The Poetry of the Process: a Study of the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound

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Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature

Declaration

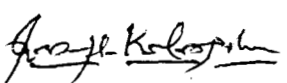
I, Mohandas C.B., hereby declare that this thesis, entitled "The Poetry of the Process: a Study of the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound" is a bona fide record of research done by me and no part of it has been presented before for any degree, diploma or other similar title of any other university.

Mohandas C.B.

C.U. Campus
8 June 1999

Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "The Poetry of the Process: a Study of the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound" submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of the Doctor of Philosophy is a record of bona fide research carried out by the candidate under my supervision. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any degree before.



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in memoriam aveesh k (1967-1992)
poet & fellow-poundian,
silent now
in pastness

Acknowledgements

What follows is the work of a group that wouldn't acknowledge its own existence, a bunch of geeks who insist on overlooking the meaning of idleness. The present study would not have been possible without that which sustains me and the steady support I received from family, supervisor, friends (with only two Poundians among them), the ASRC library and staff, and the fraternity of Pound-scholars (*especially those with whom I disagree*).

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The Latitudes of Poundworld: Introductory Observations

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Chapter 1 The Latitudes of Poundworld: Introductory Observations

> There is a most intimate connection between the ways of human power and human knowledge . . . and that which is most useful in practice is the most correct in theory. (Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, II.4)
>
> All states, said Plato, were governed by the selfish interests of the ruling class. And the reform of existing institutions was therefore no less difficult than the establishment of new ones.
>
> Convinced that knowledge is virtue and that all knowledge is innate in all men and could be uncovered through untiring search, he vested his faith for a model community in the concept of a "virtuous tyrant," a man with absolute power who was altruistic enough to become his philosopher king. And three times he went to Sicily when deluding himself into believing he had one.
>
> His first time in Syracuse, the tyrant-ruler there vacillated, it is said, between having him killed and selling him into slavery, and decided on the latter. He was rescued from slavery, goes the tale, by a fortuitous coincidence of Aristotelian dramatic recognition of very low caliber, and by a generous ransom from a benefactor to gain his release.
>
> The next time he went, the father was dead and Dionysius II was installed, and Plato had a powerful sponsor in the new ruler's uncle; the powerful sponsor was exiled on suspicion of importing the philosopher to warp the ruler's brain with philosophy and seize power for himself.
>
> Plato was old when summoned for the third time and. . . . (Joseph Heller 269-70)

in the world of cartesian shades

What is attempted in the following pages does not have much to do with literary criti-

cism in its disciplined form in English studies. Obviously, Ezra Pound's (interdisciplinary) work, preoccupied as it is with economics, politics, and religion, can never be discussed meaningfully without crossing the frontiers of "pure" and "proper" literature. It has to be granted that Pound criticism managed to keep itself confined to the cloistered domain of "literary" studies for more than three decades.[1] This may be attributed, to a considerable extent, to the dominance of formalism—the European and American versions of formalism, despite being determined by different political compulsions, share the same kind of distaste for politics—in the academic world of the fifties and early sixties. Nevertheless, a "literary" description of the *Cantos* runs the risk of looking ridiculous, considering the poem's complicity with Italian fascism and, more importantly, with the various political and religious/ritualistic factors that ingrained its formation, as well as its discursive formulation. Recent studies, it has to be said, have begun to take note of this politics. The present study is different in that it attempts to realize "an-other" perspective. Its objective is not merely to emphasize (by analysis/description) the ideological contexture of the *Cantos*. Implicitly, this study is part of an attempt to understand the dynamics of its own political environment. This hidden objective enables it to be twice removed from the domain of literary criticism.

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[1] I do not mean that ideological issues were kept out of the criticism of the period. In fact, there are numerous references to Pound's political and economic convictions, in the discussions in question. However, they are made, invariably, for purposes of explication alone. In the context of explication, the *political* connotations of a blatantly political issue are often overlooked. This "critical" blindness or aporia, as Paul de Man would have it (1983), is explicit in Hugh Kenner's pioneering study of Pound. He elaborates on Pound's theories regarding the relationship between writing and politics (1951, 37-48), without bothering to consider the ideological implications of these.

The present study does not have any Confucian or Daoist allegiances and the term, "the Process," as employed here, is not burdened with meanings attributed to it by the traditions of these warring schools of Chinese thought. I use it merely to refer to a concept that has been in use. A disturbingly long succession of dynasties have thrived and perished, playing on the variations of this concept. The shades of meaning shifted and congealed as per the dictates of the ideological milieu, and these fluctuations are often overlooked in the domain of (willfully induced) political innocence where much of the academic research into Pound's work has taken place. It is crucial to remember that "the Process" (or the Way) has been a waylaid term in an uncanny history of political convenience. This term has the same function in the *Cantos*, and the reader who chooses to ignore this detail falls prey to the very machinations that chartered its political uses.

The *Cantos*, I argue, does not even dream of altering the curious and unfortunate destiny of this term. In Ezra Pound's "enlightened" lexicon, this term is ultimately defined as a spiritual-political device for attaining knowledge and effective domination, though this may not be what he aspired for. The spirituality of the *Cantos*, manifest in its persistent commitment to the "sacred" technology that appears to assure illumination, does not obscure the poem's political emphasis. In fact, these are welded together under the catalytic spell of the vision of the *paradiso terrestre*. The grammar of this *paradiso*, the following pages contend, can be traced back to the Platonic and Confucian dream-manufactories in their diverse incarnations. The texts of their modern equivalents (as inscribed by, to name a few, Jefferson, Marx and Mussolini) are composed in accor-

dance with the same regulations, which guided these dreams of the "ideal." Significantly, the Enlightenment was inspired, among other things, by the "discovery" of China, through the reports of the Jesuit missionaries which reached Europe during the closing years of the sixteenth century. The evidence thus gathered, regarding a non-Christian civilization that thrived for more than a millennium, eventually fuelled rationalist attacks on the Christian dogma. In other words, the Chinese connection that is foregrounded in the *Cantos* lurks in the horizon of the theoretic formulations of Voltaire and Marx. The smooth transitions that mark the time-Odyssey of the protagonists of the *Cantos*[2] emphasize the continuities, which unify the metamorphosing dream that makes up the substance of the poem. Political ideologies which attempt to change the world—ranging from the Platonic and Confucian to the Marxian and Mussolinian systems—present themselves within a framework that demands, as a preliminary maneuver, the creation of a *world-picture*. Systems are generated by the reductionist strategy that fancies nothing less than a firm grasp on a universe that is available for subjection and manipulation. *Subjection*, significantly, is the mode of existence of the *discoursing subject*. In an age that has not freed itself from the sweeping proclamation of Descartes regarding thinking and being, the exploits of such a *subject* are taken for granted as

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[2] Such remarkably swift and easy transformations—that allow Odysseus to melt into John Adams or Yong Ching for instance—take place in a space where all attributes of temporality are suspended. Transformations of this sort (there are many in the poem) mark the fusion of Pound the technician and Pound the visionary. Pound's success in this respect is fraught with ambiguities as it entrenches him deeply in an idealist tradition (call it subjective or objective) that renders him ill equipped when he addresses the temporal. He tends to misread the temporal as per the insights provided by the ideal space where the poem unfolds its vision. The favorable climate of this milieu allows the metamorphosis of Dionysus into Jefferson and Mussolini smooth and effortless.

legitimate, as *natural*. The re-creation of the world in one's own image becomes imperative in such an age, which inevitably leads to an upsurge of utopian dreaming.

The idea of the Process, as it is used in the *Cantos*, provides precisely such a framework. The ease with which this idea absorbs similar visions and orders makes it ideal for a poem that is replete with cryptograms of similitude. Such huge appetite for one's own kind[3] becomes sinister when it is coupled with a passion to re-write the world as per one's own ideals. The danger is that the schema is flexible enough to *in*clude what does not belong to "one's own kind," and this accommodation takes place solely on terms set forward by the discoursing subject. That is, instead of accommodating the Other on its own terms, it is represented *imagistically*, with every likelihood of autonomy foreclosed. Such created images, in spite of all the tall claims made about them, have no existence outside the fabric of the *same* since no technique of representation can be conceived other than the one that is rooted in the idea of *similitude*. Moreover, the age that calls itself "modern" anchors its *self* on the notion of the *same*, on self-knowledge, as noted by thinkers who may have no sympathy with the ideological stance adopted here.[4] Jürgen Habermas writes:

> Modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; *it has to create its normativity out of itself*. Modernity sees itself cast back upon itself without

[3] Cf. "I am homesick after mine own kind" (Pound 1968, 20).

[4] The ideological premises of this dissertation will be made obvious in the middle and closing chapters.

> any possibility of escape. This explains the sensitiveness of its self-understanding, the dynamism of the attempt, carried forward incessantly down to our time, to "pin itself down." (1987, 7)

Its roots in the discoursing self (cf. the Cartesian dictum, "I think therefore I am") fetters the subject to a world of similitude, rendering it incapable of knowing an Other. When the protagonist of the *Cantos* sails "after knowledge" (Pound 1987, 236) he is not able to break himself free from the self-imposed constraints of the modern rational subjectivity. The paradise the poem seeks to build, in consequence, is a paradise for the dreaming self, where there is no space-time for the Other. All it can accomplish is a representation of the Other, which is none other than a reflection caught in the distorting mirror of the self where everything is transformed into its own image.

Pound's *Cantos*, despite its apparent irrationality and lack of coherence, aspires to evolve a science of the soul, the human society and the paradisal mode of existence. The penchant for scientific methodology may be traced back, through Giambattista Vico and Charles Montesquieu, to the beginnings of the modern age of reason, which was theoretically inaugurated in the writings of Francis Bacon. The present study is committed to the view that, in spite of the minor disagreements and inconsistencies, the *Cantos* forms part of the intellectual tradition that came into being with the emergence of the modern reasoning subject. This tradition, in the writings of thinkers ranging from Bacon and Descartes to Lévi-Strauss and Althusser, sets out to explain the cosmos in rational terms, thus narrativizing it. Pound's quarrel with Hegelian metaphysics or his

indifference to the systems of Kant or Husserl are hardly sufficient to contest this position seriously. The differences between the Cartesian and Hegelian systems, with their emphasis on subjective and objective ideas respectively, turn out to be irrelevant in this discussion as both are animated by the desire to build all-embracing systems. Similarly, our view is challenged neither by Pound's interest in the esoteric and mythic systems of pre-modern Europe (Hegel, incidentally, had the same interests) nor by his ideogrammic method with its apparent rejection of logic. Such inconsistencies do not affect the fundamental kinship of the Poundian system with the ones created by the modern rationality; all these are underwritten by the *desire* to give scientific footing to all forms of knowledge and recast the world, reformulate it, in accordance with "modern" interpretation. Bacon, it is useful to remember, was not only the first prophet-philosopher of modern science, but also the adviser of King James I on vital matters such as the expansion of the empire. The political machinations of the British thinker echoes Plato's (unfulfilled) dream of a republic in Syracuse, and is a fair illustration of the weird games of power in which the rational subject with a vision of a new world-order often comes to play a crucial role. The structuring of knowledge, from the very beginning of this age of visionary rationality, was inseparably linked to the mechanics of power. In fact, they feed into each other; the bond between knowledge and domination can never be severed.

cartography

Before proceeding further, it would be useful to describe the general layout of the project at hand. The second chapter, which follows this introduction, attempts to link Pound's dream of writing paradise with the (similar) programs of three different waves of enlightenment—Platonic, Confucian and modern—and to consider the implications of such allegiances. The possible objections to such a reading are usually based on three grounds: (1) the *Cantos* lacks coherence and it is unrealistic to link it with the coherent systems of modernism; (2) it is open-ended and radically different from all closed systems of thought; and (3) it depends on pre-modern cults like the Eleusinian mysteries and is, for the same reason, incompatible with the rational modes of perception and description.

