cantos I-LXXXIV,<sup>5</sup> by John H. Edwards and William Vasse, provides invaluable identifications of the sometimes bewildering array of people, places, and other allusions one encounters in the Cantos. All translations of foreign words from the Cantos in this paper, unless otherwise noted, are from the Annotated Index. In addition, it has proved impractical to attempt to indicate the innumerable bits of information I first learned in the Index, so I have limited citations of this work to the more obviously obscure points in the Cantos it clarifies.

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<sup>5</sup>John H. Edwards and William Vasse, Annotated Index to the Cantos of Ezra Pound: Cantos I-LXXXIV (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1957).

## CHAPTER II

## DEFINITIONS

The theme of man's relation to nature occurs early in the Cantos. Indeed, Leon Surette has connected the controlling motif of the Cantos, Odysseus-Pound's descent into the world of the dead (the nekuia), with the Eleusinian mysteries sacred to Demeter and Persephone.<sup>1</sup> In Canto 1, the nekuia establishes the whole procedure of the Cantos' investigation of history as metaphorically equivalent to Odysseus' descent into Hades in Book XI of the Odyssey, where an encounter with the Theban seer Tiresias is essential for Odysseus' return home (the nostos). For the Cantos, the nostos is a return to a viable civilization for the West. The periplum, or wandering, of Odysseus-Pound is a personal searching into the cultural history of the West for a permanent basis for new vitality; and everywhere at the heart of those findings is a right relation subsisting between man and nature.

Forrest Read has explained the function of the nostos in the Cantos:

Pound's first canto represents, as well as the tragedy of 'Europe exhausted by the conquest of Alsace-Lorraine,' which can be called the theme of Cantos I-XVI, a tiered historical depth in its

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<sup>1</sup>Leon Surette, "'A Light from Eleusis': Some Thoughts on Pound's Nekuia," Paideuma, Vol. 3 No. 2 (Fall, 1974), 215.

conflation of Homer, the Anglo-Saxon 'The Seafarer', and Divus' Renaissance Latin version of the *Odyssey*, in the language and voice of the 20th century American. But more important it throws the poem forward with a compelling fiction: a story of action, an archetypal hero, and the idea of the nostos. By starting with the voyage to the land of the dead Pound made the nostos symbolize a theory of history. It is the archetype for 'the break' and for his motive of exploring the past in order to find the basis for a return journey which will itself be the process of building a new civilization. . . . In the 'periplum', or voyage on which experience is encountered directly, the hero sees many cities and manners of men and knows their minds. He also enters the world of myth and encounters divinities. Both kinds of encounter become the occasion for personal insights, the aesthetic perceptions ('gods', or states of mind) which form the basis of Pound's visions of a permanent world of truth.<sup>2</sup>

In Homer, the nekua and the nostos are two distinct movements--the nekua being a necessary detour in the comprehensive nostos. For Pound, however, the return home can come about only by an examination of the past--by a nekua. The nekua and the nostos are fused into the single periplum of the Cantos. That the voyage takes Odysseus-Pound through the realm of Persephone, under the guidance and inspiration of Aphrodite "Bearing the golden bough of Agricida" (C.1/5), signals Pound's reinterpretation of the Odyssey as a spiritual journey.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Forrest Read, "Pound, Joyce, and Flaubert: The Odysseans," New Approaches to Ezra Pound, ed. Eva Hesse (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1969), p. 139.

<sup>3</sup>Surette, p. 215. Pound sees in the Odyssey a crime and punishment motif: see Ezra Pound, Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968; 1st edn. 1954), p. 212; hereafter "Lit. Essays." For Aphrodite as Persephone reborn, see Eva Hesse, "Introduction," New Approaches, p. 31.

On several occasions, Pound has defined an epic as "a poem including history."<sup>4</sup> He has also indicated, if it is not readily apparent, that his subject matter is the mind of Europe, which abandons nothing en route. About his beginning the Cantos, he writes:

The problem was to build up a circle of reference--taking the modern mind to be the mediaeval mind with wash after wash of classical culture poured over it since the Renaissance. That was the psyche, if you like. One had to deal with one's own subject.<sup>5</sup>

But his treatment of that subject is not according to the principles of the encyclopaedist, but in the spirit in which Confucius compiled his history of the dynasties, the Spring and Autumn Annals--that is, to elucidate the principles of sound government. Pound writes about this didactic purpose, "I do not believe that the method of historiography has progressed much since the days when Confucius selected the documents of the old kingdoms, and condensed his conclusions in the Testament."<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of the Cantos, a return to a viable culture, Pound has referred to as the setting up of a new paideuma.

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<sup>4</sup>Ezra Pound, A B C of Reading (London: Routledge & Sons, 1934; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 46.

<sup>5</sup>Donald Hall, "Ezra Pound: An Interview," Writers at Work: The "Paris Review" Interviews (Second Series), ed. George Plimpton (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), p. 39.

<sup>6</sup>Ezra Pound, "An Introduction to the Economic Nature of the United States," (orig. pub. in Italian, 1944), in Selected Prose: 1909-1965, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 167; hereafter "Sel. Prose."



He defines this term in his "treatise," Guide to Kulchur:

To escape a word or a set of words loaded up with dead association Frobenius uses the term Paideuma for the tangle or complex of the inrooted ideas of any period. . . .

The Paideuma is not the Zeitgeist, though I have no doubt many people will try to sink it in the latter romantic term. . . .

When I said I wanted a new civilization, I think I cd. have used Frobenius' term.

At any rate for my own use and for the duration of this treatise I shall use Paideuma for the gristly roots of ideas that are in action.<sup>7</sup>

An essential reason for Pound's linking the cultures of Greece, Provence and Italy as closely as he does is that he believes cultural values to arise out of the substratum of natural process. He writes:

That things can be known a hundred generations distant, implied no supernatural powers, it did imply the durability of natural process which alone gives a possibility for science. . . .

It is of the permanence of nature that honest men, even if endowed with no special brilliance, with no talents above those of straightness and honesty, come repeatedly to the same answers in ethics, without need of borrowing each other's ideas.<sup>8</sup>

Greece, Provence and Italy all have the climate of the Mediterranean in common. This cultural relativity can be traced, again, to Frobenius' concept of paideuma. Frobenius distinguishes three levels of culture: generalized world culture, single populations, and the individual--each with its own

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<sup>7</sup> Ezra Pound, Guide to Kulchur (London: Faber & Faber, 1938; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1970), pp. 57-58; hereafter "Kulchur."

<sup>8</sup> Sel. Prose, pp. 86, 89.

life-cycle.<sup>9</sup> Robert J. Welke sketches this life-cycle for the generalized world culture when he writes, "the original growth impulse reaches its high point in mythology, especially the solar and lunar cults, and reaches senility with materialism, world economics, specialization and 'the machine age'."<sup>10</sup> Frobenius held that the origins of all culture were to be found in the peasantry, and that cultures reach the moribund stage in specialists. Welke writes:

The moribund culture would then be stripped of its 'refined' but meaningless hierarchy and reduced to the radix, the source of the cultural impulse: those standing in awe and continuous appreciation of nature's duality--death and rebirth, heaven and earth, fertilization and fecundity, etc. The peasantry in a word.<sup>11</sup>

For Pound, European culture had reached the moribund stage by World War I. His return to European origins in the Eleusinian paideuma is a return to the well-springs of classical culture. In his 1913 essay, "The Tradition," Pound had written:

A return to origins invigorates because it is a return to nature and reason. The man who returns to origins does so because he wishes to behave in the eternally sensible manner. That is to say, naturally, reasonably, intuitively.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Robert J. Welke, "Frobenius: Pound--Some Quick Notes," Paideuma, Vol. 2 No. 3 (Winter, 1973), 415.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.      <sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 416.

<sup>12</sup>Lit. Essays, p. 92.



To help bring about a new paideuma, Pound has presented his selection of cultural high points as touchstones for a new ethos. His reading of history is, therefore, crucial; and since that reading is largely esoteric, to understand the Cantos it is necessary to examine in detail Pound's understanding of the Eleusinian tradition. For Pound, that tradition has been an unheralded "conspiracy of intelligence"<sup>13</sup> carrying on the Mediterranean sanity of classical culture (though appearing metamorphosed in new circumstances). He writes:

Shallow minds have been in a measure right in their lust for "secret history". I mean they have been dead right to want it, but shallow in their conception of what it was. Secret history is at least twofold. One part consists in the secret corruptions, the personal lusts, avarices etc. that scoundrels keep hidden, another part is the "plus", the constructive urges, a secretum because it passes unnoticed or because no human effort can force it on public attention.<sup>14</sup>

The "constructive urges" recorded in the Cantos all share in the sanity represented by Eleusis. The "secret corruptions" center around Usura.