However, a closer observation would reveal that the issues raised by these objections are interrelated. The incoherence of the *Cantos*, it becomes clear, is as disputable as its polyphony and open-endedness are. Just as the task of establishing the logical links between two successive ideograms is a matter of time and energy, the poem could be made coherent, largely, by supplying certain missing connectives. The components that do not yield such a construction of coherence, it turns out, are precisely the ones the poem seeks to suppress. In other words, the potential for coherence is very much there in the visionary framework of the *Cantos*, though it is undermined, curiously enough, by

the inherent contradictions of the same framework. However, the poem can do no more than acknowledge the presence of these contradictions; it is not even aware of, nor can it account for, its own grounding. The *Cantos* never sets itself free from the modern (read, rational) dream of coherence. In spite of the feeble acknowledgment, the general tendency in the poem is to ignore or suppress its internal contradictions. The centered incoherence of the *Cantos*, it may be concluded, results from the historical and psychological contingencies on the one hand, and a refusal/inability, on the other, to look at/understand the elements that cause disorder. Its incoherence is not exactly unambiguous in the sense that it is insistently resisted by a dream of a cosmic *order*. The polyphony of the *Cantos* is even more so since the other voices it claims to accommodate are simply the ones that the discoursing subject can afford to endorse. Similarly, its open-endedness is severely limited, being open only to the similar. The same principle applies to the question of the Other: in conformity with the tradition of western metaphysics, the irreducible Other is placed within the framework of the same. This intolerance of the incommensurable has a long history in western philosophy and, in spite of his antipathies, Pound's poem falls within the Hellenic-Hegelian boundaries of thought where subjection of the object is the norm. It is further argued that the mysteries, as they appear in the *Cantos*, are not mysterious enough to claim that description. They are as rationalized as the corresponding elements in the treatises of George Frazer or Leo Frobenius. In other words, they form part of a rational framework which, in a wild frenzy that almost undermines it, reaches out to things alien, and adopts them for the sole reason that they are reason's bastards formulated in a form that is discredited in the present.

Transcendence, in the *Cantos*, as elsewhere in the domain of the rational subject, is always into the adjacent domain where the Other is rendered into the metrics of similitude. In this aspect it conforms to the tradition of post-Platonic ontology which, according to Lévinas, thrives by the "reduction of the *other* to the categories of the *same*" (Kearney 1984, 53). This is accomplished in the poem by (1) substituting the divine with its idolatrous equivalent, the invocation of which is attained through mediumistic devices (in tune with the Hellenic-Hegelian tradition) and by (2) grasping it through the idea of the Process, which is grounded almost (but not quite) beyond the border of the thinkable (in tune with tenets of Confucian rationality). The cult of the goddess and the erotic mysticism of Cavalcanti and Dante stimulate the former while latter is validated by the versions of Confucian ideas in action.

The third and fourth chapters attempt to pry into the secrets behind the poem's remarkable maneuverability that apparently allows transactions between the realms of reason and unreason. The *Cantos*, consistent with its roots in the Enlightenment, has ready at hand a frame of reference that correlates and accounts for all the warring elements which constitute its body. This device, which reconciles the diverse elements ranging from the myth of Odysseus and the Eleusinian mysteries to the thought of Coke and Mussolini is, as suggested above, the Neo-Confucian vision of the Process. It is not surprising that a poem that attempts to refer to all and everything is attracted to a way of thinking that imposes order, brings the known as a totality under its encyclopedic viewfinder. The creation of such a world-picture corresponds to the aspirations of the Enlightenment, since it is fuelled by the appetite for the totality of existence, which is a

characteristic trait of Hegelianism.

Pound's vision is anchored in the Confucian motif of the "unwobbling pivot" of the universe, which is a representation of the still center of the universe, the root of the Process and its fountainhead. The *Unwobbling Pivot* of Confucius, in which the metaphysics of the Process is subjected to contemplation, is instrumental here. However, this does not mean a departure from the Confucian inclination towards ethics; the middle sections of the book address the ethical questions, situated within the comprehensive framework of the Process. In other words, the moral/political action that transforms society has, as its context, a cosmic vision—spanning from the infernal depths of the soul to its paradisal altitudes—that could be reduced to a master code, a passion that is not fundamentally different from the one that inspired the Enlightenment. In the ling[2] ideogram, which opens Canto LXXXV, this master code is emblematized. Along with Yggdrasail, the ash-tree of Nordic mythology, it represents the cosmos the *Cantos* attempts to depict, ranging from the Hades into which Odysseus descends to the *paradiso terrestre* he strives to reach. By emblematizing the Process, it also intimates the sacred technology by which this paradise may be realized.

The idea of the Process, then, functions not merely as a motif that captures the prominent desires and tendencies of the Enlightenment; it is a structural device as well, a device that attempts to unify the discordant components of the *Cantos*. It simplifies Pound's task as the builder of a system, the political segments of which are co-authored by figures like Malatesta and Jefferson.

The texts of Confucianism and those akin to them (ranging from the texts of Apollonius of Tyana to those of Adams and Mussolini) provide the *Cantos* with the components of a grand narrative of political and spiritual emancipation. The fifth chapter looks into the consolidation of this narrative as well as its disturbing implications. Stifling tyrannies inevitably (and enigmatically) shadow the dreams of utopia, and these constitute a distinctive component of the Enlightenment. This is reflected in the *Cantos* by the smooth transitions from the Neo-Confucian dream-empires through the New World and Leninism to the Italian fascist fantasia. Even at its most sordid moments, the dream of utopia is not divorced from the luminous sphere of spirituality. In fact, spirituality becomes meaningful, in Poundworld, only when the whole community is rooted in it. The image of the blaze of the thousand candles Pound uses in his definition of fascism (Pound 1973, 276) is to be read as an actualization of the light written about in the texts of Neoplatonic mysticism. Illumination becomes real when the community is illumined, as they become the inhabitants of the celestial city. The instrumental role in this political-moral-spiritual transformation is played by the emperor rooted in the Process (as per the Confucian vision) or the ruler whose creative action is inspired by the vision of the celestial city or the ideal republic which stays in the mind as a "formèd trace." Such a ruler, it follows, is not merely a demigod (rendered so by the rituals of the fascist cult) but also a lover-adept since the *Forma* of the dreamed city has the same function as the *Forma* of the Lady in erotic mysticism. Pound associates the efforts to realize the terrestrial paradise with the struggle of the poet to register something precisely, legitimizing it on the ground that the corrosion of language and the degeneration of the body politic have the same causes (cf. Pound 1952a, 29-31). In short, the fascist dicta-

tor is not merely a counterfeit god, but also a fraudulent lover-poet.

The Ideal City, it is held, is built within the ambience of the light of awareness and thus the narration of the protagonist's emergence from the murky world of ignorance to the radiant sphere of light becomes crucially important. Chapter six focuses on the groping of Pound-Odysseus from the Cimmerian lands enveloped in darkness to the world of the gods, and links it with the strands of narrative that rhyme with it, in which the darkness-light dichotomy is instrumental. Pound-Odysseus seeks to "build light" and this is not possible without *directio voluntatis* (direction of the will) which is nothing other than the will to power, the force that drives him towards Ithaca, in order to re-establish order in the lawless kingdom. The impetus of the protagonist is emphasized through the contrast instituted with the fall of Elpenor, which is a dramatization of *abuleia*, the antithesis of *directio voluntatis*. By welding together the ideas of the Process and *directio voluntatis*, the *Cantos* evolves a metaphysics of power, one of the major functions of which is to legitimize the discourse of fascism.

As the will of the protagonist of the *Cantos* to acquire knowledge is welded to the will to acquire power, the question of representation has a prominent position. This is rendered even more complex by Pound's insistence on the "documentary" method—a method that, according to his theory, guarantees objectivity. The seventh chapter of this study focuses on this factor. Pound regarded literature as a science that studies mankind (1954, 42)—a view that brings into play not merely virtues like precision and objectivity but also claims regarding a firm hold on reality. The problem is not that he

often departed from what he preached but that the theoretical assumptions that sustain his stance are not as foolproof as they appear to be. The objectivity of the sciences themselves is highly problematic since, in scientific discourse, interpretations are often donned as facts. In the same fashion, Pound's "presentations" turn out, on scrutiny, to be readings or re-presentations. As the poem aspires to "include history," an analysis of the way historical "facts" are "presented" in it would clearly reveal the dynamics of the mode of representation adopted. One of the most striking things about the historical figures in the *Cantos* is that only those who have Pound's approval are allowed to speak freely. The speech of those whom he associates with the cult of darkness is either distorted or comical. This is not fundamentally different from the ways in which fascism silences opposition. Though the theory of the documentary method promises a place for all the numerous positions and voices, Pound's poetic practice either absorbs the different into the poem's visionary framework or caricatures it in such a way that its position in the conspiracy of darkness looks legitimate. The dynamic image of Sigismundo Malatesta presented in cantos VIII-XI, for instance, corresponds merely to Pound's own concept of the *condottiere*, the sole objective of which is to create a predetermined impact in the reader's mind. The "real" Malatesta these cantos promise to define remains an elusive figure, and he becomes even more elusive when Pound's sources are consulted. A reader who consults the sources of the poem finds himself/herself embattled by a host of texts whose authenticity is by no means self-evident. In fact, Pound reserves his insights regarding textual manipulation for occasions when he discusses authors/institutions he does not approve of; and the textuality of those with his approval is never scrutinized. For instance, the works of Confucius and Ovid are

incorporated into the poem as "sacred texts." The documents in the *Cantos* become meaningful only through an interpretative act and it was through the same process that they were incorporated. An interpretation normally considers the context in which the text is situated and the context itself, as Dominick LaCapra points out, is "a text of sorts" (1983, 116). The act of interpretation, to complicate matters further, takes place in an environment conditioned by personal inclinations and ideological convictions and this complicates matters further. The decision to accept certain texts without subjecting them to thorough interrogation involves an act of faith and it is the same kind of faith that drew Pound towards Mussolini. In other words, the fascist devices of the glorification of "one's own kind" and the silencing of the Other govern the historiography of the *Cantos*.

The fascist discourse of the *Cantos* proceeds by the appropriation of figures from history, their initiation through textual layering and further, their idolization through rituals. One of the most revealing examples of this, the metamorphosis of Jefferson into Mussolini, whose idol-function is not distinct from that of Dionysus, is discussed in chapter eight. If the identification of the two figures is rationally worked out in the book *Jefferson and or Mussolini* (by representing the Duce as the Jefferson of the twentieth century), the corresponding segment in the *Cantos* makes use of musical structuring. Cantos XXXI-XLI appropriate Jefferson into the framework of the fascist present and redefine Mussolini in terms of the American Enlightenment. The principle of *directio voluntatis* is conceived as the driving force behind both these figures and the conception of this myth is complete with the identification of the Duce with Dionysus

in the opening lines of Canto LXXIV. The link between Jefferson and Mussolini is not as far-fetched as it appears to be. Fascism, like Romanticism before it, is a continuation and the undermining of the Enlightenment. In both these reactions the grand ideals of the Age of Reason are accommodated (except the unique position conceded to reason), while the suppression of the irrational is deeply resented. Thus, the man of genius becomes the hero in the Romantic age, the political ideals of which were drawn from the revolution in France. Fascism replaces the Romantic notion of the national bard with that of the inspired leader, and grants him the unusual privileges granted to the former. To be precise, fascism is the political use of the revolt against the tyranny of reason.

Pound's fascism is aestheticized and ritualized to the core since it is apprehended solely in terms of beauty (the ideal state is a thing of beauty) and is sustained through the rites of the cult. As fascism's frenzied poetic embraces the poem, many of its original aesthetic-moral objectives (regarding verbal precision sincerity etc.) are compromised and, even reversed. They taint the poem's fabric, as the strands of empty rhetoric are ingrained in it. Moreover, it is important to remember that Mussolini is not an alien figure that is introduced into the poem by historical contingency; he is an embodiment of certain basic ideas on which the edifice of the *Cantos* rests. He links the ritualistic and Dionysian components of the poem with those that are Confucian and ethical.

Pound's deep interest in the rites and mysteries of fascism is linked with his anti-Semitism and the implications of this relationship are of tremendous importance. The more obvious and less important one is Pound's belief in fascism's potential to cure the

world of the "cancer" of usury, for which the Jewish people are held responsible. However, as in the case of Voltaire, Pound's anti-Semitism is not confined to mere prejudices such as these. There are deeper reasons and these are related to the questions of idolatry and the idol's function in structuring the known. The Dionysian stature that is conferred on Mussolini enables Pound to include him in a "European religion" that is free from "verminous semitic infections" (Pound, 1973, 71) that the poem envisages. This religion is offered as an alternative to the Judaic faith, which abhors idolatry. It springs from a desire to protect the individual from the tyranny of the one God of Judaism who remains hidden, and this alternative is political and spiritual at the same time. The spirituality of the poem, it has to be emphasized, is aestheticized like its politics. The deities of the Greco-Roman world are beautiful like the myths that embody them and they naturally appeal to a *poetic* sensibility like that of Pound. The God of the Old Testament, on the other hand, is generally perceived as a harsh, wrathful father figure. The most disconcerting thing that Pound (and the Enlightenment in general) comes across here is the predicament that this God is unknowable and hence not available to the categories of thought. The hero of the poem is Odysseus, the master of the known, and not Abraham, who wanders into the unknown. In other words, the religion of the *Cantos*, with its preference for the materiality of the idol conforms to the Enlightenment's emphasis on the material, knowable world. The God of the Old Testament that remains separate and different is not tolerated by a sensibility that craves for identification and unification. Like Hegel before him, Pound embraces the Hellenic religion (and Hellenized Christianity to the extent that it reconciles man-God opposition) because it is compatible with his spirit. More important, the devices used by Greco-Roman relig-

ions to know the divine and those used by the Enlightenment thought to conceive the Other as the same serve to silence what is different and expel it from the sphere of awareness. The infinitely-other is evaded (in Hegel and in Pound) because their respective systems have no space where it could be accommodated.

An understanding of the function of the deities of the *Cantos* is as significant as that of their origin and nature. Their function, the present study argues, is closely akin to that of fetish objects in the dynamics of the psyche. Chapter ten attempts to decipher the functions in the *Cantos* that parallel fetishism. As in the case of fetishism in psychodynamics, the freezing image of the deity obscures and further on substitutes what it represents. The surrogate object functions as a device that simplifies things by appearing to provide the necessary insulation and thus domesticating the unknowable. This procedure limits the scope of the poem's vision severely since what cannot be accommodated is discarded callously. The boundaries of the paradise conceived in the poem are set by its Neoplatonic-imagistic/idolatrous discourses. The ambits beyond the river of crystal, in which goddesses float, are seldom registered in its cartography. Moreover, visionary experience is confined to the *nous*, knowing nothing other than the known. The "sacred technology" that makes the elevation to this realm possible is a rational system, designed for methodical progress. The major objective of this system is to extend the sphere of light, of knowledge, and thus dispel darkness. Pound's deities exist on the plain of the known, a realm that is essentially the creation of the fear of the unknown and the unknowable. Consequently, Pound's Odyssean hero is confined in the *nous*, incapable of further ascent. His knowledge is captivatingly transformed into

myths that refer unto themselves. In other words, the hero is unable to extricate himself from the self-referential vicious circle of the fetishist spirituality of his own making.

The closing chapter examines the consequences of the position outlined above. The distinction between the abstract language of metaphysics and concrete one of ideogrammic discourse is not as solid as it is made out to be. Both are metaphoric to the same degree and in both cases, metaphors are literalized. Pound's attitude towards the question of metaphor is extremely complex. Though acutely aware of the metaphoricity of language, Pound was wary of figurative language and this is consistent with the truth-claims on which his poetics is based. However, unable to get rid of metaphoricity, he settles for the notion of the "interpretative metaphor" which turns out to be extremely advantageous because it allows intervention and displacement. That is, in a characteristic maneuver the metaphor usurps its own tenor. The principle of the "direct examination of phenomena" (Pound, 1951, 20) and the transparent representation it promises are thus rendered dysfunctional. Thus, the "well-defined image" becomes opaque and tangible to form a well-defined idol, which is, in its refusal to signify anything other than itself, sterile. Therefore, it is natural that the major manifestations of the literalized metaphor are linked, closely or remotely, to fetishism and idolatry. The self-referential idol provides a false realization of the Other and thus renders the appetite for it sluggish, deferring it infinitely.

The fragmentation of the mind effected by fetishist spirituality is reflected in the admission of incoherence towards the end of the *Cantos*. The issue of incoherence is ren-

dered enigmatic by the potential preserved by the rationality of the Enlightenment to breed coherence in all its products. However, this potential is undermined by the Romantic insurrection that continues in Pound's poetry and politics. Partly an extension of the sphere of rational *subject*ivity and partly a revolt against the tyranny of reason, Romanticism legitimizes the fervor of political revolution and rewrites it in terms of the pantheistic and sacrificial rites of the premodern world. Moreover, with the idol coalescing with the ideogram, the self-referentiality of the imagistic/ideogrammic mode recedes to the self's world of decentered pleasures. The regression is to a realm of fantasy that cannot be explained solely in psychological terms. The "One who moves all things" in Dante's paradise is dethroned here to be replaced by the deities of Pound-world. However, this is not an instance of replacing the tyranny of the One by the rule of the many; instead, the One is displaced by the discoursing subject. The shreds of the fresco of the subject's mind reflect the deities of the pagan world and those of its own creation. The resultant spiritual condition corresponds to the psychic disorder caused, in Lacanian terms, by the rejection of the Name-of-the-Father. It leads to a state of delusion, Lacan argues, (1989, 215-17) in which the signifier and the signified are indistinguishable. This later extends to the social and cultural realms until the disruption with reality is complete. The problem in the *Cantos*, it must be emphasized, is not simply of psychological origin. It may be traced back to spiritual and cultural practices prevalent in the enlightened world. This leads to the conclusion that the *Cantos* is wrecked by a psychosis of the soul, in which the process of signification is severely impaired.

Though the general ideological bent the present study displays may be termed postmodernist, it is not affiliated to any particular school of contemporary thought. However, it must be mentioned that it draws from the theories of Lévinas, Lyotard, Adorno Horkheimer and, to a lesser extent, of Derrida and Lacan. It is also important to mention that there is no illusion of transcending the discourse of the Enlightenment or of being totally free from its premises and procedures. The present study belongs to the same domain so long as it is a rational analysis of a subject. Nonetheless, it is highly wary of its methods and acutely aware of its limitations. It is self-critical as well, suffering from the maladies it sets out to cure.

trends in pound studies

The implications of the political and ideological positions the *Cantos* adopts were not recognized as major issues in Pound Studies till the late 1970s. The general trends in Pound scholarship in the postwar years were set by Hugh Kenner's 1951 book, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*. By introducing the reader to the radical aesthetics activated in the *Cantos* and the structural and thematic links that purport to organize it, this book revived the interest in Pound's work at a time when he was widely unpopular as poet and citizen. A discussion of the more disturbing aspects of the poem's politics would have damaged his reputation further and, understandably enough, Kenner chose not to depart from Pound's own version of the matter. However, this book did a disservice to Pound Studies in that it gave currency to the notion that the political issues—Pound's fascism and anti-Semitism in particular—are marginal problems that do not merit the attention of the critic. The books and articles on Pound, which were published in the two decades that followed,[5] generally failed to challenge this assumption. In fact, the critics of

[5] The more important of these include Donald Davie's *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor* (1965) and *Pound* (1975), George Dekker's *Sailing After Knowledge: The* Cantos *of Ezra Pound* (1963), Noel Stock's *Poet in Exile: Ezra Pound* (1964) and *Reading the* Cantos (1967), Walter Baumann's *Rose in the Steel Dust: An Examination of the* Cantos (1970), Daniel Pearlman's *The Barb of Time: On the Unity of Ezra Pound's* 'Cantos' (1969), Christine Brooke-Rose's *A ZBC of Ezra Pound* (1971), Herbert N Schneidau's *Ezra Pound: The Image and the Real* (1969) and Kenner's own *The Pound Era* (1971). In spite of the differences in their attitude towards Pound and his work Kenner, Baumann and Pearlman are sympathetic (and, at times, too indulgent), the Noel Stock of *Reading the Cantos* is hostile, and Davie and Dekker try to be objective and critical. ~~all these critics shy away~~ from a serous ~~critical discussion~~ of the ~~politics of the~~

this period were either too loyal to Pound so that they refrained from broaching the embarrassing topics of his links with fascist oppression and racial prejudice or intellectually and morally ill-equipped to address the political questions candidly. This is not to say that the critical works in question are worthless or irrelevant. In fact, they have clarified some of the important aspects of Pound's major work and the present study would not have been the same but for their significant contributions. The debt is even more pronounced in the case of the collection of essays edited by Eva Hesse, titled *New Approaches to Ezra Pound* (1969) and work published in *Paideuma*, the major findings of which are codified in Carroll F. Terrell's commendable work, *A Companion to the* Cantos *of Ezra Pound*.

Nonetheless, it is important to remember that the explicator's work remains apathetic to the differences between the intricacies of esoteric texts and the intricate maneuvering of tyrannous power. Academic neutrality cannot have it otherwise, but this leaves certain disturbing questions unanswered. When the explicatory problems of Pound's text are more or less settled, there is no excuse for not probing into the moral and ideological problems raised by it. Pound scholars began to address these issues in the seventies[6]

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cal—all these critics shy away from a serous critical discussion of the politics of the *Cantos*.

[6] This is manifest in the writings of Massimo Bacigalupo (*The Formèd Trace: The Later Poetry of Ezra Pound*, 1980), M. A. Bernstein (*The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra Pound and the Modern Verse Epic*, 1980), Alan Durant (*Ezra Pound: Identity in Crisis*, 1981), Ian F. A. Bell (*Critic as Scientist: The Modernist poetics of Ezra Pound*, 1981 and the collection of essays edited by him, *Ezra Pound: Tactics for Reading*, 1982), Martin Kayman (*The Modernism of Ezra Pound: The Science of Poetry*, 1986), Jean-Michel Rabaté (*Language, Sexuality and Ideology in Ezra Pound's* Cantos, 1986), and J. J. McGann ("The *Cantos* of Ezra Pound, the Truth in Contradiction," 1988). The critics

and the political ideology of the poem, as well as the philosophical problems related to it were brought to the forefront. Many of them read the *Cantos* as a major literary work of the century in which the moral questions raised by the tyrannies of the period—and their claims about a just and free society—are dramatized.