Pound first entertained the suggestion of Eleusinian influence on medieval culture in 1906, when he reviewed two books by the ageing French Rosicrucian, Josephin Péladan.<sup>15</sup> Pound, having done graduate work on troubadour literature,

<sup>13</sup>Kulchur, p. 263.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>15</sup>Pound's review appeared as "Interesting French Publications," The Book News Monthly, Vol. 25 (September, 1906).

was then in Paris pursuing a Master of Arts degree from the University of Pennsylvania and was attracted to two of Péladan's recent books, Origine et Esthétique de la Tragédie and Le Secret des Troubadours.<sup>16</sup> The central argument in both these works is that the cult of Eleusis had survived the advent of Christianity as a mystic extra-church philosophy manifest in the Holy Grail legends, the troubadours and Albigensian heretics, and in Cervantes' Don Quixote.<sup>17</sup>

Pound dismissed with scepticism Péladan's reading of medieval culture (who was justifying his own extra-church philosophy in the Ordre de la Rose Croix du Temple et du Sanct Graal, which he founded), but some years later he returned to Péladan's suggestions with cautious agreement, in The Spirit of Romance. There, Pound defines chivalric love as "an art, that is to say, a religion. The writers of 'trobar clus' did not seek obscurity for the sake of obscurity."<sup>18</sup> One such writer of the ritual canzoni of "trobar clus" was Arnaut Daniel (Dante's "il miglior fabbro"). Pound entertains the theory of a secret religion consciously practiced in Provence that could explain Arnaut's obscurity:

We must, however, take into our account a number

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<sup>16</sup>For more details about Péladan and his works, see Surette, p. 191.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>18</sup>Ezra Pound, The Spirit of Romance (New York: New Directions, 1952; 1st edn. 1910), p. 87.

of related things; consider, in following the clue of a visionary interpretation, whether it will throw light upon events and problems other than our own, and weigh the chances in favor of, or against, this interpretation. Allow for climate, consider the restless sensitive temper of our jongleur, and the quality of the minds which appreciated him. Consider what poetry was to become, within less than a century, at the hands of Guinicelli, or of "il nostro Guido" . . . and consider the whole temper of Dante's verse. In none of these things singly is there any specific proof. Consider the history of the time, the Albigensian Crusade, nominally against a sect tinged with Manichean heresy, and remember how Provençal song is never wholly disjunct from pagan rites of May Day. Provence was less disturbed than the rest of Europe by invasion from the North in the darker ages; if paganism survived anywhere it would have been, unofficially, in the Langue d'Oc. That the spirit was, in Provence, Hellenic is seen readily enough by anyone who will compare the Greek Anthology with the work of the troubadours. They have, in some way, lost the names of the gods and remembered the names of lovers. Ovid and The Eclogues of Virgil would seem to have been their chief documents.<sup>19</sup>

In this passage Provençal culture is seen as the mediator between Hellas and Tuscany. Pound finds in Provence an "aristocracy of emotion" that, perhaps, had evolved "out of its half memories of Hellenistic mysteries, a cult--a cult stricter, or more subtle, than that of the celibate ascetics, a cult for the purgation of the soul by a refinement of, and lordship over, the senses."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Spirit of Romance, p. 90.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Pound had written a year earlier, "For that fineness of Arnaut's senses which made him chary of his rhymes, impatient of tunes that would have distorted his language, fastidious of redundancy, made him likewise accurate in his observations of Nature." (Sel. Prose, p. 27.)

Pound reinforces his suggestions about a cult of the senses in Provence with recourse to naturalistic psychology:

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 communicate 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 deeper.<sup>21</sup>

This basis is permanent because of "our kinship to the vital universe, to the tree and the living rock;" because "We have about us the universe of fluid force, and below us the germinal universe of wood alive, of stone alive."<sup>22</sup> The degree of man's participation in the vital universe depends on his consciousness. Pound distinguishes between two opposed kinds of consciousness--the one passively reflecting the phantastikon of the vital universe, the other actively a part of that vitality. Of the second kind, he writes:

And with certain others their consciousness is "germinal." Their thoughts are in them as the thought of the tree is in the seed, or in the grass, or the grain, or the blossom. And these minds are the more poetic, and they affect mind about them, and transmute it as the seed the earth. And this latter sort of mind is close on the vital universe; and the strength of the Greek beauty rests in this, that it is ever at the interpretation of this vital universe, by its signs of gods and godly attendants and oreads.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Spirit of Romance, p. 92.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 92-93.

(This last sentence explains a great deal about Pound's use of gods and goddesses in the arcanum of the Cantos.) After sketching the history of Western literature as a falling away from the consciousness of this vital universe (the troubadours still had faint reliqua of the germinal consciousness while the Tuscans had but the phantastikon; and in the England of Chaucer and Shakespeare, "Man is concerned with man and forgets the whole and the flowing"),<sup>24</sup> Pound returns to a reconsideration of the vital universe:

At any rate, when we do get into contemplation of the flowing we find sex, or some correspondence to it, "positive and negative," "North and South," "sun and moon," or whatever terms of whatever cult or science you prefer to substitute.<sup>25</sup>

The cult at Eleusis was, without doubt, a fertility cult, centered as it was on Demeter (goddess of agriculture) and on Persephone (raped by Pluto). Scholars have differed on the role and significance of sex in the mysteries,<sup>26</sup> but the connection in Pound's mind between sex and the creative life-force of the universe is clear.<sup>27</sup> Sex, to Pound's mind, is a sacred mode of visionary experience (given gods as states of mind).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Spirit of Romance, p. 93.      <sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>See Surette's note, p. 201, n. 18.

<sup>27</sup>See Pound's "Date Line" (1934) in Lit. Essays, p. 85; and "Religio" (1940) in Sel. Prose, p. 70.

<sup>28</sup>Ezra Pound, "Religio or, The Child's Guide to Knowledge" (1918) in Sel. Prose, p. 47: "A god is an eternal state of mind."



Pound writes:

It is an ancient hypothesis that the little cosmos "corresponds" to the greater, that man has in him both "sun" and "moon." From this I should say that there are at least two paths-- I do not say that they lead to the same place-- the one ascetic, the other for want of a better term "chivalric." In the first the monk or whoever he may be, develops, at infinite trouble and expense, the secondary pole within himself, produces his charged surface which registers the beauties, celestial or otherwise, by "contemplation." In the second, which I must say seems more in accord with "mens sana in corpore sano" the charged surface is produced between the predominant natural poles of two human mechanisms.

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. No scientist would be so stupid as to affirm that heat produced light, and it is into a similar sort of false ratiocination that those writers fall who find the source of illumination, or of religious experience, centered solely in the philo-progenitive instinct.<sup>29</sup>

Although Pound nowhere in this essay specifies the Eleusinian mysteries (he refers to paganism generally), his thinking kept returning to Eleusis. By the 1930s, he was positively asserting in his prose medieval culture's affinities with Eleusis. Responding in 1930 to T. S. Eliot's questioning what Pound believed, Pound answered:

Having a strong disbelief in abstract and general statement as a means of conveying one's thought to others I have for a number of years answered such questions by telling the enquirer

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<sup>29</sup>Spirit of Romance, p. 94.

to read Confucius and Ovid. This can do no harm to the intelligent and the unintelligent may be damned.

Given the material means I would replace the statue of Venus on the cliffs of Terracina. I would erect a temple to Artemis in Park Lane. I believe that a light from Eleusis persisted throughout the middle ages and set beauty in the song of Provence and of Italy.<sup>30</sup>

Four years later, in "Cavalcanti: Medievalism,"<sup>31</sup> Pound focuses on sexuality to dissociate modes of consciousness in Greek, Provençal and Italian aesthetic. Clearly, he is developing ideas from The Spirit of Romance on sexuality as a mode of visionary experience (chivalric love leading to an "exteriorization of the sensibility," and interpretation of the cosmos by feeling"),<sup>32</sup> leaving no doubt that he has Eleusis in mind.

"The Greek aesthetic would seem to consist wholly in plastic," he writes, "or in plastic moving toward coitus, and limited by incest which is the sole Greek taboo."<sup>33</sup> "What is the difference between Provence and Hellas?" he asks.<sup>34</sup>

The whole break of Provence with this world, and indeed the central theme of the troubadours, is the dogma that there is some proportion between the fine thing held in the mind, and the inferior thing ready for instant consumption.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ezra Pound, "Credo" (1930) in Sel. Prose, p. 53.

<sup>31</sup> The essay was first published in 1934, but significantly, Pound says "the essay as a whole must be dated 1910-1931." See Lit. Essays, p. 149 (where the essay is reprinted).

<sup>32</sup> Spirit of Romance, p. 94.

<sup>33</sup> Lit. Essays, p. 150.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 151.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.



If the Provençal aesthetic consists in a harmony of the plastic, then "The Tuscan demands harmony in something more than the plastic."<sup>36</sup> Pound refrains from applying the term "metaphysic" to the Tuscan aesthetic because it is "so appallingly associated in people's minds with unsupportable conjecture and devastated terms of abstraction."<sup>37</sup> Instead of "metaphysic," Pound employs the medieval term "virtu." He writes:

The Tuscan demands harmony in something more than the plastic. He declines to limit his aesthetic to the impact of light on the eye. It would be misleading to reduce his aesthetic to terms of music, or to distort the analysis of it by analogies to the art of sonority. Man shares plastic with the statue, sound does not require a human being to produce it. The bird, the phonograph, sing. Sound can be exteriorized as completely as plastic. There is the residue of perception, perception of something which requires a human being to produce it. Which may even require a certain individual to produce it. This really complicates the aesthetic. You deal with an interactive force: the virtu in short.<sup>38</sup>

As early as 1911-1912, Pound had identified Tuscan and Provençal aesthetic as a matter of virtu. He had defined the term in "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris":

The soul of each man is compounded of all the elements of the cosmos of souls, but in each soul there is some one element which predominates, which is in some peculiar and intense way the quality or virtu of the individual; in no two souls is this the same. It is by reason of this virtu that a given work of art persists.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Lit. Essays, p. 151.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 151-52.

<sup>39</sup> Ezra Pound, "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris," in Sel. Prose, p. 28. Note that this essay, published originally as a series between December, 1911 and February, 1912, is a follow-up to The Spirit of Romance.

Of Arnaut Daniel and Guido Cavalcanti, Pound writes that "In each case their virtue is a virtue of precision."<sup>40</sup>

Pound explains the consciousness in Tuscan aesthetic in terms of perception, virtu, and sexuality. He writes of virtu:

And dealing with it is not anti-life. It is not maiming, it is not curtailment. The senses at first seem to project a few yards beyond the body. Effect of a decent climate where a man leaves his nerve-set open, or allows it to tune in to its ambience, rather than struggling, as a northern race has to for self-preservation, to guard the body from assaults of weather.

He declines, after a time, to limit reception to his solar plexus. The whole thing has nothing to do with taboos and bigotries. It is more than the simple athleticism of the mens sana in corpore sano. The conception of the body as perfect instrument of the increasing intelligence pervades. The lack of this concept invalidates the whole of monastic thought. Dogmatic asceticism is obviously not essential to the perceptions of Guido's ballate.<sup>41</sup>

In this essay, the sexuality represented by the Eleusinian paideuma is seen to account for fineness of perception and precision of technique. That sexuality, taking different emphases and serving different ends in Greece, Provence and Italy, is nevertheless understood in all three cultures as one of the modes whereby man interprets the cosmos by feeling. Fidelity to feeling, and to emotion, Pound holds to account for the discrimination of the ineffable cosmos evident in fine art. And since "We advance by discriminations,"<sup>42</sup> this

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<sup>40</sup>Sel. Prose, p. 31.

<sup>41</sup>Lit. Essays, p. 152.

<sup>42</sup>Sel. Prose, p. 25.

art is essential to the hierarchy of values on which a civilization is built. "Civilization consists in the establishment of a hierarchy of values,"<sup>43</sup> Pound writes; and "'Our' hierarchy of values shines from the Divina Commedia, or one can at least use that work as a convenient indicator of it."<sup>44</sup>

Pound's personal periplum into the land of the dead in search of a permanent basis for future civilization carries him to masters of technique and to masterworks of art. In these, he finds a realization in art of the germinal consciousness interpretive of the vital universe. Masters of technique in the past have used their fineness of perception and intellect to make discriminations about the nature of man and the cosmos without which values and civilization are impossible. His return to these values is a return to

. . . the radiant world where one thought cuts through another with clean edge, a world of moving energies 'mezzo oscuro rade', 'risplende in se perpetuale effecto', magnetisms that take form, that are seen, or that border the visible, the matter of Dante's paradiso, the glass under water, the form that seems a form seen in a mirror, these realities perceptible to the sense, interacting, 'a lui si tiri' untouched by the two maladies, the Hebrew disease, the Hindoo disease, fanaticisms and excess that produce Savonarola, asceticisms that produce fakirs, St Clement of Alexandria, with his prohibition of bathing by women.<sup>45</sup>

This well-spring of Western culture Pound finds in the spirit

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<sup>43</sup>Ezra Pound, "Mang Tze (The Ethics of Mencius)" (1938), in Sel. Prose, p. 90.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid. <sup>45</sup>Lit. Essays, p. 154.

of Eleusis which "persisted throughout the middle ages"<sup>46</sup>  
 untouched by the two maladies:

Between those diseases, existed the Mediterranean  
 sanity. The 'section d'or', if that is what it  
 meant, that gave the churches like St Hilaire, San  
 Zeno, the Duomo di Modena, the clear lines and pro-  
 portions. Not the pagan worship of strength, nor  
 the Greek perception of visual non-animate plastic,  
 or plastic in which the being animate was not the  
 main and principal quality, but this 'harmony in  
 the sentience' or harmony of the sentient, where  
 the thought has its demarcation, the substance its  
virtu, where stupid men have not reduced all 'energy'  
 to unbounded undistinguished abstraction.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Sel. Prose, p. 53.

<sup>47</sup>Lit. Essays, p. 154.

## CHAPTER III

## GREECE AND ROME

"The first 11 cantos are preparation of the palette," Pound wrote in 1922; "I have to get down all the colours or elements I want for the poem."<sup>1</sup> For convenience, one could call these elements heroism, love, and the gods. The first eleven cantos weave and interweave motives of heroism, love, and the gods out of myths and history from the three major phases of the Eleusinian tradition--Greco-Roman, medieval Provençal, and Renaissance Italian.

Hugh Kenner has written about the opening line of the Cantos, "And then went down to the ship":

What comes before "And"? In mankind's past, before ever Homer, a foretime; a foretime even before the dark rite of confronting shades which Pound thought older than the rest of the Odyssey, reclaimed by Homer as he reclaims Homer now.<sup>2</sup>

Canto 1 is most emphatically a return to origins: to Homer (the originator of epic conventions) and to the oldest part of the Odyssey (the nekuia); to Divus' 1537 Latin version

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<sup>1</sup>Ezra Pound, The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound: 1907-1941, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: New Directions, 1971; 1st edn. 1950), p. 180 (Pound to Felix E. Schelling, 8 July 1922); hereafter, "Sel. Letters," with correspondent and date.

<sup>2</sup>Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1972), p. 349. For Pound's opinion on the nekuia, see Sel. Letters, p. 274 (Pound to W. H. D. Rouse, 23 May 1935).



(beginning the Homeric tradition for the Renaissance); and to the earliest native element in English poetry, "The Seafarer," "which has transmuted the various qualities of poetry that have drifted up from the south,"<sup>3</sup> Canto 1 returns to origins and returns to the folk-wisdom, rather than naïveté, underlying European culture. That folk-wisdom recognizes the organic wholeness of all existence.

Odysseus is the hero wandering across the inimical sea, "spiteful Neptune" (C.1/5), in his attempt to return home. "The sea symbolizes not only history," writes Daniel Pearlman, "but even more obviously nature, both of which the will must learn to cope with if it is creatively to transform the environment."<sup>4</sup> The basic polarity in the Cantos is that between the will and the vital universe; and the tension can only be resolved by an ordering of the will in accord with nature.<sup>5</sup> Myth, legend, and history show this struggle in the Cantos.

After Odysseus' descent into Hades, his journey goes on:

And he sailed, by Sirens and thence outward and away  
And unto Circe.

Venerandum,  
In the Cretan's phrase, with the golden crown, Aphrodite,

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<sup>3</sup>Ezra Pound, "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris" (1911-1912), in Selected Prose: 1909-1965, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 24; hereafter "Sel. Prose."

<sup>4</sup>Daniel Pearlman, The Barb of Time: On the Unity of Ezra Pound's Cantos (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), p. 39.

<sup>5</sup>See Pound's Jefferson and/or Mussolini (New York: Liveright, 1935), p. 17: "The whole of the Divina Commedia is a study of the 'directio voluntatis' (direction of the will)."

Cypri munimenta sortita est, mirthful, orichalchi, with golden  
Girdles and breast bands, thou with dark eyelids  
Bearing the golden bough of Agricida. So that: (C.1/5).

The Sirens are destructive temptresses; Circe, "the trim-coifed goddess" (C.1/3), is both temptress and guide; and Aphrodite symbolizes the fusion of physical passion and ideal beauty. Daniel Pearlman identifies Pound's "non-dualistic view of nature as a physical-spiritual continuum" with holism, and writes:

When the last seven lines of Canto 1 are examined in the light of the holistic principle, Aphrodite and the Sirens are seen as the two polar extremes of the Ding and sich which is nature. Circe, as a mediating center between the destructive and creative extremes, will come to represent that harmony with nature which Odysseus-Pound must attain before he can be vouchsafed the vision of Aphrodite. The point is that nature will be for man no more than he wills it to be, its creative or destructive effects on him depending entirely on the quality of his will--or, better, the direction of the will. This concept of the direction of the will<sup>6</sup> is the foundation of Pound's ethical world-view.

After the Odysseus Canto, Pound retells in Canto 2 the story from Ovid's Metamorphoses (Book III) of the metamorphosis of the Tyrrhenian pirates. Ovid's story comes from the Homeric Hymn "To Dionysos."

In The Spirit of Romance, Pound praises Ovid for his precision (as he did Arnaut and Cavalcanti)--for Ovid's definiteness in conveying the "marvelous":

Ovid--urbane, sceptical, a Roman of the city--

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<sup>6</sup> Pearlman, The Barb of Time, p. 43.



writes, not in a florid prose, but in a verse which has the clarity of French scientific prose.

"Convenit esse deos et ergo esse credemus."

"It is convenient to have Gods, and therefore we believe they exist"; and with all pretence of scientific accuracy he ushers in his gods, demi-gods, monsters and transformations. His mind, trained to the system of empire, demands the definite. The sceptical age hungers after the definite, after something it can pretend to believe. The marvelous thing is made plausible, the gods are humanized, their annals are written as if copied from a parish register; their heroes might have been acquaintances of the author's father.<sup>7</sup>

The gods for Pound, available for contemplation in such works as the Metamorphoses, are quite natural and powerful phenomena. He writes, "A god is an eternal state of mind."<sup>8</sup> His catechumen, "Religio or, The Child's Guide to Knowledge," is a series of simple questions and answers which explain his belief that even in an age of experiment, technology, and mass-man, the gods remain. He speaks of two kinds of knowledge-- immediate and hearsay:

Is hearsay of any value?

Of some.

What is the greatest hearsay?

The greatest hearsay is the tradition of the gods.

Of what use is this tradition?

It tells us to be ready to look.

In what manner do gods appear?

Formed and formlessly.

To what do they appear when formed?

To the sense of vision.

And when formless?

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<sup>7</sup> Ezra Pound, The Spirit of Romance (New York: New Directions, 1952; 1st edn, 1910), p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ezra Pound, "Religio or, The Child's Guide to Knowledge" (1918), in Sel. Prose, p. 47.

To the sense of knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

Ovid's Metamorphoses is Pound's Bible. Objecting to Harriet Monroe's prudery in her "ladylike selection" of his verse, Pound tells her point-blank, "Say that I consider the Writings of Confucius, and Ovid's Metamorphoses the only safe guides in religion."<sup>10</sup> He denigrates Christianity not because he has any quarrel with Christ, but because "Christianity, as practised resumes itself into one commandment dear to all officials, American Y.M.C.A., burocrats, etc., 'Thou shalt attend to thy neighbor's business before attending to thine own.'"<sup>11</sup> He tells her:

In your footnote you ought to point out that I refuse to accept any monotheistic taboos whatsoever. That I consider the Metamorphoses a sacred book, and the Hebrew scriptures the record of a barbarian tribe, full of evil. You have no right to palm me off for what I am not, even if it does happen to suit your convenience.<sup>12</sup>

In Ovid, Pound finds "a great treasure of verity" for mankind.<sup>13</sup> Pound's distinction between pagan and Christian religion is that between a theanthropic and a theocratic religion.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Sel. Prose, pp. 47-48.

<sup>10</sup>Sel. Letters, p. 183, (Pound to Monroe, 16 July 1922).