This does not mean that most of the Poundians writing in the past two decades were keen on highlighting an awareness of the moral and political enigmas, triggered off by a reading of the *Cantos*. The explicatory work continued and one of the major areas of research was the mystical and occult sources of the poem.[7] If at all the question of politics is brought up in such studies, it is subordinated to the occult motifs and this looks legitimate once the occultist framework is taken for granted. However, the uses of this kind of source hunting/explication are limited, though the poem is opened up further and many of its difficulties are resolved, these changes do not have any impact

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mentioned here are of different ideological persuasions and some of these might even sponsor tyrannies like the one Pound supported; yet an emphasis on the poem's politics marks a welcome change, since it focuses on Pound's major preoccupation as a poet. While critics like Kenner and Pearlman chose to remain within the framework of the aestheticism Pound claimed to have transcended, or swallowed the poem's political philosophy at its face-value, critics like Durant pose questions about the politics of the *Cantos* and also about the theoretical assumptions behind these. The simplistic assumptions regarding the relationship between writing and the world that nurtured the modernist criticism of Kenner, Davie and their contemporaries are no longer found tenable.

[7] The reference is to the works of critics like Angela Elliot ("Pound's Lucifer: A Study in the Imagery of Flight and Light," *Paideuma*.12.2&3 [1983], 236-66; "Pound's Isis Kuanon: An Ascension Motif in the *Cantos*," *Paideuma* 13.3[1984], 327-56; "The Word Comprehensive: Gnostic Light in the *Cantos*," *Paideuma* 18.3 [1989], 7-57), D. Tryphonopoulous *The Celestial Tradition: A Study of Ezra Pound's The Cantos* [1992] and Leon Surette (*A Light from Eleusis: A Study of Pound's Cantos* [1979] and *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats and the Occult* [1993].

upon its essential ideological implications. The esoteric nature of its content, permeated with a persistent search for "beauty," does not alter its curious role in a century riddled with an upsurge of tyrannies that transformed utopian dreams into nightmares.

Though not committed to the systems of thought to which the political readings (i.e. of Durant, Bell et al; see footnote 6) of the *Cantos* are affiliated, the present study has more in common with this school of Pound studies than the others mentioned above. However, it has to be emphasized that none of these critics pay proper attention to the ideological roots of the *Cantos* that may be traced back to the spirit of the Enlightenment and its Platonic, Confucian and modern manifestations. The utopian dreams (including the democratic dream of the New World and its fascist counterpart) and their corollaries in the poem originate from the will to enlighten and transform the world in the thinking subject's (narcissistic) image. The present study works on this perception and its implications, as outlined in the previous section.

Paradisal Scrolls En-Lightened

Mohandas C.B. “The Poetry of the Process: a Study of the Cantos of Ezra Pound ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 1999

Paradisal Scrolls En-Lightened

the subjection of the world

> The writers Proust, Pound are the ones who have had this mad ambition to build total works, works that would embrace everything which again somehow is an image found in the East. Here great literary works are sometimes unbearably elaborate "list of everything." Images are more concise than words. I always thought painting the ideal medium to attempt this mad list of all . . . there is. (Francesco Clemente)[8]
>
> Modern man, for Baudelaire, is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. The modernity does not "liberate man in his own being"; it compels him to face the task of producing himself. (Foucault 1984, 42)

The *Cantos* of Ezra Pound is a poem where the acts of reading and writing coalesce functionally: writing it involved the reading of numerous documents and reading it calls for the creation of new texts. This is confined, in many modernist texts, to the reader's creative role in deciphering the connectives and erecting a structure of meaning. The reader of the *Cantos*, on the other hand, is invited to attempt nothing less than an extensive re-reading *and re-writing* of the world at large. To what extent he or she would be able to and would want to act upon this proposal is a different question altogether. Al-

though it is a subjective verbal construct, the *Cantos* attempts to refer to and transform the world outside it. Its meaning—at this point in the investigation we cannot take it for granted that it attains any—will be generated at a point where these two realms intersect. This dream of transforming the world initiates a host of problems in the various domains of the poem—aesthetic, ideological and visionary—and these issues cannot be resolved easily. Without the insistence on reporting on and transforming the world, the *Cantos* would have been a totally different enterprise, with its ultimate validity resting on the subjectivity that holds it together. However, as the poem stands now, this subjectivity loses all its significance, once divorced from what it wants to do unto the world. In fact, the *Cantos* has no materiality other than in relation to the world it seeks to transform. When the subjective and external worlds refrain from converging and interacting, the poem runs the risk of losing its ground, and disintegrating to a hollow utterance suspended in an intellectually passionate vacuum. It is very important to ascertain whether the *Cantos* operates in this fashion, and if it does, to assess the nature of the implications.

What the *Cantos* asks the reader to reconstruct is a vision of a paradise, a *paradiso terrestre*, in religious *as well as* political terms. This vision is inseparable from Pound's efforts to realize it, within the cosmos depicted in the poem as well as in the world outside. The history of this dream and the mirror of tyranny that (almost always) reflects it may be traced back to Plato and his Republic. The different waves of "enlightenment," which evolved similar ideals in the ensuing centuries, follow the same paradigm of

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[8] Francesco Clemente, interview, *The Hindu*, 22 December 1996, x.

euphoria and visible and/or invisible repression. Pound's vision, like those of his predecessors, proceeds from a created world-picture though it differs from most of them in having sources that are apparently incompatible with one another. If Plato grounded his thought on his version of the Greek religion and Marx, on modern science,[9] the evolving religion of the present age, Pound anchors his dream on a fusion of the variant versions of his religion which have, as components, techniques ranging from those of Eleusis (not alien to Platonic thought) to the biology of Agassiz (not alien to Marxism).

Nevertheless, the apparent incongruity of the components that build up the world-picture on which the vision of paradise in the *Cantos* is founded does not make it fundamentally different from its predecessors. The conflicting elements become parts of a richly varied cosmos as the all-embracing vision of the Process (which is Confucian and Ovidian-Heraclitian at the same time) is introduced into the poem as a unifying device. The other motifs of the poem are either subordinated or linked to this elemental field of force. This apparently simple sleight of hand underplays the inherent contradictions and apparently solves the structural and visionary problems these may engender.

The writing of a *paradiso terrestre* – i.e., dreaming about and trying to realize an ideal state where justice and harmony prevail – occupies, significantly, a prominent place in the agenda of the Enlightenment (and its Platonic and Confucian prototypes). These three schools of thought – Neoplatonism, Neo-Confucianism and the "enlightened"

[9] The striking differences between the Platonic and Marxist systems are invalidated by the rationalist, system-building impulses which guide these programs. It is no wonder, then, that the tyrannies of these utopias mirror each other.

thinking of John Adams[10] *and* Mussolini—converge in the *Cantos*, though in slightly varied forms. These are the chief ideological components that define the attributes of Pound's paradise.[11] An "enlightened" paradise is the realm Pound-Odysseus hopes to reach, at the end of his wanderings. Significantly, his wanderings take him to many times and places—spanning from ancient China to the contemporary world (touching the nightmarish hellscape of Dante in its course)—and it is in the space where these coalesce that he receives his education. It is not surprising that statecraft forms an important (if not *the* important) part of his education: he is, primarily, a child of the Enlightenment which turned into a (con)fusion of knowledge and domination. The desire to broaden the scope of the field of study to the utmost, (bringing the whole of the known history of the race into focus), and to subject concrete data to scientific and meticulous scrutiny was not a widely shared one before the sixteenth century. The rational subjectivity that emerged at the beginning of the modern age had to ensure that political thought emerged into a *modern science*. Louis Althusser substantiates this point, in his essay on Montesquieu:

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[10] Pound links the Chinese and modern versions of the Enlightenment in passages like the following:

> I am for balance [chung] (in the middle)
> and know not how it is but mankind have an aversion
> to any study of government. (Pound 1987, 413)

[11] Equally important is the Eleusinian element, which qualifies all the components mentioned above, and its presence apparently complicates the situation. Eleusis functions as the real link the *Cantos* retains with the pre-modern world, since Neo-Confucianism and Neoplatonism are basically "modern" in their emphasis on rationality. However, Eleusis too, the following chapter argues, is appropriated into the modern framework of the poem.

> Like Montaigne and all his disciples, collectors of examples and facts hunted out from every place and time, he [Montesquieu] takes as his object *the entire history of all the men who have ever lived.* And this idea did not come to him altogether by chance. We must imagine the double revolution that shook the world at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. A revolution in its space. A revolution in its structure . . . . What had previously been themes for compilation, extravaganzas to appease the passions of the erudite, became a kind of mirror for the contemporary unease and the fantastic echo of this world in crisis. This is the basis for the *political exoticism* (known history itself, Greece and Rome, becoming the *other world* in which the present seeks its own image) which has dominated thought since the sixteenth century.
>
> Such is Montesquieu's object, too . . . . It is precisely this object that distinguishes him from all the writers who, before him, had hoped to make politics a science. For never before him had anyone had the daring to reflect on *all the customs and laws of all the nations of the world* . . . . If Montesquieu was not the first to conceive of the idea of a social physics, he was the first to attempt to give it the spirit of the new physics, to set out not from essences but from facts, and from these facts to disengage their laws. (1982, 18-20)

Montesquieu has little to do with Pound's intellectual development, and yet the *Cantos* is motivated by the same desire to give politics "the spirit of a new physics." Like Montesquieu, Pound is interested in concrete instances, ("'History is the school book for princes'" Pound 1987, 280) which are analysed in such a way that he may bring out the universal principle activating them. In his essay, "The Teacher's Mission" Pound writes:

Our editor asks: What ought to be done?

1. Examination of conscience and consciousness, by each teacher for himself or herself.

2. Direction of the will toward the light, with concurrent sloughing off of laziness and prejudice.

3. An inexorable demand for the facts.

4. Dispassionate examination of the ideogrammic method (the examination and juxtaposition of particular specimens—e.g. particular works, passages of literature) as an implement for acquisition and transmission of knowledge. (1954, 61)

Pound's mission in the *Cantos* is fundamentally similar to that of the teacher discussed here since he employs in the poem most of the methods suggested above. The insistence on the "Direction of the will toward the light," the "inexorable demand for the facts" and the "Dispassionate examination of the ideogrammic method" may be traced back to the objectives and the modus operandi of the Enlightenment thought. In canto LXII, we read a paraphrase of Adams' words, which point to the political implication of this line of thought:

a love of science and letters
        a desire to encourage schools and academies
as only means to preserve our Constitution. (Pound 1987, 349)

Ideogrammic thinking, Pound's major device in the *Cantos*, employs the methodology of modern science: the "direct examination of phenomena." In *ABC of Reading* he

traces the evolution of this method in scientific thinking and contrasts it with the prevailing mode employed by metaphysicians:

> . . . science developed more rapidly after Bacon had suggested the direct examination of phenomena, and after Galileo and others had stopped discussing things so much, and had begun really to look at them and to invent means (like the telescope) of seeing them better . . . .
>
> By contrast to the method of abstraction, or of defining things in more and still more general terms, Fenollosa emphasizes the method of science, 'which is the method of poetry,' as distinct from that of 'philosophical discussion', and is the way the Chinese go about it in their ideograph or abbreviated picture writing. (20)

Later, in *Guide to Kulchur* he praises Fenollosa for having held similar views:

> Ernest Fenollosa attacked, quite rightly, a great weakness in western ratiocination. He pointed out that the material sciences, biology, chemistry, examined collections of fact, phenomena, specimens, and gathered general equations of real knowledge from them, even though the observed data had no syllogistic connection one with another. (27-28)

The ideogrammic method, because of its stress on simultaneous presentation, and the interaction of concrete details it allows to take place, is the ideal one to express the vision of the *whole*. This vision is committed to movements and continuities and can capture them directly, without resorting to the abstractions inherent in the Occidental languages. Fenollosa highlights this aspect of the Chinese ideogram:

> . . . examination shows that a large number of the primitive Chinese characters, even the so-called radicals, are shorthand pictures of actions or processes . . . .
>
> A true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature. Things are only terminal points, or rather the meeting points of actions, cross-sections cut through actions, snap-shots. Neither can a pure verb, an abstract motion, be possible in nature. The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things and so the Chinese conception tends to represent them. (Pound 1936, 9-10)

The technical advantages of such a method as this are obvious in a poem like the *Cantos*. On the one hand, it fulfills the demands of modern science regarding direct, accurate observation, and on the other, it tends to embrace the whole of existence in its concern with "actions and processes," and assists the poem, in becoming one about all and everything. Embracing everything, it becomes an emblem of coherence that the poem tries to inscribe on its own body as well as the body politic.