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.      <sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ezra Pound, Guide to Kulchur (London: Faber & Faber, 1938; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 299; hereafter "Kulchur."

<sup>14</sup>William Tay, "Between Kung and Eleusis: Li Chi, The Eleusinian Rites, Erigena and Ezra Pound," Paideuma, Vol. 4 No. 1 (Spring, 1975), 42.

Theocratic religions, according to Pound, explain things their practitioners have no way of knowing. In "Axiomata," he writes,

Concerning the intimate essence of the universe we are utterly ignorant. We have no proof that this God, Theos, is one, or is many, or is divisible, or indivisible, or is an ordered hierarchy culminating, or not culminating, in a unity.<sup>15</sup>

He fully accepts the possibility that the ultimate essence is one,<sup>16</sup> but asserts that "The greatest tyrannies have arisen from the dogma that the theos is one, or that there is a unity above various strata of theos which imposes its will upon the sub-strata, and thence upon human individuals."<sup>17</sup> Against dogma, Pound prefers mythology--"the greatest hearsay." He writes:

For certain people the pecten cteis is the gate of wisdom. The glory of the polytheistic anschauung is that it never asserted a single and obligatory path for everyone.<sup>18</sup>

Mythology permits an expression of things unknown and unknowable to the rational mind, or at least the meaning inherent in a myth cannot be exhausted by paraphrastic dogmatism. "The mythological exposition permits this. It permits the expression

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<sup>15</sup>Ezra Pound, "Axiomata" (1921), in Sel. Prose, p. 49.

<sup>16</sup>See, for instance, Pound's "Terra Italica" (Winter, 1931-32), in Sel. Prose, p. 57: "The unity of God may be the supreme mystery beyond the multitudinous appearance of nature."

<sup>17</sup>Sel. Prose, p. 51.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

of intuition without denting the edges or shaving off the nose and ears of a verity."<sup>19</sup>

Holding that Ovid preserves Mediterranean sanity in his tradition of the gods, Pound thereby considers the Metamorphoses as interpretive of the vital universe.<sup>20</sup> The mythological interpretations of the "germinal universe of wood alive, of stone alive"<sup>21</sup> presents the mysterium and does not explain it. "The mysteries are not revealed, and no guide book to them has been or will be written."<sup>22</sup>

Gods and goddesses throughout the Cantos are representative of different aspects of the germinal universe. There are no pat correspondences that apply (such as Dionysos and wine). "Gods tricky as nature."<sup>23</sup> Canto 2, more clearly than anywhere else in the poem, presents the "moment of metamorphosis" which is a gate into the "divine or permanent world."<sup>24</sup> The sea captain Acoetes, brought in chains before tyrannical Pentheus, gives intelligence of the new cult at

<sup>19</sup>Kulchur, p. 127.

<sup>20</sup>Spirit of Romance, p. 87: "The interpretive function is the highest honour of the arts; and because it is so we find that a sort of hyper-scientific precision is the touchstone and assay of the artist's power, of his honour, his authenticity."

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>22</sup>Sel. Letters, p. 327 (Pound to Henry Swabey, 31 October 1939). See also Kulchur, pp. 144-45, 156.

<sup>23</sup>Sel. Letters, p. 273 (Pound to W. H. D. Rouse, 17 April 1935).

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 210 (Pound to Homer L. Pound, 11 April 1927).

Thebes. Acoetes recounts his crew's mutiny when he opposed their plan to sell a young stranger (Dionysos) into slavery ("Mad for a little slave money" (C.2/7)), and the consequent wrath of Dionysos that transformed the ship and all its crew save reverent Acoetes:

God-sleight then, god-sleight:  
                   ship stock fast in sea-swirl,  
 Ivy upon the oars, King Pentheus,  
                   grapes with no seed but sea-foam,  
 Ivy in scupper-hole  
 Aye, I, Acoetes, stood there,  
                   and the god stood by me,  
 . . . . .  
 And, out of nothing, a breathing,  
                   hot breath on my ankles,  
 Beasts like shadows in glass,  
                   a furred tail upon nothingness.  
 Lynx-purr and heathery smell of beasts,  
                   where tar smell had been,  
 Sniff and pad-foot of beasts,  
                   eye-glitter out of black air.  
 . . . . .  
 Black snout of a porpoise  
                   where Lycabs had been  
 Fish-scales on the oarsmen.  
                   And I worship.  
 I have seen what I have seen.  
                   When they brought the boy I said:  
 "He has a god in him,  
                   though I do not know which god."  
 And they kicked me into the fore-stays.  
 I have seen what I have seen:  
                   Medon's face like the face of a dory,  
 Arms shrunk into fins. And you, Pentheus,  
 Had as well listen to Tiresias, and to Cadmus,  
                   or your luck will go out of you. (C.2/8-9).

The imagery in this passage emphasizes the sexual fertility of Dionysos. Ivy vines sprout and climb the masts, oarshafts, ropework. The "heathery smell of beasts" like an earthy perfume and the "feline leisure of panthers" attend this full manifestation of Dionysos' godhead. Only Acoetes survives.



In Canto 4, another Ovidian deity is made manifest. This time, the story is Actaeon's metamorphosis into a stag and destruction by his own hounds for having violated the sanctuary of Diana. The story serves Pound to make explicit the relationship between the vital universe of Ovid and the world of the troubadours. Actaeon shades into the troubadour Pierre Vidal. Their archetypal sacrilege, though innocent of evil intention, calls for the necessary punishment. Again, the imagery stresses the sexuality of the goddess:

Actaeon...  
and a valley,  
The valley is thick with leaves, with leaves, with trees,  
The sunlight glitters, glitters a-top  
Like a fish-scale roof,  
Like the church roof in Poitiers  
If it were gold.  
Beneath it, beneath it  
Not a ray, not a sliver, not a spare disc of sunlight  
Flaking the black, soft water;  
Bathing the body of nymphs, of nymphs, and Diana,  
Nymphs, white-gathered about her, and the air, air,  
Shaking, air alight with the goddess,  
fanning their hair in the dark  
Lifting, lifting and waffing:  
Ivory dipping in silver,  
Shadow'd, o'ershadow'd  
Ivory dipping in silver,  
Not a splotch, not a lost shatter of sunlight. (C.4/14).

The light imagery, the careful repetitions and, most of all, the rhythms convey the tranquility and serene movements of the goddess. This beauty in stasis gives no hint of Diana's sudden and powerful wrath to follow. The rhythms shift dramatically with the appearance on the scene of Actaeon-Vidal, "stumbling along in the wood":

Then Actaeon: Vidal,  
 Vidal. It is old Vidal speaking,  
                   stumbling along in the wood,  
 Not a patch, not a lost shimmer of sunlight,  
                   the pale hair of the goddess.

The dogs leap on Actaeon,  
                   "Hither, hither, Actaeon,"  
 Spotted stag of the wood;  
 Gold, gold, a sheaf of hair,  
                   Thick like a wheat swath,  
 Blaze, blaze in the sun,  
                   The dogs leap on Actaeon. (C.4/14).

Diana is here nature itself. Her hair sheds light into the sacred bower, the air is alight with the goddess, and the "pale hair of the goddess" seems to blend into some sort of equivalence with "shimmer of sunlight." The line "Gold, gold, a sheaf of hair,/ Thick like a wheat swath," is the only metaphor in this passage applied to Diana. The vision Pound recreates here is a vision of Diana as interpretive of the vital universe.

Pound returns to Diana in Canto 30, where Artemis' "Compleynt agaynst Pity" registers a protest against a vapid sensibility that perpetuates "foulness" by pitying it, which leads to a decay in values.

Compleynt, compleynt I hearde upon a day,  
 Artemis singing, Artemis, Artemis  
 Agaynst Pity lifted her wail:  
 Pity causeth the forests to fail,  
 Pity slayeth my nymphs,  
 Pity spareth so many an evil thing.  
 Pity befouleth April,  
 Pity is the root and the spring.

.....  
 All things are made foul in this season,  
 This is the reason, none may seek purity  
 Having for foulness pity (C.30/147).





But that does not by any means exhaust the unquenchable splendour and indestructible delicacy of nature.<sup>25</sup>

That nature, as known and interpreted by the Eleusinian paideuma, is a continuum from sexuality to the gods. In "Terra Italica," the connection with the sexuality portrayed in Artemis is clearly associated with "the light from Eleusis" when Pound quotes with approval from a recent Italian pamphlet (the exact source is not specified):

'Paganism, which at the base of its cosmogonic philosophy set the sexual phenomena whereby Life perpetuates itself mysteriously throughout the universe, not only did not disdain the erotic factor in its religious institutions but celebrated and exalted it, precisely because it encountered in it the marvellous vital principle infused by invisible Divinity into manifest nature.'<sup>26</sup>

Pound sees the Nietzschean tension between Dionysian energy and Apollonian order as aspects of an organic wholeness. Sexuality, as the physical basis for intimate perception of, and participation in, the vital universe, makes possible a fuller knowledge of life in its diversity. And that fuller knowledge, in turn, is necessary to the establishment of a permanent hierarchy of values.

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<sup>25</sup>Kulchur, p. 282.

<sup>26</sup>Sel. Prose, p. 55.

## CHAPTER IV

## PROVENCE

Pound returns to the Circe theme (destructive and creative beauty) in Canto 2 with the invocation of Eleanor of Aquitaine. She is associated with Helen of Troy, another of the poem's Circean women-goddesses:

"Eleanor, *ἠλέναυς* and *ἠλέκτολις*!"  
 And poor old Homer blind, blind, as a bat,  
 Ear, ear for the sea-surge, murmur of old men's voices:  
 "Let her go back to the ships,  
 Back among Grecian faces, lest evil come on our own,  
 Evil and further evil, and a curse cursed on our children,  
 Moves, yes she moves like a goddess  
 And has the face of a god  
 and the voice of Schoeney's daughters,  
 And doom goes with her in walking,  
 Let her go back to the ships,  
 back among Grecian voices." (C.2/6).