True, Pound's polytheistic faith and the polyphonic discourse of the *Cantos* appear to contest this urge for coherence that tends to become tyrannical, recasting the whole in its own image. The open-ended form of the poem, it seems, reinforces the case further—to the extent that an "apolitical deconstructionist" would find in it merely the "the play of language that exceeds the possibility of a unified text or a transcription of non-difference." Joseph Riddel, to cite an example, reads the poem thus:

> Pound repudiates the Idea of an origin which commands its field, as vigorously as Nietzsche refuses the fiction of an immaculate beginning. "The greatest tyrannies," Pound wrote in "Axiomata," "have arisen from the dogma that *theos* is one, or that there is a unity above various strata of *theos* which imposes its will upon the substrata, and then upon human individuals." Pound's Image becomes more appropriately a Vortex, or moving Image, which has its origin in what he calls a "polytheistic anschung [*sic*]" . . . We might even recall that in his redoubtable essay on Henry James, he celebrated James's breaking of the omniscient point of view in fiction as an attack upon tyranny. Tyranny reduces to One, but a great art communicates by a "recognition of differences," not a "levelling" but an uncovering of the "right of differences to exist." (1975, 575-76)

This appears to be the case indeed, but a closer reading of the poem questions the complacence implied here. In spite of its open-endedness and (apparent) polyphony, the

Cantos constitutes a discourse that can never accommodate a voice that is not compatible with its own. Other voices are admitted, but only those which allow themselves to be woven into the texture of the poem's discourse. Dissenting voices are either repressed or caricatured.[12] Pound often withdraws into the background, it is true, but this happens only when the narrative is in "safe" hands, as in "Cantos LII-LXXI". Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion of Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels would clarify this point further, as it highlights the differences between genuine and spurious polyphony. Bakhtin writes:

> Dostoevsky, like Goethe's Prometheus, creates not voiceless slaves (as does Zeus) but *free* people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him.
>
> *A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels.* What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of char-

[12] It is useful to note that the passage Riddel refers to in Pound's Henry James essay formulates *a notion* of the polyphony of the *Cantos* —an idea that is not at work in the poem:

> And this communication is not a levelling, is not an elimination of differences, of the right of differences to exist, of interest in finding things different. Kultur is an abomination; philology is an abomination, all repressive uniforming education is an evil. (Pound 1954, 298)

In spite of these formulations, one seldom comes across a passage in the *Cantos* that resists the "all repressive uniforming education." In fact, the poem becomes the mouthpiece of such a curriculum. It is ironic and tragic (to risk sentimentalism) that Pound who sponsored or supported (as the standard biographies tell us) voices as diverse as those of Lawrence and Frost —voices radically different from his own—during his London years couldn't manage the same thing when he wrote his masterpiece. This leads to a series of disturbing questions, which challenge the genuineness of the catholicity of taste displayed in Pound's critical writings of this period.

> acters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. Dostoevsky's major heroes are, by the very nature of his creative design, *not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse.* (1984, 6-7)

The *Cantos* has many voices and these utter their own words,[13] but this fact, in itself, need not ensure polyphony. These voices are incorporated into the poem *only* when they substantiate *Pound's* points. All of them belong to his *personae* and their credentials are always predictable. Bakhtin has commented on this possibility:

> It is precisely the Romantics who in the very reality they depict give direct expression to their own artistic sympathies and evaluations, all the while objectifying and turning into a material thing all they cannot mark with the accent of their own voice.
>
> The uniqueness of Dostoevsky lies . . . in the fact that he was able, in an objective and artistic way, to visualize and portray personality as another, as someone else's personality, without making it lyrical or merging it with his own voice—and at the same time without reducing it to a materialized psychic reality. (*Ibid.*, 12-13)

One cannot blame Pound for not having created a Nicholas Stavrogin or an Ivan Karamazov but the fact remains that the potential for doing so is conspicuously absent.

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[13] Most often, these are translated into the Poundian tongue. Though this makes a significant difference, the present context does not call for a detailed discussion. Moreo-

In this context, it would be interesting to consider the Jefferson cantos where the theoretician-statesman is presented through his own words.[14] The first distinction to be made is that Thomas Jefferson, as he appears in the *Cantos*, is not the Jefferson of his own writings: he is a metamorphosing figure instead, caught in the process of becoming analogous with Mussolini. Extensive quotations from Jefferson's writings (in cantos XXXI-XXXIII) do not alter this. Once brought into the framework of the *Cantos*, Jefferson becomes a *reading* of him, part of an alien and homogenous network. The same

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ver, one can go back to the sources.

[14] It is equally interesting to look into some of the critical responses the segment has evoked: Kenner, for instance writes,

> We move in for a close-up on matter developed in Cantos 8-11, 13, 23, and elsewhere: the statesman as artist. Politics, like writing poetry, is a practical art, using what materials are available, with an eye to the best work feasible, mobilizing a plenum of practical knowledge to cope with circumstances continually new.
>
> Simultaneously, we inspect a *new* set of concepts going into action. The complete change in the tone of the verse marks the supersession of dark lordly magnificence rooted in Greek irresponsibility by the brisk shrewd rationality of the Enlightenment. (Kenner 1951, 320)

Kenner takes it for granted that the Jefferson of these cantos is the *real* Jefferson or at least the Jefferson of his own representation. The complacency with which this is done is astounding, in spite of the limitations set by the period during which his first book on Pound was published. Though the eagerness to defend Pound at a time when he was charged with treason is quite understandable, Kenner's refusal to look at the facts (especially in the works that followed) is not. He continues in his suave fashion:

> (PARENTHESIS: The reader's blood-pressure may be saved by Pound's explicit disavowal of 'advocating fascism in and for America'. 'I think the American system *de jure* is probably quite good enough, if there were only 500 men with guts and the sense to *use* it or even with the capacity for answering letters, or printing a paper.' —page *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*]). (*Ibid.*, 322)

We shall return to this topic in a later chapter.

is the case with most of the other heroes of the poem, and this is customary in a monologic text. Similarly, the attempt to reflect the plurality of the universe[15] is

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[15] In his essay, "Coherence in Pound's *Cantos* and William James's Pluralistic Universe," (*Paideuma* 15.1 [1986] 7-21) Walter Sutton links Pound's vision with James's concept of the pluralistic "multiverse". Sutton emphasizes Pound's awareness of plurality and the inadequacy of "traditional monistic idealism" to cope with it:

> His poet's antennae, like those of William James and other thinkers and artists, told him that hermetically-unified systems of theology or philosophy are incompatible with a modern science-conditioned outlook . . . . [T]he principles of Imagism and Vorticism and of the ideogram as supplied by Fenollosa helped Pound by providing a rationale for his technique of presenting, through clusters of images without explicit connections or transitions, a sense of the pluralism and the cultural fragmentation of the modern world . . But these principles could not help him toward an intellectual perspective within which both his plurality of values and apparently discontinuous mode of expression could be seen to be aesthetically and philosophically appropriate—and, more importantly, to be perhaps the only intellectually responsible kind of coherence available in his time. (9-11)

What Sutton fails to note here is the difference between plurality and the *notion* of plurality. Once placed in the rational framework of the *Cantos* that swallows up everything, it is transformed into a mere idea. The *Cantos* is an open-ended poem in a limited sense—it is open only to elements of its own kind. It closes itself when it encounters the radically different. This has a political dimension as well, which explains how authoritarianism becomes dominant in Poundworld. The "right of differences to exist" (Riddel, *Ibid.*, 576) is recognized only when the differences are of the right sort, conforming to the implied norm. Sutton, it must be acknowledged, notices this contradiction:

> In his political thinking, however, Pound moved almost fatally towards authoritarianism, even though he repeatedly characterized himself as a defender of the Constitution. His admiration of Mussolini as "the Boss" or "il Capo" represents a championing of, not the constitutional balance of powers of which Adams was actually speaking when as Pound quotes him at the close of Canto 70, but the totalitarian idea of unification through the single leader principle, which—need it be said?—is peculiarly harmonious with the philosophical idea of the Absolute that James strenuously opposes as a democratic philosopher. (19)

Instead of attempting to analyze the contradiction, Sutton goes on to dismiss it as a minor factor:

> But Pound's authoritarian inclinations do not seriously damage the overall

thwarted by the homogenous elements that constitute the (authoritarian) discourse of the poem. What organizes the *Cantos*, what gives it the coherence it has, is the same factor that organizes this discourse: the rationalizing subjectivity that seeks to rewrite the cosmos. The *Cantos* knows of no center other than that of this subject, which can know (or tolerate) no Other and thus turns autocratic, and for the same reason, cannot even conceive of anything that is *different*. This subjectivity, sustained by the *idea* of plurality, creates an absolute out of the idea (of plurality) and becomes, paradoxically, authoritarian *and* de-centered at the same time, in the *same* space. In short, it retains the worst of both worlds.

Obviously, Pound regarded the ideogrammic method, which employs the counterpart of the biologist's slide as a powerful weapon to fight the irresponsible vagueness and insincerity plaguing the western cultural milieu. Nevertheless, it is possible not to get carried away by the negative rhetoric of Pound's prose. It is crucial to note that the difference between the method of science and the method of "philosophical discussion" is just a difference in *method*: the objectives are the same. The empiricist and rationalist/metaphysical schools of thought disagree on matters of technique, but both aim at *knowledge*, which, in the context of the Enlightenment, is merely a device for controlling the known, for manipulating it. There is another crucial distinction to be made: Pound's admiration for the methods of the empiricist sciences is not a wholehearted one. He is not interested in the random accumulation of principles, of data; he is trying to isolate the principle (or the set of principles) that unifies everything. What appears to

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poetic power of the *Cantos* as the greatest of twentieth-century epics. (20)

parallel empiricism is just a feeler coming from the impulse that created the great systems of the modern rational era. In other words, Pound is looking for the master code the Enlightenment attempted to extract, the desire to realize which culminated in the Hegelian System. Pound's guarded quarrel with one school of enlightenment thinking addresses the question of gradations and that of the reduction of the manifest into the underlying principles. In his essay, "The Jefferson-Adams Letters as a Shrine and a Monument" he writes:

> The sanity and civilisation of Adams-Jefferson stems from the Encyclopaedists. You find in their letters a varied culture, and an omniverous (or apparently so) curiosity. And yet the 'thinning,' the impoverishment of mental life shows in the decades after their death, and not, I think, without cause.
>
> The Aquinian universe, the grades of divine intelligence and/or goodness or goodwill present in graduated degrees throughout this universe gave the thinker, any thinker something to measure by. What was lost or mislaid in the successive centuries, or what at least went out of the limelight may have been belief in 'God', but it most certainly was the habit thinking of things in general as set in an orderly universe.
>
> The laws of material science presuppose uniformity throughout the cosmos, but they do not offer an hierarchy of anything like the earlier coherence. Call it an hierarchy of evaluation. (1973, 124)

This is an illuminating passage because it expresses Pound's admiration for the school

of enlightenment thinking[16] which produced the thought of Jefferson and Adams, and at the same time indicates the source of his dissatisfaction with it, namely, its inability to provide a coherent vision. The *Cantos* is not conceived as an encyclopaedia in this sense, though he wanted it to be encyclopedic in scope—"an endless poem . . . all about everything."[17] Dante's *Commedia*, one of Pound's models, it is interesting to remember, is an encyclopaedia *with* coherence, with an internalized organizing principle, drawn from the system of Aquinas. But, as Pound points out, Aquinas is not "valid now"[18] in the modern world, and he devises a framework comprising of the Neo-Confucian vision of the Process and the Eleusinian and similar cults.

However, this guarded offensive does not redefine the terms of Pound's (apparently)

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[16] A preceding passage in the essay makes the distinction clearer:

> All I want to do for the moment is to set up two poles of reference. One: a graduated system in which all actions were relative good or evil, according to almost millimetric measurement, but in the absolute. Two, a system in which everything was good or bad without any graduation, but as taboo, though the system itself was continually modified in action by contingencies.

When this second system emerged from low life into high life, when it took over vast stretches of already acquired knowledge, it produced the Encyclopedists. Things were so or not so. (Pound 1973, 121)

It is difficult to subscribe to these views, but that is not the issue here.

[17] From a letter to James Joyce written in 1917, quoted in William Cookson, 1985, xvii.

[18] "I haven't an Acquaints map; Aquinas *not* valid now," Pound wrote in a letter in 1939 (Paige, 1982, 323). Years later, he told Donald Hall in an interview: "I was not following the three divisions of the *Divine Comedy* exactly. On can't follow the Dantescan cosmos in an age of experiment." (Hall 1963 37-59).

uneasy[19] relationship with the Enlightenment: in fact, he is so deeply ingrained in the tradition that there is no getting out for him. The offensive, it is important to note, is directed against the systems that were created (by thinkers like Spinoza, Kant and Hegel) as well as the systems the Encyclopaedists did not or could not create, but *not* against the system-creating drive that became predominant after the emergence of the rational subjectivity. Pound attacks these thinkers on the ground that their ideas do not "go into action."[20] Yet, he cannot fight against this compulsion to make systems because he is driven by the selfsame desire. The *Cantos* attempts to create such a system,[21] coherent and cosmic, which is resourceful enough to explain everything. It fails to evolve into one, but this does not set it free from being part of this tradition. Jean-François Lyotard has discussed the nature of this impulse in detail:

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[19] While Pound subscribes to the major tenets of enlightenment thinking, he is seldom free from the pre-modern world and its systems of secret "knowledge", embodied in what he understands as Eleusis. Consequently, the relationship is uneasy and problematic.

[20] Pound distinguishes between "two kinds of 'ideas'" in *Guide to Kulchur*:

> Ideas which exist and/or are discussed in a species of vacuum, which are as it were toys of the intellect, and ideas which are intended to "go into action", or to guide action and serve us as rules (and/or measures) of conduct. (34)

[21] It would be interesting to consider the following passage from *Kulchur* in this discussion of the system-building instinct:

> Given a free hand with the Saints and Fathers one could construct a decent philosophy, not merely a philosophism. This much I believe. Given Erigena, given St Ambrose and St Antonino, plus time, patience and genius you cd. erect inside the fabric something modern man cd. Believe. (76)

One cannot say that the *Cantos* attempts *exactly* this, but the differences are not significant. It tries to build a similar system.

> Philosophy must restore unity to learning, which has been scattered into separate sciences in laboratories and in pre-university education; it can only achieve this in a language game that links the sciences together as moments in the becoming of spirit, in other words, which links them in a rational narration, or rather metanarration. Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* (1817-27) attempts to realize this project of totalization, which was already present in Fichte and Schelling in the form of the idea of the System.
>
> It is here, in the mechanism of developing a Life that is simultaneously Subject, that we see a return of narrative knowledge. There is a universal "history" of spirit, spirit is "life," and "life" is its own self-presentation and formulation in the ordered knowledge of all its forms contained in the empirical sciences. The encyclopedia of German idealism is the narration of the "(hi)story" of this life-subject. But what it produces is a meta-narrative, for the story's narrator must not be a people mired in the particular positivity of its traditional knowledge, nor even scientists taken as a whole, since they are sequestered in professional frameworks corresponding to their respective specialties.
>
> The narrator must be a metasubject in the process of formulating both the legitimacy of the discourses of the empirical sciences and that of the direct institutions of popular cultures. This metasubject, in giving voice to their common grounding, realizes their implicit goal. (1984, 33-34)

The discourse of the *Cantos*, with all its imperfections and complexities, remains within the framework devised by modern rational subjectivity. Even the mythical and occult elements are carefully worked into the texture of this discourse. The irrational surface of the *Cantos* often results from the willful suppression of logical connectives. Nevertheless, the poem has a case to argue and a cosmos to build: it cannot afford to leave out

the rational framework completely. Once the connectives are identified, either by returning to the sources or to the previous treatment of the same or similar motif in the poem itself, the rational structure of a particular ideogram-cluster becomes clearer. It is not difficult, for instance, to see why (and how) such diverse personalities as Malatesta, the Cid, Kang Hsi, Adams and Mussolini (to name a few) melt into one another and define the Odyssean hero of the poem. If the various clusters do not evolve to form a coherent vision, (and that, indeed, is the case) it not for want of trying. The *Cantos* is incoherent, but this incoherence is totally unintentional and this fact makes a crucial difference.[22] Pound's confession in the last finished canto, "I cannot make it cohere" (1987, 810) does not, obviously, record a sense of fulfillment. This utterance endorses the *failure* of rational discourse but it is important to note that the mode is not abandoned altogether. The *Cantos* remains a poem that dreams of the "patterned streets" (1987, 17) of the city of Dioce, "whose terraces are the colour of stars" (1987, 439) to the very end, even after the realization that it is going to remain a dream.[23]

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[22] It is quite natural that the question of coherence becomes one of the most contested issues in the criticism of the *Cantos*. On the one hand we have critics like Hugh Kenner and Daniel Pearlman who believe in the poem's unity—see Kenner's *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (1951) and Pearlman's *The Barb of Time: on the Unity of Ezra Pound's Cantos* (1969)—and on the other, Noel Stock (of *Reading* the *Cantos* [1967]; his earlier stance was different) and George Dekker—who argues that the poem, "as a poem, is a colossal failure" (1963, 202). In recent discussions of Pound, it is difficult to come across many critics who believe in the "essential unity of the poem." (Pearlman, 1969, 9)

[23] "When I get to end pattern *ought* to be discoverable," Pound wrote in 1937, "Stage set à la Dante is *not* modern truth." (Paige 1982, 293)

Pound-Odysseus, Tamer of the Other

Mohandas C.B. “The Poetry of the Process: a Study of the Cantos of Ezra Pound ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 1999

Pound-Odysseus, Tamer of the Other

the appropriation of the other

> What we have to consider in the case of Italian painters is not that they surveyed the world with the eyes of building contractors, a mere means like any other, but that they never stirred from the field of the possible. (S. Beckett 1984, 139)

The attempt to link *the Cantos*, steeped as it is in the Mysteries and diverse brands of the occult, to the Systems created by modern rationality looks uncalled-for and absurd. Nevertheless, it remains a fact that the paraphernalia of sacred technologies and arcana do not displace the *Cantos* from the site where the modern thought systems are constructed. The basic paradigms that organize discourse are the same in both these cases. My case is not that that the rational texture of the *Cantos* is a flawless one. In fact, it is often threatened by energies that are not apparently compatible with the rational mode of comprehension. However, these are powerless to undermine the thought-system that upholds the poem, since they come from the domain of reason itself, in which myths are rewritten into the idiom of rational discourse. It would be useful to identify the areas where the methods of the respective systems (the rational and mysterious) coincide or displace each other in the poem. A clear instance of this would be that of the ways in

which reason appropriates what is incompatible with it.

The problem of accommodating the mysterious within the framework of organized discourse has often baffled the philosophers. A rational system of thought[24] that sets out to explain the universe will have to encounter and tackle what is referred to as the Unknowable or the Irreducible Other. Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus has pondered over this riddle:

> the paradox is the source of the thinker's passion, and the thinker without a paradox is like a lover without feeling: a paltry mediocrity. But the highest pitch of every passion is always to will its own downfall; and so it is also the supreme passion of the Reason to seek a collision, though this collision must in one way or another prove its undoing. The supreme paradox of thought is the attempt to discover something that thought cannot think. This passion is at bottom present in all thinking, even in the thinking of the individual, in so far as in thinking he participates in something transcending himself. (1974, 46)

[24] That is, a system like the one created by Hegel, that aims at nothing less than "a justification of the ways of God." The site where such a system is created is none other than that of human reason, and its method is none other than reasoning, and its objective is the "comprehension" of the Divine, which is equated with Reason. Hegel writes:

> The insight then to which . . . philosophy is to lead us, is that the real world is as it ought to be, that the truly good, the universal divine reason, is not a mere abstraction, but a vital principle capable of realizing itself. This Good, this Reason, in its most concrete form is God. (Beardsley, 1960 569)

Under these circumstances, "comprehension" simply means appropriation, for the strategy, from the very moment of its conception, is reductionist. It has no space for anything that is other than itself.

The Other invariably invokes the same response in the rational system: it is perceived as something to be evaded or repressed at any cost. This is usually accomplished by refusing to acknowledge its existence or by naming and thus translating it into the language of the system at work. The representation of the Unknown necessarily involves an attempt to conceive it as reason's other, the irrational, and thus create a safe version of it that fits in the framework of reason. Such a rationalized version, created to make comprehension possible--at least that is the rationale behind it--later displaces even the irrational: it (i.e., the irrational) is recast in reason's own image.

The absolutely Other, to use Emmanuel Lévinas's phrase, has always been sidelined or suppressed in European thought. The Greek Enlightenment, which faced the same problem, provided the ontologists of the west with a set of tools (i.e., tools for evasion and suppression) by which the Other can be tackled. Western ontology considers the phenomenon of the Other, as Lévinas puts it, "to be a modality of unity and fusion, that is a reduction of the *other* to the categories of the *same*" (Kearney, 1984, 53). Lyotard has discussed the related questions:

> But . . . I would situate the 'basic meaning' of the postmodern above all in the way western will discovers the 'nothingness' (*néant*) of its objects and projects, thereby finding itself inhabited by something which it neither comprehends nor masters. Some 'thing' crypted in itself, which resists us. Its name is irrelevant. It is 'unnamable' because too rapidly named . . . . All the thinkers, writers and artists of the West, including the great 'rationalists', stumbled upon this 'thing', sought to name it, realised its inex-

> pungeability, and recognized that no odyssey, no Grand Narrative could contain it. (Kearney, 1995, 293)

Hegel's great success lies, paradoxically, in his unintentional demonstration of the failure (which remains invisible) of rational discourse when it encounters the Other. He transforms the Other and assimilates it into his System. Hegel does not merely explain the universe: he explains it *away*. Lévinas's critique of the western philosophic tradition clarifies the point further:

> western philosophy coincides with the disclosure of the other where the other, in manifesting itself as being, loses its alterity. From its infancy philosophy has been struck with a horror of the other that remains the other—with an insurmountable allergy. It is for this reason that it is essentially a philosophy of being, that the comprehension of being is its last word, and the fundamental structure of man. It is for this reason that it becomes philosophy of immanence and of autonomy, or atheism. The God of the philosophers, from Aristotle to Leibniz, by way of the God of the scholastics, is a god adequate to reason, a comprehended god who could not trouble the autonomy of consciousness, which finds itself again in all its adventures, returning home to itself like Ulysses, who through all his peregrinations is only on the way to his native island . . . .
>
> Not only the world understood by reason ceases to be other, for consciousness finds itself in that world, but everything that is an *attitude* of consciousness, that is, valorization, feeling, action, labor, and in general commitment, is in the last analysis self-consciousness, that is, identity and autonomy. Hegel's philosophy represents the logical outcome of this underlying allergy of philosophy. (Taylor, 1986, 346-47)