The word-play on Helen's name from Aeschylus' Agamemnon (lines 689-90) calls Helen "destroyer of ships" and "destroyer of cities." Eleanor of Aquitaine is known as the wife of Louis VII of France and then of Henry of Anjou (later Henry II of England), as the mother of Henry, Richard Coeur de Lion, and John of England, and as the patroness of troubadours.<sup>1</sup> Pound focuses the heroism and culture of the time in the figure of Eleanor as the Trojan era centers on Helen.

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<sup>1</sup>John H. Edwards and William Vasse, "Eleanor," Annotated Index to the Cantos of Ezra Pound: Cantos I-LXXXIV (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1957), p. 58; hereafter "Index."

The general movement of the canto demonstrates the consequences of failing to appreciate the proper nature of divinity (the fall of Troy and the metamorphosis of the Tyrrhenian seamen). Helen is both ideal beauty (she "moves like a goddess") and a Siren at Troy (she has "the voice of Schoeney's daughters" and "doom goes with her in walking"). The power of sexual beauty by which both Helen and Eleanor give life to those around them results in either of the two Circean consequences: metamorphosis into swine or passage home, depending on the will of the individual.

The old men of Troy, in their failure to fully appreciate the power of Helen, are in part responsible for the fall of Troy. The modern situation, sexual sterility and the spiritual malaise which accompanies it, Pound records in Canto 7 (published a year before Eliot's The Waste Land):

Life to make mock of motion:  
 For the husks, before me, move,  
     The words rattle: shells given out by shells.  
 The live man, out of lands and prisons,  
     shakes the dry pods,  
 Probes for old wills and friendships, and the big locust-casques  
 Bend to the tawdry table,  
 Lift up their spoons to mouths, put forks in outlets,  
 And make sound like the sound of voices. (C.7/27).

Of the old men, leaders of Troy who advised that Helen be sent back to the Greeks, Homer says, "Now through old age these fought no longer, yet they were excellent speakers still, and clear, as cicadas . . ." <sup>2</sup> They no longer feel the passions

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<sup>2</sup>Iliad, III, lines 150-51, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 104.

for beauty that the young feel and are willing to die for.

And all that day, another day:  
 Thin husks I had known as men,  
 Dry casques of departed locusts  
     speaking a shell of speech...  
 Propped between chairs and table...  
 Words like the locust-shells, moved by no inner being;  
     A dryness calling for death (C.7/26).

The modern malaise is a failure of will, a failure to appreciate and to desire beauty. Pound records that Remy de Gourmont had said "that most men think only husks and shells of the thoughts that had been lived by others."<sup>3</sup> The modern world has no vital spirit because it has no passion for life, and not even the universe's various beauties are reflected in the phantastikon of the modern mind. The repetition of the Helen-Eleanor motif in this canto, here amplified to include "ἔλανδρος," "destroyer of men," asserts against this lifelessness the permanence of vitality:

But is she dead as Tyro? In seven years?  
 Ἠλέναυς, ἔλανδρος, ἐλέπτολις  
 The sea runs in the beach-groove, shaking the floated pebbles,  
 Eleanor! (C.7/25).

The sea, Eleanor, and Helen are alive. The sea shakes the floating pebbles as the live man shakes the dry pods.

In contrast to the destructive nature of Circe, there is her creative and beneficial side. Homer wrote the Iliad and the Odyssey, Ovid his Metamorphoses and Art of Love. The liveli-

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<sup>3</sup>Ezra Pound, "The Prose Tradition in Verse" (1914), in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968; 1st edn. 1954), p. 371.



ness of the troubadours is never far from their sexuality. Guillaume Poitiers (1071-1127), seventh Count of Poitiers, ninth Duke of Aquitaine, and grandfather to Eleanor by his son Guillaume X, is the earliest known troubadour.<sup>4</sup> Pound quotes from his Farai un vers, pos mi sonelh in Canto 6:

"Tant las fotei com auzirets  
 "Can e quatre vint et veit vetz...  
 The stone is alive in my hand, the crops  
 will be thick in my death-year... (C.6/21).

The Provençal lines read: "And I screwed them this many times:/ One hundred and eighty-eight."<sup>5</sup> Guillaume was excommunicated on numerous occasions, mostly for disputes over property rights with the Church but also for his refusal to end his liaison with the Vicomtesse de Châtellerault.<sup>6</sup> Her daughter, Anor, became the wife of Guillaume X and the mother of Eleanor.

The world of the troubadours is filled with sexual energy. Louis VII, like Odysseus who "went over sea till day's end" (C.1/3), "Went over sea till day's end (he, Louis, with Eleanor)/ Coming at last to Acre" (C.6/21). Pound links the events of Louis' Second Crusade with the power of Eleanor's beauty:

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<sup>4</sup>"Poitiers, Guillaume," Index, p. 175.

<sup>5</sup>Duke William IX of Aquitaine, "Farai un vers, pos mi sonelh," Medieval Song: An Anthology of Hymns and Lyrics, trans. and ed. James J. Wilhelm (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1971), p. 108, lines 79-80.

<sup>6</sup>Frederick Goldin, Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouveres: An Anthology and a History (Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1973), p. 5.

Her uncle commanded in Acre,  
 That had known her in girlhood  
     (Theseus, son of Ageus)  
 And he, Louis, was not at ease in that town,  
 And was not at ease by Jordan  
 As she rode out to the palm-grove  
 Her scarf in the Saladin's cimier.  
 Divorced her in that year, he Louis,  
     divorcing thus Aquitaine.  
 And that year Plantagenet married her  
     (that had dodged past 17 suitors) (C.6/21).

Pound alludes to Eleanor as civilizing force with a quotation from one of Bernart de Ventadour's songs addressed to Eleanor. Bernart, a troubadour at the court of Eblis III Vicomte of Ventadour, had been banished from the court because of his too intimate relation with Eblis' wife Alice of Montpellier ("My Lady of Ventadour") and Alice was imprisoned in the tower.<sup>7</sup> Bernart pleads that Eleanor intercede on his behalf with Eblis to free Alice from confinement:

"Send word I ask you to Eblis  
     you have seen that maker  
 And finder of songs so far afield as this  
 That he may free her,  
     who sheds such light in the air. (C.6/22).

Sordel, or Sordello, is another instance of the link between sexuality and order. His planh or lament for the death of Blacatz, a nobleman of Provence and a patron of troubadours, offers the example of Blacatz' courage to the reigning kings of Europe whose realms are in disarray. Frederick Goldin writes in his headnote to Sordel's lyrics:

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<sup>7</sup>"Ventadour, Lady of," Index, p. 237.



Free go they all as by full manumission  
 All serfs of Eccelin my father da Romano  
 Save those who were with Alberic at Castra San Zeno  
 And let them go also  
 The devils of hell in their body.

And sixth the Lady Cunizza  
 That was first given Richard St Boniface  
 And Sordello subtracted her from that husband  
 And lay with her in Tarviso  
 And she left with a soldier named Bonius  
 nimium amorata in eum /too much enamoured of him/<sup>7</sup>  
 And went from one place to another  
 "The light of this star o'ercame me"  
 Greatly enjoying herself  
 And running up the most awful bills.  
 And this Bonius was killed on a sunday  
 and she had then a Lord from Braganza  
 and later a house in Verona. (C.29/142).

The star whose light overcame Cunizza was Venus, as Dante recognizes (and praises) by placing Cunizza in third heaven, the heaven of love: "Cunizza was I called; and here I glow, / Since was I conquered by this burning star."<sup>10</sup>

As with Sordello, Dante associates Cunizza with justice and righteousness. She with indignation remembers the bishop of Feltro's treachery to the Ferrarese refugees who, taking shelter with the bishop, were given over by him to massacre:

Feltro shall wail its pastor's perfidy--  
 A crime so foul, that Malta's deep dungeons  
 Held never a doer of like infamy.<sup>11</sup>

Another story of troubadour love, Pieire de Maensac's for Bernart de Tierci's wife, is recounted in condensed form in

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<sup>10</sup>The Divine Comedy, Paradiso IX, lines 32-33, trans. Laurence Binyon in The Portable Dante, ed. Paolo Milano (New York: Viking Press, 1947), p. 411.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., lines 52-54, trans. Laurence Binyon, p. 412.

Canto 5 (where Pound draws the parallel with Troy):

And Pieire won the singing, Pieire de Maensac,  
 Song or land on the throw, and was dreitz hom  
 And had De Tierci's wife and with the war they made:  
     Troy in Auvergnat  
 While Menelaus piled up the church at port  
 He kept Tyndarida. Dauphin stood with de Maensac. (C.5/18).

The church Menelaus piled up was the Achaean host at the port of Troy. De Tierci made war on de Maensac and his protector the Dauphin with the aid of the Church.<sup>12</sup> Pound expands the story of de Maensac in Canto 23:

And went to Auvergne, to the Dauphin,  
 And Tierci came with a posse to Auvergnat,  
 And went back for an army  
 And came to Auvergne with the army  
 But never got Pieire nor the woman.  
 And he went down past Chaise Dieu,  
 And went after it all to Mount Segur,  
     after the end of all things,  
 And they hadn't left even the stair,  
 And Simone was dead by that time,  
 And they called us the Manicheans  
 Wotever the hellsarse that is. (C.23/109).

The Albigensians were destroyed in a crusade, initiated by Pope Innocent III, carried on between 1209 and 1249.<sup>13</sup> The "end of all things" came in 1244 when the last great battle was fought destroying Mount Ségur, where "Provençal civilization (in synecdoche) was snuffed out."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Leon Surette, "'A Light from Eleusis': Some Thoughts on Pound's Nekuia," Paideuma, Vol. 3 No. 2 (Fall, 1974), 196.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1971), p. 335.



The siege of the Dauphin's castle by De Tierci and the Church is seen to parallel the crusade against the Albigensians and the siege of Mount Ségur. That Pieire had anything to do with the Albigensians is wholly Pound's addition, and is conclusive evidence that by 1928 when this canto was published Pound had, in the main, accepted Péladan's notion of an extra-church philosophy influencing medieval culture.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Surette, loc. cit.