This intolerance of alterity explains, to a great extent, Hegel's early passion for Greek thought (a passion that was shared by men like Johann Winkelmann, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Goethe and Hölderlin)[25] where the problem is solved by domesticating the Other with the help of myth, ritual and the idol. Hegel's mature work is consistent with this; in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) for instance, he formulates the theory which, for him, resolves the problem of the Other, where the Hellenic strategy is fused with Christian idea of the Incarnation.[26] Mark C. Taylor sums up the implications of this subtle maneuver:

> Conception reintegrates fissured subjectivity and objectivity to form a thoroughly *reciprocal* relation. In other words, the immediate truth embodied in the Mediator must be mediated conceptually. This mediation arises through the universalization of the particular self-consciousness of the sensuous object effected by the believing subject's recognition of *itself* in *its*

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[25] Tony Davies comments on the ideological implications of this passion in his book, *Humanism*:

> The hellenic ideal belonged, for Hegel and Humboldt as for Goethe and Schiller, not to the remote past and the post-mortem formalities of an ancient language, but to the future. For them, the modern Germany they were engaged in building, cultured, orderly and modern, would be the fruition of what the ancient Greeks had dreamed. (1997, 11)

[26] This idea is reiterated in Hegel's later works. In his Introduction to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1822-1831, published posthumously in 1837) Hegel writes:

> I have been unwilling to leave out of sight the connection between our thesis—that Reason governs and has governed the world—and the question of the possibility of a knowledge of God . . . . In the Christian religion God has revealed Himself—that is He has given us to understand what He is, so that He is no longer a concealed of secret existence. (Beardsley, 1960, 549)

> other—i.e., in the object of its belief. Consciousness of the other is, in truth, self-consciousness. This "inversion" . . . of consciousness into self-consciousness is the "conversion" . . . of consciousness that creates the awareness of "absolute reconciliation." The unity of opposites embodied in the Mediator reveals the implicit nature of all individuals. (Taylor, 1987, 30)

In the *Cantos*, Christianity is, admittedly, a marginal affair. However, it is significant to note that Pound's solution is thoroughly Hellenic (and Hegelian): the myths and rituals he uses congeal to form the idol which, while existing in space-time and thus being comprehensible, claims to reveal the divine that is unconfined by spatio-temporal limitations. These myths and idols are then placed in a framework, the components of which come partly from the Greek Enlightenment (Platonism and its pagan and Christian reverberations) and the Chinese Enlightenment (Confucianism and its continuities). The contradictions inherent in this amalgam—such as the Platonic disdain for myths—are resolved to a certain extent on the bedrock of rationality itself. Myths, as they are used in the *Cantos*, are rationalized to the core, employing the insights of modern social sciences, especially the anthropology of Leo Frobenius. However, this rationality is seldom apparent and the presence of the mythic apparently renders the discourse of rational subjectivity that constitutes the *Cantos* complex. Still, a scrutiny reveals the fact that the poem's discourse functions exactly in the same way as in the modern philosophy of the Subject.

The *Cantos* is firmly ingrained in the Hellenic-Hegelian tradition, in spite of Pound's

indifference to Hegel and his System. The way in which Pound tries to resolve the problem of the irreducible Other is fundamentally Hegelian. The basic strategy in the *Cantos* is the same as the one employed in the Hegelian System: the appropriation of the divine or the Other into the cosmos created by the Subject, into the dimensions of time-space. This fundamental kinship with the master-builder among the makers of Systems places Pound firmly in the tradition of the discoursing subjectivity. The implicit truth-claims, as well as the violence involved, are similar in nature. The danger is that even criticism, when not meticulously watchful, is drawn into this fabric of violent appropriation. The discoursing Subject proceeds by creating a cosmos according to its own terms, through an interpretative act, and thus establishing its authority. "Through the subjection of the object," Mark C. Taylor comments, in an essay on Heidegger,

> the subject exercises its mastery over everything other than itself. Nothing can be present to self-consciousness unless it is represented by the subject's *own* representative activity . . . .
>
> In the activity of representation, the subject transforms the world into its own image. The world, therefore, is the picture of the creative subject. (*Ibid.*, 39-40)

If this reads like a description of the *Cantos*, the reason is not far to seek. The objectives as well as the strategies of ideation are fundamentally similar in the *Cantos* and the Enlightenment thinking. The differences in style, though impressive, are not substantial.

the mysteries into the poundian tongue

The mysteries are inevitably rewritten into the rational fabric of modernism, in response to the poem's endeavor to "include" them. Because of the rationalization involved—prompted or conditioned by the anthropology of Frobenius—the mysteries of the poem cease to be as mysterious as they are meant to be. A discussion of the subject that ignores this significant distinction—between the mysteries and their rationalized representations—would not take the reader far. However, the literature on this aspect of the poem that is evidently growing,[27] is based on the notion that the occultist mode of perception is radically different from the modes that became legitimate with the advent of the Enlightenment. Leon Surette, for instance, finds nothing more than certain superficial similarities between these:

> To some extent occultism, Enlightenment rationalism, and twentieth century empiricism also share a common vocabulary. All speak of "enlightenment" as the supreme value. And although each means a different thing by

[27] See for instance, Angela Elliott, "Pound's Isis Kuanon: An Ascension Motif in the *Cantos*," *Paideuma* 13.3 (1984) 327-56; "Pound's Lucifer: A Study in the Imagery of Flight and Light" *Paideuma* 12.2&3 (1983) 236-66; *"The Word Comprehensive: Gnostic Light in* the *Cantos*," *Paideuma* 18.3 (1989) 7-57; Leon Surette, *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats and the Occult*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1993) and Demitrius P. Tryphonopoulous, *The Celestial Tradition: A Study of Ezra Pound's* the *Cantos*, (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1992); "Ezra Pound and Emmanuel Swedenborg." *Paideuma* 20.3 (1991) 7-15.

> the term, they all share the assumption that humans are benighted and need some aid to achieve enlightenment. But no one would permit these conformities to persuade him that Platonism, scholasticism, rationalism and empiricism are equivalent cognitive systems. (1993, 94)[28]

What Surette ignores here is the fact that the basic strategies of all these systems of cognition are very similar when they constitute their respective discourses. Considered as *systems*, there are no radical differences between the Hegelian and Blavatskian edifices. Moreover, they share certain common maladies, which emphasize their fundamental kinship. In the process of acquiring knowledge, for instance, both these programs erect mediatory structures in order to pursue their goals—obviously, the goals are vastly different—and these structures refuse to be demolished afterwards. In fact, they

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[28] Angela Elliott holds a similar view. In the essay, "The Word Comprehensive: Gnostic Light in the *Cantos*," which tries to trace the Gnostic elements in the *Cantos* she writes:

> The movement [Gnosticism] shares with Christianity and the "general religion of the period" four characteristics: religiosity (as distinct from rationalism), dualism, transcendence and salvation. But it is unique in its "emphasis on *knowledge* as the means for the attainment of salvation, or even as the form of salvation itself, and the claim to the possession of this knowledge in one's own articulate doctrine" (32) . . . . "Knowledge," expressed in ever-new and original forms, was "knowledge of God," a "supernatural" condition and a "mental act . . . vastly different from the rational cognition of philosophy." Such knowledge, as an "event in the soul," transforms the knower himself by making him a partaker in the divine existence" (34-35). (1989, 11)

Elliott's quotations are from a book by Erwin Goodenough, *By Light, Light: The Mystical Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (London: H. Milford, O. U. P, 1935). I am not concerned here with the authenticity of the knowledge "that transforms the knower by making him a partaker in the divine existence" (though the neatness of the statement betrays the oversimplification that renders it possible and thus arouses suspicions) but with its representation (for the *Cantos* attempts representation) which is an entirely different matter. Once formulated, the knowledge that transforms the knower becomes something other than itself.

often disrupt the cognitive process by displacing what is sought. The mysteries function exactly in the same way in the *Cantos* (which the author is powerless to resist or even to reconsider: the poem is so permeated with them that he has no choice): they provide the poet-hero with the technology which, he believes, would initiate him into the world of the divine. Pound borrows the basic strategy from the esoteric schools of mysticism, (probably without realizing what its deeper demands would make him risk) in which the goddess becomes the medium that makes the transference possible, the *Lady*. However, the dangers involved in this technology (those of distraction and ultimately the disruption of the cognitive process) become more and more evident as the poem progresses. It would be useful now to take a closer look at the ways in which the mysterious is inscribed on the poem's texture.

Of the various strands of the occult employed in the *Cantos*, the one associated with the Lady has the most sustained[29] use. In fact, the Lady unifies the different schools of esoteric thinking invoked in the poem (ranging from Eleusinian mysteries and Gnosti-

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[29] She is introduced in the opening canto (as Circe and as "Venerandam, / In the Cretan's phrase, with the golden crown, Aphrodite" [5]). The fragment of 1966 which Pound wanted to incorporate into the "ultimate CANTO" (which now appears on the last page of the *Cantos*) mentions her:

> That her acts
> Olga's acts
> of beauty
> be remembered.
>
> Her name was Courage
> & is written Olga. (818)

In between, she surfaces under various guises, to be read as manifestations of Circe-Aphrodite and Isis-Kuanon.

cism to the theories of Blavatsky and Mead) by playing a key role in almost all of them. In his voyage home, the Lady, as in Dante's poem, assists Odysseus-Pound:

> from the dulled edge beyond pain,
> m'elevasti[30]
> out of Erebus, the deep-lying
> from the wind under the earth,
> m'elevasti
> from the dulled air and the dust,
> m'elevasti
> by the great flight,
> m'elevasti,
> Isis Kuanon. (1987, 620)

Isis Kuanon, the goddess of compassion in the *Cantos* elevates the protagonist in order to lead him to a state of spiritual illumination so that his union with the Divine may become possible. The promised illumination and the union, it must be remembered, keep on eluding him even in the closing parts of the poem; but these objectives, which provide the entire work with its primary impulses are never completely abandoned.

The passage cited above sheds light on Pound's notions regarding the mechanics of spiritual elevation: it is activated, in this instance, through a deity who is a fusion of Isis, the Egyptian goddess of life and love and the Buddhist Kuanon, who, out of compassion, works for the salvation of all humanity. She, like the other god-bearers of the

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[30] Pound's "m'elevasti" alludes to Paradiso I.75, "know: it was Your light that raised me," spoken of Beatrice.

Cantos, tries to bring man closer to God. What is involved here is not just a casual collocation of two mythologies. Like the lotus and "white nenuphar" (1987, 486)—flowers rooted in mud and still reach for the heavens and the radiant sun—with which she is associated, this goddess represents the Process that is the created world[31]. It is crucial to note that the desire to access the *whole* as manifest here is in perfect harmony with the aspirations of the Enlightenment. Isis, who fits into the pattern of the Eleusinian mysteries as a goddess of regeneration like the merciful Kuanon, offers man a technique (the sacred mysteries) which, it is believed, can assist him in his attempts to regain harmony with the Divine. These and analogous mysteries, in Pound's view, fecundate the mind that produces works of art in which the spiritual and the physical inseparably fused. Significantly, he discovers the invigorating presence of "a light from Eleusis" (Pound 1973, 53) which "set beauty in the song of Provence and Italy," that is, in the poetry of the "trobar clus" (enclosed or hermetic) tradition, especially in the works of Arnaut Daniel and Guido Cavalcanti. In an essay which is one of the clearest statements of his paganism, "Terra Italica," Pound returns to the idea, emphasizing it

[31] Angela Elliott has discussed this in some detail:

> In its least esoteric symbolism, the lotus, as a flowering plant rooted in the muddy bed of a stream or a lake, represents the unity of that Pound often terms "the process" [1987, 439] or, more specifically, "the total light process" [CON. p. 20] which involves "the sun and the moon." The lotus is the flower of light, resulting from both the solar creative fire and the lunar power of water. Spirit and matter—light and "mud" in Poundian terms [51/250]—interact in it . . . . Associated with Isis and Kuanon, the lotus clearly betokens their antiquity and universality as deities of nature and nurture (1984 336-37).