CHAPTER V  
RENAISSANCE ITALY

In Canto 3, Pound shares in the vision of the gods held by Renaissance Italy. Thoroughly present in modern Italy ("I sat on the Dogana's steps/ For the gondolas cost too much, that year" (C.3/11)), he can nevertheless enter imaginatively the lost world of the gods:

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.  
Panisks, and from the oak, dryas,  
And from the apple, maelid,  
Through all the wood, and the leaves are full of voices,  
A-whisper, and the clouds bowe over the lake,  
And there are gods upon them,  
And in the water, the almond-white swimmers,  
The silvery water glazes the upturned nipple,  
As Poggio has remarked. (C.3/11).

Coming as they do after Canto 2's Dionysos, the Tuscan gods seem elegant and subtle, like fine objets d'art. They are graceful and diminutive like the best ornamentation in baroque art, having but a suggestion of the primitive power of the ancient gods. The Tuscan gods are not, however, cut off from nature. This passage represents that point of transition in Western culture between the vital art of the Renaissance and the dissipation of force into rhetoric of baroque art.

Canto 5 again returns to Renaissance culture--this time, to the Renaissance historian Benedetto Varchi who, in his Storia Fiorentina (1527-1538), examines the murder of the Flor-

entine tyrant Alessandro de' Medici by his distant kin Lorenzino de' Medici (Lorenzaccio), in 1537. (Their great-great grandfathers were brothers.)

But Varchi of Florence,  
 Steeped in a different year, and pondering Brutus,  
 Then "Σίγα μαλ' αὐθις δευτέραν!  
 "Dog-eye!!" (to Alessandro)  
 "Whether for love of Florence," Varchi leaves it,  
 Saying "I saw the man, came up with him at Venice,  
 "I, one wanting the facts,  
 "And no mean labour... Or for a privy spite?" (C.5/19).

Varchi tried to distinguish whether Lorenzino's motive had been pious or impious ("Se pia/ 'O empia?" (C.5/19)). This passage subject-rhymes with Pound's concern for historical accuracy--respecting the once total aliveness of historical people and situations--which opens Canto 2:

Hang it all, Robert Browning,  
 there can be but the one "Sordello."  
 But Sordello, and my Sordello?  
 Lo Sordels si fo di Mantovana (C.2/6).

There are four Sordello's distinguished here: Browning's poetic creation in his Sordello, Pound's more historically accurate but nonetheless poetic recreation of Sordello, the real Sordello that once walked in the bright air, and the historical Sordello of biographies, songs, and fragmentary documents.<sup>1</sup> Pound requires accuracy because an epic is a poem containing history.

<sup>1</sup>Pound was using the biography/anthology of Sordello by Cesare de Lollis, Vita e Poesie di Sordello di Goito (Halle A. S.: Verlag von Max Niemeyer, 1896). For more details, see Bradford Morrow, "De Lollis' Sordello and Sordello: Canto 36," Paideuma, Vol. 4 No. 1 (Spring, 1975), 93-98.

Varchi is important for Pound because as a historian he respects the complexities of a situation and because he is "one wanting the facts" who refrains from generalizing without sufficient knowledge. Varchi's approach to history is the same as the attitude to the mysteries that Pound elsewhere praises. He writes:

Christianity lends itself to fanaticism. Barbarian ethics proceed by general taboos. The relation of two individuals is so complex that no third person can pass judgment upon it. Civilization is individual. The truth is the individual. The light of the Renaissance shines in Varchi when he declines to pass judgment on Lorenzaccio.<sup>2</sup>

Varchi does not "shave off the nose and ears" of Lorenzino's action. He serves Pound, therefore, as a reliable guide to the actual events of the time. Varchi's history was commissioned by Cosimo the Great, who became the Duke of Florence after Alessandro's murder.<sup>3</sup>

The story of Alessandro's murder in the canto is bracketed with fragments alluding to the murder on June 14, 1497, of Giovanni (John) Borgia. Giovanni was the son of Rodrigo Borgia (Pope Alexander VI) and the brother of Cesare Borgia.<sup>4</sup> Gio-

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<sup>2</sup> Ezra Pound, Guide to Kulchur (New York: New Directions, 1968; 1st edn. 1938), p. 355; hereafter "Kulchur."

<sup>3</sup> John H. Edwards and William Vasse, "Varchi, Benedetto," Annotated Index to the Cantos of Ezra Pound: Cantos I-LXXXIV (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1957), p. 236; hereafter "Index."

<sup>4</sup> Fred Moramarco, "Schiavoni: 'That Chap on The Wood Barge'," Paideuma, Vol. 4 No. 1 (Spring, 1975), 101.

vanni, as the Duke of Gandia, was heir to the Borgia fortune and for that reason Caesare was suspected as his murderer.<sup>5</sup> Pound's lines retell an eye-witness account of the disposal of Giovanni's corpse:

John Borgia is bathed at last. (Clock-tick pierces the vision)  
Tiber, dark with the cloak, wet cat gleaming in patches.  
Click of the hooves, through garbage,  
Clutching the greasy stone. "And the cloak floated."  
Slander is up betimes. (C.5/18-19).

Pound's source for this narration is the diary of John Burchard (Bishop of Orta and Master of Papal Ceremonies during the time of Alexander VI), in which Burchard recounts the statements of an eye-witness to this part in the story, a workman on the Tiber named Schiavoni.<sup>6</sup> Schiavoni had that night seen four men on foot, and another on a white horse that also carried a corpse, approach the Tiber where the garbage of the city is dumped and throw the corpse in. When the cloak floated, one of the men sank it with a stone.<sup>7</sup> Pound telescopes the eye-witness account:

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<sup>5</sup>Moramarco, p. 101.

<sup>6</sup>Pound's immediate source is Arnold H. Mathew, The Life and Times of Rodrigo Borgia (New York: Brentanos, n. d.) where, on pp. 248-49, Mathew translates (poorly) the relevant passage from Johannis Burchardi Argentinensis, Diarium (1483-1506), ed. L. Thusane (Paris, 1884). Mathew's translation is cited in Moramarco (my source), p. 102. Mathew, Pound, and Moramarco are corrected by Eva Hesse, "'Schiavoni,' or: When St. Hieronymus Turned His Back," Paideuma, Vol. 4 No. 1 (Spring, 1975), 105-106, followed by the passage in question from Burchard's Latin (pp. 107-110).

<sup>7</sup>Moramarco, p. 102.



And the next comer says, "Were nine wounds,  
 Four men, white horse. Held on the saddle before him..."  
 Hooves clink and slick on the cobbles.  
 Schiavoni... cloak... "Sink the damn thing!"  
 Splash wakes that chap on the wood-barge.  
 Tiber catching the nap, the moonlit velvet,  
 A wet cat gleaming in patches. (C.5/20).

In these passages, there are two points of importance.  
 The first is that the actions (however horrible and immoral)  
 at least reveal that the Renaissance was filled with passion.  
 In Canto 7, the huge locust-casques are compared to Lorenzino:

and the big locust-casques

Bend to the tawdry table,  
 Lift up their spoons to mouths, put forks in outlets,  
 And make sound like the sound of voices.  
 Lorenzaccio  
 Being more live than they, more full of flames and voices.  
 (C.7/27).

The second point is that, by selecting Varchi and the passage  
 from Burchard's diary as his guides, Pound wishes to render  
 history as living (at least in the mind, and in the mind of  
 Europe). Here again, Pound returns to origins. But Lorenzino  
 and Caesare are only background to Pound's true Odyssean hero  
 in the Renaissance, Sigismundo Pandolfo Malatesta.

In Cantos 8-11, Pound continues his investigation of Ren-  
 aissance culture in the life of Sigismundo (1417-1468). These  
 cantos gather together early motives into a new synthesis in  
 the presentation of Sigismundo that brings this first major  
 movement of the Cantos to a close. Dealing with Sigismundo's  
 life as he had dealt with the murders of Borgia and Alessandro,  
 these cantos give documentary fragments from his life and time,  
 some even written by Sigismundo himself. The fragments reveal

the ideas in action, the paideuma, at Sigismundo's time; they also reveal particulars of his domestic and public life, and his mind. Pound has written,

No one has claimed that the Malatesta cantos are obscure. They are openly volitionist, establishing, I think clearly, the effect of the factive personality, Sigismundo, an entire man.<sup>8</sup>

Sigismundo is the Odyssean hero struggling against the gods (in this case, the chaos of Sigismundo's time) to attain order.

Canto 8 opens with a letter from Sigismundo responding to Giovanni de' Medici (son of Cosimo, "Pater Patriae") who, in an earlier letter, had asked for Sigismundo's opinion about Giovanni's peace with the King of Aragon ("Ragona"). Sigismundo is positive about the peace, wanting his part of the action, and takes the occasion of his reply to assure that arrangements are in order for the Maestro di pentore (Piero dei Francheschi), who will shortly transfer from Giovanni's to Sigismundo's patronage:

And let me have a clear answer,  
 For I mean to give him good treatment  
 So that he may come to live the rest  
 Of his life in my lands--  
 Unless you put him off it--  
 And for this I mean to make due provision,  
 So that he can work as he likes,  
 Or waste his time as he likes  
 (affatigandose per suo piacere o no  
non gli mancherà la provixione mai)  
 /tiring himself, for his pleasure or not  
 he will never need provision/ (C.8/29).

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<sup>8</sup>Kulchur, p. 194.

The line "affatigandose per suo piacere o no" is interlarded in an analogous letter in Canto 21, where Thomas Jefferson requests from a friend in France that he find him "a gardener/ who can play the french horn" (C.21/97), thus associating Jefferson with Sigismundo as the Odyssean full man.

The full man, Sigismundo is competent in both war and peace. As a ranging condottiere, he enters an alliance with Francesco Sforza, the Duke of Milan, and goes

. . . into the service of the most magnificent commune  
Of the Florentines  
For alliance defensive of the two states (C.8/29)

with "1400 cavalry and four hundred foot" (C.8/30) for 50,000 florins. And later,

Venice has taken me on again  
At 7,000 a month, fiorini di Camera  
For 2,000 horse and four hundred footmen, (C.8/30).

As a man of peaceful pursuits, he had an active mind. He was a poet ("Ye spirits who of olde were in this land . . ." (C.8/30)), and keenly interested in the most current intellectual developments--such as the Council at Florence between the Eastern and Western Churches (1438):

And the Greek emperor was in Florence  
(Ferrara having the pest)  
And with him Gemisthus Plethon  
Talking of the war about the temple at Delphos,  
And of Poseidon, concret Allgemeine,  
And telling of how Plato went to Dionysius of Syracuse  
Because he had observed that tyrants  
Were most efficient in all they set their hands to,  
But he was unable to persuade Dionysius  
To any amelioration. (C.8/31).

Pound's dropping Hegel's "concrete universal" into Sigismundo's conversation underscores Sigismundo's competence in the kind of intellectual discussions one in the company of Plethon would encounter. Indeed, in Canto 9, Sigismundo is called "Polumetis" (C.9/36), the Homeric epithet for Odysseus "of many devices."

The surest sign that Sigismundo is an Odyssean hero is that, in an age preoccupied with short-sighted goals of power and glory, Sigismundo manifests his part in the vision of the whole. Pound contrasts Sigismundo's steadfastness of purpose and character with the fickleness of Sforza's opportunist campaigning:

With the church against him,  
 With the Medici bank for itself,  
 With wattle Sforza against him  
 Sforza Francesco, wattle-nose,  
 Who married him (Sigismundo) his (Francesco's)  
 Daughter in September,  
 Who stole Pèsaro in October (as Broglio says "bestialmente"),  
 Who stood with the Venetians in November,  
 With the Milanese in December,  
 Sold Milan in November, stole Milan in December  
 Or something of that sort,  
 Commanded the Milanese in the spring,  
 The Venetians in midsummer,  
 The Milanese in the autumn,  
 And was Naples' ally in October,  
 He, Sigismundo, templum aedificavit  
 [built a temple] (C.8/32).

Sigismundo's struggle, throughout his endless battling, to erect the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini (with obvious parallels to Odysseus' long voyage home) becomes in these cantos a symbol bearing the significance of Sigismundo's life.

Jacob Burckhardt, who refers to Sigismundo as "the profligate

pagan,"<sup>9</sup> writes of his life, somewhat puzzled:

Life and manners at the Court of Rimini must have been a singular spectacle under the bold pagan condottiere Sigismundo Malatesta. He had a number of scholars round him, some of whom he provided for liberally, even giving them landed estates, while others earned at least a livelihood as officers in his army. In his citadel--arx Sismundea--they used to hold discussions, often of a very venomous kind, in the presence of the rex, as they termed him. In their Latin poems they sing his praises and celebrate his amour with the fair Isotta, in whose honour and as whose monument the famous rebuilding of S. Francesco at Rimini took place--Divae Isottae Sacrum. When the humanists themselves came to die they were laid there at the time when Sigismundus, the son of Pandolfus, ruled. It is hard for us nowadays to believe that a monster like this prince felt learning and the friendship of cultivated people to be a necessity of life; and yet the man who excommunicated him, made war upon him, and burnt him in effigy, Pope Pius II, says: "Sigismund knew history and had a great store of philosophy; he seemed born to all he undertook."<sup>10</sup>

Pound was not blind to Sigismundo's underside, though that side is not fully represented in the Cantos (nor, as a poet, was Pound bound to represent it). For Pound, Sigismundo "registered a state of mind, of sensibility, of all-aroundness and awareness."<sup>11</sup> In particular, Sigismundo registered that sensibility in the Tempio, which Pound calls "perhaps the apex of what one man has embodied in the last 1000 years of the occident."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, 2 vols., trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (New York: Harper and Row, 1929; 1st edn. in German, 1860), 2: 483.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 1: 235.

<sup>11</sup>Kulchur, p. 159.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.



That Sigismundo could hold such a relatively important place in the tradition Pound has outlined in these first cantos is not to be explained solely by the fact that Sigismundo, on his own, came to be a part of that tradition. His family had been a part of that tradition since before Dante, over a century before Sigismundo's time. Pound duly records all this in a characteristically concentrated passage:

And Poictiers, you know, Guillaume Poictiers,  
     had brought the song up out of Spain  
 With the singers and viels. But here they wanted a setting,  
 By Marecchia, where the water comes down over the cobbles  
 And Mastin had come to Verucchio,  
     and the sword, Paolo il Bello's,  
     caught in the arras  
 And, in Este's house, Parisina  
 Paid  
 For this tribe paid always, and the house  
 Called also Atreides' (C.8/32).

The curse that fell on Agamemnon and Menelaus (the sons of Atreus) was the Trojan War. The passion of the tribe of the Malatesta is linked with the Circe theme.

Mastin, or "The Old Mastiff," is Sigismundo's great-great grandfather Malatesta da Verrucchio (1212-1312). The Old Mastiff had four sons: Malatestino, Paolo, Giovanni, and Pandolfo (Sigismundo's great grandfather).<sup>13</sup> Dante mentions the Old Mastiff in the Inferno when he talks with Guido da Montefeltro, the great Ghibelline general now in the eighth chasm of Hell for having taken Palestrina by making false pledges, which

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<sup>13</sup>"Appendix D: Genealogy (House of the Malatesta)," Index, p. 291.

treacherous action won him the promised "absolution" for his Ghibelline politics from Boniface VIII.<sup>14</sup> Dante tells Guido news of Romagna, including Rimini:

The old mastiff of Verrucchio and the young,  
Who brought Montagna into such evil state,  
After their wont still tear where they have clung.<sup>15</sup>

The young mastiff is one-eyed Malatestino, son of the Old Mastiff. The Old Mastiff and the young defeated Ghibelline (Imperial, anti-papal) forces at Rimini in 1296; and at the instigation of the Old Mastiff, Malatestino killed their leader Montagna.<sup>16</sup> Dante's Italian for the last line is much more scathing and exact than the translation quoted. Grandgent translates the line "fan de' denti succhio" in his note as "Make an auger of their teeth."<sup>17</sup> An auger is a carpenter's tool for boring holes in wood, made from a shaft that has at one end handles for twisting the shaft and at the other a screw-shaped point. The image refers to sucking the people's blood.

Paolo il Bello is Paolo Malatesta, Paolo the Fair, another son of the Old Mastiff and lover of his deformed brother Giovanni's wife, Francesca da Polenta. Dante tells their story

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<sup>14</sup>See Grandgent's "Argument" for Inferno XXVII in Dante Alighieri, La Divina Commedia, ed. C. H. Grandgent (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1933), p. 239.

<sup>15</sup>The Divine Comedy, Inferno XXVII, lines 46-48, trans. Laurence Binyon in The Portable Dante, ed. Paolo Milano (New York: Viking Press, 1947), p. 145.

<sup>16</sup>La Divina Commedia, notes to Inf. XXVII, lines 46-47, p. 242.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., note to line 48.

in Inferno V, where they wander endlessly in the second circle for carnal sinners whose desires overcame their reason. (Helen and Paris are also in this circle.) For Giovanni, who killed them both, "Caina attende"--Cain's place, the abode of traitors to kindred in nethermost Hell, awaits. "Caina attende" in Pound's Canto 5 links the murder of Alessandro with that of Paolo and Francesca. The reference to Paolo's sword caught in the arras, hindering his attempt to flee when Giovanni suddenly appears, is Pound's addition to the story, and unifies Paolo's and Parisina's stories thematically.<sup>18</sup>

Parisina Malatesta, Sigismundo's cousin, was the second wife of Niccolo d'Este. She had an affair with Niccolo's first-born son Ugo (a bastard), who was the same age as his stepmother.<sup>19</sup> When Niccolo discovered the pair's secret love, he went against all counsel and insisted that the two receive the maximum punishment: Parisina and Ugo were beheaded.<sup>20</sup> Pound tells the story in Canto 20, through the deranged mind of Niccolo suffering from intense grief and rage. The crucial lines are:

Neestho, le'er go back...                    in the autumn."  
 "Este, go' damn you." between the walls, arras,  
 Painted to look like arras. (C.20/91).

These lines show Este remembering the day he hid behind a false wall "Painted to look like arras" to spy on Ugo and Parisina.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>John Peck, "Arras and Painted Arras," Paideuma, Vol. 3 No. 1 (Spring, 1974), 61.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.







or a woman."<sup>2</sup>

Forrest Read sees in Canto 39 Odysseus-Pound's encounter with destructive/creative beauty as a prelude necessary for his return home. He writes:

I would suggest that in Canto XXXIX Elpenor and Eurilochus embody alternatives Odysseus must choose as he stands before Circe, who tells him he must go to Hades to seek directions home from the shade Tiresias. Passive Elpenor (man-destroying passion) and aggressive Eurilochus (man-destroying intellect) are shown as aspects of Odysseus' own nature from whom he learns, as in the Odyssey, to strike the middle way.<sup>3</sup>

Elpenor's is the first voice:

When I lay in the ingle of Circe  
I heard a song of that kind  
    Fat panther lay by me  
Girls talked there of fucking, beasts talked there of eating,  
All heavy with sleep, fucked girls and fat leopards,  
Lions loggy with Circe's tisane,  
Girls leery with Circe's tisane (C.39/193).

Elpenor describes Circe: "venter venustus, cunni cultrix"  
[belly beautiful, cunning in country matters] (C.39/193). His  
passion is out of season: "Spring overborne into summer/ late  
spring in the leafy autumn" (C.39/193). Elpenor, of course,

<sup>2</sup>Odyssey, X, line 228; trans. John H. Edwards and William Vasse, "Appendix A: Greek: "H θεαδς," Annotated Index to the Cantos of Ezra Pound: Cantos I-LXXXIV (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1957), p. 263; hereafter "Index."

<sup>3</sup>Forrest Read, "A Man of No Fortune," in Motive and Method in the Cantos of Ezra Pound (English Institute Essays, 1953), ed. Lewis Leary (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1954); rpt. in Ezra Pound: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Walter Sutton (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 64.

was one of the crewmen turned into swine.

Next, Circe informs Odysseus that he must first go to Hades before returning home. This passage is in Greek. Read writes, "Circe's advice is here given in Greek, with no translation, signifying that Pound as Odysseus does not comprehend the full import of her advice."<sup>4</sup>

In the Odyssey, only Eurilochus remained behind when the others rushed into the palace, lured by Circe's singing. Eurilochus "suspected that there was a snare,"<sup>5</sup> and reported back to Odysseus about the men, afterwards refusing to return with Odysseus to investigate.<sup>6</sup> Eurilochus is a kind of second lieutenant--bright, but no sea captain. Eurilochus, in this canto, takes pride that "nec ivi in harum/ Nec in harum ingressus sum" [nor went I to the pigsty/ Nor into the pigsty did I enter] (C.39/194).

To Odysseus, protected from Circe's potion by Hermes' Moly, Circe says,

Discuss this in bed said the lady  
 Euné kai philoteti ephata kirkh  
 /making love in bed, said Circe\_7  
 "I think you must be Odysseus....  
     feel better when you have eaten....  
 Always with your mind on the past....  
 Ad Orcum autem quisquam?  
     nondum nave nigra pervenit.....  
 Been to hell in a boat yet? (C. 39/194-95).

<sup>4</sup> Read, "A Man of No Fortune," p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> Odyssey, X, line 232; trans. A. T. Murray, 1: 361.

<sup>6</sup> Odyssey, X, lines 244-72.

Circe has to ameliorate Odysseus' Eurilochean distrust so he can yield properly to the transformation she has to offer.<sup>7</sup>

Read explains it this way:

Odysseus underwent at Circe's house the experience which altered him, preparing himself for the nekuia, or journey to the underworld. Had he refused to enter Circe's bed he would have clung to the Eurilochus alternative and would not have been in a passive mood which opened his heart to the words of Tiresias, thereby to absorb the wisdom of the Land of the Dead. Without that "education,"<sup>8</sup> Odysseus would never have reached Ithaca, his home.

The canto closes with a spring processional in which maidens sing and dance "there in the glade/ To Flora's night" amid the new flowers. They dance

Flank by flank on the headland  
                                           with the Goddess' eyes to seaward  
 By Circeo, by Terracina, with the stone eyes  
                                           white toward the sea  
 With one measure, unceasing:  
                                           "Fac deum!" "Est factus." [Make god! He is made.]  
 Ver novum!  
                                           ver novum! [fresh spring!]  
 Thus made the spring (C.39/195).

Circeo and Terracina are Italian coastal towns, the former obviously connected with Circe in some way. The important thing to note in this passage is the transition from sexual encounter to spring as a god's presence. Consciousness of the spring as a god (eternal state of mind) occurs because of a ritual partic-

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<sup>7</sup>Read, "A Man of No Fortune," p. 68.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p. 69.



the small lamps drift in the bay  
 and the sea's claw gathers them.  
 Neptunus drinks after neap-tide.  
 Tamuz! Tamuz!!  
 The red flame going seaward.

By this gate art thou measured. (C.47/236).

Hugh Kenner tells that "viewing at Rapallo every July votive lights set adrift in the Golfo di Tigullio for the festival of the Montallegre Madonna, Pound wove into it cries of "Tammuz! Tammuz!!" and affirmations that Adonis was commemorated still."<sup>9</sup> The cry "TU DIONA/ Kai MOIRAI' ADONIN" (C.47/236), which means "you, Diona, and the Fates," refers to Aphrodite's lament for Adonis. Diona is Zeus' wife and the mother of Aphrodite, but in Bion's "Lament for Adonis" and the Pervigilium Veneris ("Vigil of Venus") Aphrodite is called "Diona."<sup>10</sup> Pound is here overlaying centuries of vegetation worship in the context of Circe's grace and the nekuia.

After indications of the female nature, Odysseus' destiny is told in a prophetic tone recalling Tiresias' in Canto 1:

Moth is called over mountain  
 The bull runs blind on the sword, naturans  
 To the cave art thou called, Odysseus,  
 By Molu hast thou respite for a little,  
 By Molu art thou freed from the one bed  
 that thou may'st return to another. (C.47/237).

Perhaps Odysseus is seen as midway between the moth and the bull--

<sup>9</sup>Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1971), p. 368.

<sup>10</sup>"Appendix A: Greek: 'Τὴ Διώνᾳ' and 'Καὶ Μοῖραι' 'Ἀδονίῳ,'"  
Index, pp. 268 and 264, respectively.



the one ethereal, the other beastly. In some sense, this canto seems to present Odysseus-Pound, "Knowing less than drugged beasts," being initiated into the mysteries of the animal kingdom (of which he is a part). The rhythms of nature, and the cosmic cycle of the seasons, follow from Hesiod's directions for plowing (from Works and Days):

Begin thy plowing  
 When the Pleiades go down to their rest,  
 Begin thy plowing  
 40 days are they under seabord,  
 Thus do in fields by seabord  
 And in valleys winding down toward the sea.  
 When the cranes fly high  
     think of plowing.  
 By this gate art thou measured  
 Thy day is between a door and a door (C.47/237).

"Fields by seabord" recalls the spring processional in Canto 39 and is anything but gratuitous. Plowing, of course, is the human activity associated at Eleusis with the sacred rites of Demeter and Persephone.

In the next section, vegetable and animal imagery serve to describe man's life in the eternal cycles of nature. Man's weight on Tellus (earth) is lighter than the shadow, on roof tiles, of "the floating martin/ that has no care for your presence" (C.47/237).

Thy weight less than the shadow  
 Yet hast thou gnawed through the mountain,  
     Scylla's white teeth less sharp.  
 Hast thou found a nest softer than cunnus  
 Or hast thou found better rest  
 Hast'ou a deeper planting, doth thy death year  
 Bring swifter shoot?  
 Hast thou entered more deeply the mountain? (C.47/238).



ience of the vital universe. Leon Surette writes, in reference to Canto 39, that "this dance/descent which incorporates the manifestation of a goddess, rather suprisingly modulates into a symbolical evocation of the act of copulation, as if Odysseus' visit to Circe's bed were not so much the prelude to a descent as the descent itself."<sup>12</sup> This is even more so in the case of Canto 47. The nekuia is the nostos. And, whereas the nostos largely involves Odysseus-Pound's investigation and interpretation of history, it also involves his personal encounter with myth, which underlies and forms that history.

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<sup>12</sup>Leon Surette, "'A Light From Eleusis': Some Thoughts on Pound's Nekuia," Paideuma, Vol. 3 No. 2 (Fall, 1974), 212.

## CHAPTER VII

## CONCLUSION

For Pound, Western civilization had reached a dead end by World War I. European culture had by then reached a point of senility at the end of its long process of attenuation from vital sources. The main purpose of the Cantos is to redefine those origins by an interpretive exploration of the past, thus making a new culture possible.

Pound's personal understanding of the meaning of the past shapes and informs his handling of historical material in these first eleven cantos. The Eleusinian tradition, in the Cantos, symbolizes the true well-springs of Western culture; and the positive meaning of the past is largely identified with this tradition. The spiritual relationship between man and cosmic reality Pound believes to have existed in the Eleusinian mysteries is seen as responsible for Western culture's heritage of values as discriminated in works of art. The initial cantos seek to redefine Eleusinian consciousness.

In the first eleven cantos' "preparation of the palette," the Eleusinian tradition is followed from its most vital phase in Homeric Greece through the Rome of Ovid and Catullus and thence into Provençal and Italian culture. The vitality of this tradition inheres in its maintaining man in proper intimacy with "the germinal universe of wood alive, of stone alive." The intimacy of that relation has been steadily decaying, resulting in the

modern world's spiritual malaise. These cantos explore the lost consciousness of the vital universe as that has been manifested in history and myth while at the same time charting its dissolution.

In the Eleusinian paideuma as presented in these cantos, sexuality is the entry point into consciousness of the germinal universe; but the initiation is a dangerous one. The will of the individual must be in harmony with creative forces if harm to self and others is to be avoided on the one hand or failure to undergo transformation on the other. To be reasonable and to conduct one's life with full humanity requires that these forces be taken into account and properly appreciated. The Circe motif crystalizes the dualistic power of nature and serves Pound as a focal point in his examination of consciousness and will at different times in history.

In a human context, Circean nature represents the passions-- which can be either destructive or creative. In their positive aspect, the passions permit that intimate consciousness of creation and its processes necessary to the formulation of lasting values. In their negative aspect, the passions can bring the doom such as afflicted the House of Atreus or Niccolo d'Este. The spirit of Eleusis represents the necessary balance between passion and reason because in that spirit the self has consciousness of totality. Odysseus' encounter with Circe, along with the similar encounters throughout the Cantos, dramatizes the struggle to order one's will in accord with natural forces.

Sexuality, whether in the form of actual intercourse, heightened



sensory and affective perceptions, or in clarity of mind, is a counterpart of Eleusinian consciousness. Sexuality is both a mode of comprehending creation as well as a mode of participating and identifying with the vital universe. As such, sexuality is fundamental to the formulation of permanent values out of experience of the world as Pound conceives it.

An examination of man's relation to nature as a theme in these cantos provides, as this study demonstrates, illumination on the Cantos central concern for a new paideuma. Pound's searching into origins for that paideuma finds the most important problem to be the relation of man's will to the creative universe. The Cantos can be seen as Odysseus-Pound's attempt to understand this problem by examining man's will and the nature of the vital universe as these can be encountered imaginatively in history and in myth. The Cantos are the record of that attempt. Pound's search for a permanent hierarchy of values as the basis for social order begins, as it must, with his attempt to understand the individual's right relation with nature.

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