Pound's preoccupation with his deities, it becomes evident, has helped to aggravate the fissures in the structure and form of the *Cantos*. These deities evidently belong to the created universe and that is their greatest limitation when regarded as agents of transcendence. Pound overlooks this and thus invites a host of problems, which shall be discussed in due course.

ments of his paganism, "Terra Italica," Pound returns to the idea, emphasizing it further: "the cult of Eleusis will explain not only general phenomena but particular beauties in Arnaut Daniel or in Guido Cavalcanti" (1973, 59). In Canto XXXVI he summarizes the mystical implications of this eroticism: "Sacrum, sacrum, inluminatio coitu"[32] (180). For the troubadour poet of Amor, the Lady was an epiphany of Divine Beauty that could elevate him to the celestial realms. In his essay, "Psychology and Troubadours" Pound observes:

> Richard of St. Victor has left us one very beautiful passage on the splendors of paradise.
>
> They are ineffable and innumerable and no man having beheld them can fittingly narrate them or even remember them exactly. Nevertheless by naming over all the most beautiful things we know we may draw back upon the mind some vestige of the heavenly splendor.
>
> I suggest that the troubadour, either more indolent or more logical, progresses from all these details for purpose of comparison, and lumps the matter. The Lady contains the catalogue, is more complete. She serves as a sort of *mantram*. (1953, 96-97)

Arnaut Daniel was the first great master of the *trobar clus* tradition which Guido Cavalcanti and Dante inherited. The central vision of the *Cantos* is informed by the insights of this cult: "Ubi amor ibi oculus,"[33] as Pound has it in Canto XC (620), quoting Richard of St. Victor. Love leads to perception and perception, this system believes, ulti-

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[32] "Sacred, sacred, the illumination of coitus."

mately leads to the knowledge of God. The metaphysics[34] of the cult is expounded in Canto XXXVI, which contains a rendering of Cavalcanti's poem, "Donna mi priegha." In this canzone, regarded by Pound as "a sort of metaphor on the generation of light," (1954, 161) the poet attempts to construct a theory of love in precise, *logical* terms. What Pound finds interesting in this theory is its balanced acceptance of both the physical and the spiritual in its "conception of the body as perfect instrument of the increased intelligence" (1954, 152). Though rooted in the physical, love tends to move towards a state of illumination and thus makes possible a synthesis of the apparently irreconcilable factors, body and soul. Such a synthesis, it is important to remember, plays the same crucial role in Hegel's interpretation of the Incarnation. The striking differences

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[33]"Where love, there the eye."

[34] Maria Luisa Ardizzone argues that Pound's paradise is physical rather than metaphysical. In her essay, "The Genesis and Structure of Pound's Paradise," *Paideuma* 22.3 (1993) she writes:

> Pound sets a physical paradise against Dante's metaphysical one. But most important is the ordered and coherent procedure which sets the Cavalcanti function [the attempt to build a paradise based on physics instead of on metaphysics] against Dante. Turning to Cavalcanti in the second half of the 1920s, Pound reads him in a way that is crucial to the identification of his Paradise. It should be noted that Pound read Cavalcanti "as psychology" . . . . That is, Pound links Cavalcanti to the Aristotelian science of the soul . . . . In Del Garbo, we find the source of the interpretation of love as illumination . . . . According to this metaphor . . . knowledge is a form of illumination, a passage of light, just as love, which "cometh from a seen form which being understood" (36/177), is a passage of light impressing sensibility . . . . Cavalcanti had given him an example of a poem based on physics; *De Anima* is a section of Aristotle's physics. (22-24)

Nevertheless, it should be noted that Pound's use of the language of physics does not alter the nature of subject he treats and hence the term, metaphysics is retained. The empiricism of the *Cantos*, no matter whether it is Aristotelian or that of Agassiz, can never set itself free form the poem's Platonism, which is fundamentally metaphysical.

between the Hegelian and Poundian discourses lose their edge when considered in the light of this basic stratagem, without which they cannot construct themselves.

It is explicitly stated in the opening stanza of the canzone that its argument will elude those who have not experienced love:

> Having no hope that low-hearted
> Can bring sight to such reason
> Be there not natural demonstration
> I have no will to try proof-bringing. (1987, 177)

The canzone argues that the form of the Lady, as available to the senses, is grasped by the lover and this leads to an understanding of her deeper, intrinsic Form. The methodology is empiricist in essence, but the preoccupation with the "intrinsic Form," it must be noted, is essentially Platonic. This Form remains in the mind "where memory liveth" (177) emanating light, yet without suffering any diminishment. It is believed that such illumination, (which, in this teaching, comes from Heaven and has the power to lead the soul back to Heaven), leaves a "formèd trace"[35] in that part of the mind where only the stronger and deeper affections are stored ("What thou lovest well remains" [1987, 534]). This love, which does not move and draws "all to his stillness" (1987, 178) is known by contemplation, and leads the soul to spiritual illumination:

> Nor is he known from his face
> But taken in the white light that is allness

[35] "the trace or locus marked out in the 'possible intelleto,'" *Ibid.*, 188.

Toucheth his aim . . . . (1987, 179)

The understanding of the wholeness of a thing, not through systematic reasoning but through contemplation, which begins with the form in space-time and ends in illumination, is an integral part of Pound's *concept* of paradise. Contemplation is, (according to his summary of certain ideas of Richard of St. Victor)[36] is the highest mode of thought in which "the mind is unified with the object," a state which ensures paradisal bliss. Along with Grosseteste (whose theory on the generation of light influenced him profoundly) and Scotus Erigena who believed that "all things that are are lights" [1987, 443] Richard is *meant to be* one of the important figures of Pound's paradise. At this point certain distinctions become crucial: though figures like Erigena and Richard are invoked in the *Cantos*, it is difficult to accommodate them in the poem's cosmos which is conceived according to the impulse that is dominant in the *Commedia* and the Cavalcanti of "Donna mi priegha"—the impulse to explain (love or the cosmos or whatever it is)—*logically*. Here, in spite of the professed allegiances, the *Cantos* embrace the Aristotle-Aquinas tradition, in other words, the tradition of Hellenized Christianity. This argument is endorsed by the observation that the poem fails to reach the level where "the mind is unified with the object." Such communion remains a dream in the *Cantos*, though the endeavor that constitutes the poem is fuelled by the same dream. Moreover, it is important to remember that the distinction between the Platonic and Aristotelian

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[36] The other two modes of thought as per Richard's system are, [1.] cogitation in which the mind "flits aimlessly about the object" and [2.] meditation which progresses methodically (Pound, 1952b, 77). Pound associates these with infernal and purgatorial modes of thought respectively.

schools of thought is constituted exclusively by the difference between rationalist and empiricist approaches. Erigena and Grosseteste are fundamentally philosophers like Aquinas and Hegel, who, in Miltonic fashion, attempt to and justify (and *explain*) the ways of God. Curiously enough, Pound's modernist poetics, with its emphasis on the luminous detail, does not extricate him form the web of abstractions—explanations inevitably leads to abstractions, implicit or otherwise—which define the systems of Plato, Aquinas and Hegel. Once placed in the framework of explanation-interpretation, the functions of the abstract and concrete modes of discourse become identical. Both attempt the same thing, i.e., to create a system, to dominate what is systematized. The differences between Dante's Beatrice and Pound's Lady are those imposed by their respective milieus; they have no being outside the systems that conceive them. They function as the mediumistic systems devised by the Enlightenment, powerful enough to arrest the process of transmission, reflecting, and ultimately going back to themselves. Pound's Lady is a reincarnation of Beatrice, who, at the dawn of the age of Enlightenment, prophesied the self-referentiality of what would eventually become the Hegelian system. Dante, in his visionary experience, transcends Beatrice: but this transcendence takes place on the plane of Time, as she cannot be eliminated from the eternal present, where the poem is supposed to have its roots [37]. This is an ironic and tragic predicament, considering the poem's grand objectives. The *Cantos* attempts to re-enact this rebirth of the Thomist version of the Greek Enlightenment, attempting to transfigure it by replacing Aquinas with a host of figures that belong to the other (Platonic) tradition.

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[37] We, who inhabit time, cannot spurn the temporal. The distinction here is between things temporal and things temporal which claim to function as bridges to the eternal.

It nonetheless results in a system that fuses the Aristotelian love of logic with the Platonic dream of the republic. In this sense, the cosmos of the *Cantos* is fundamentally similar to the one constructed in the Hegelian appropriation of the whole.

To a considerable extent, the troubadour love-mystique rhymes with the vision of Richard. Though he recognizes six stages of contemplation (concerned with sensible, intelligible, and incomprehensible things) they are not in conflict with one another: one leads to the other and ultimately ends in a union with the Divine. Rejecting the ascetic tradition that condemns the body, Richard recognizes it as the seat of love with which perception begins. "To love is to perceive," Pound paraphrases Richard's dictum, "Amare videre est" (1973, 73).[38] The paradise of the *Cantos* is founded on these ideas, as D. James Neault observes:

> . . . Pound does not forget that the origins of contemplation are in love, first manifested in *bona voluntas* [the "good things of the will"] and in the desire of the intelligence for truth. Thus implicit in contemplation are love, truth, virtue, and justice, all essential to the realization of a "paradiso terrestre." (Neault, 1974, 224)

Canto XXXVI sums up the process of contemplation at the level of human love, thus bringing out the paradisal implications of this highest mode of intelligence:

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[38] It has to be noted that these quotations, selected and translated in 1956 while the "Thrones" cantos were in progress, not only offer valuable clues to the general meaning of the *Cantos* but also point to some of their structural difficulties. Consider, for instance, "*Happy who can gather the heart's fragmentations into unity*" (Pound, 1973,

Who heareth, seeth not form
But is led by its emanation.
Being divided, set out from colour,
Disjunct in mid darkness
Grazeth the light, one moving by other,
Being divided, divided from all falsity
Worthy of trust
From him alone mercy proceedeth. (1987, 179)

Though limited in scope and magnitude, the contemplation on human love is intended to give the reader a foretaste of the greater contemplation that is central to any vision of paradise, which reveals the source of everything, the highest and boundless form of Love from whom alone "mercy proceedeth," God. True, the Lady returns in the later cantos, primarily in the guise of Aphrodite-Isis-Kuanon-Leucothea and elevates him to the radiant realm where the air pulsates with the presence of the gods:

Selena, foam on the wave-swirl
Out of gold light flooding the peristyle
Trees open in Paros,
White feet as Carrara's whiteness
in Xoroi.[39]
God's eye art 'ou. (1987, 769)

This is little more than a dream of the beatific vision by a mind that is in love with the

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73).

[39] Dancers.

dream: the medium has already replaced the goal. As the poem becomes increasingly aware of the elusive nature of *atasal*, the dream of it displaces the sought-after state and becomes the central preoccupation. The dream and the medium are fetishized and the movement of the poem becomes circular,[40] (instead of being linear so that the goal can be achieved) and it never frees itself from this vicious circle of empty signification.

As suggested above, the basic strategies employed by the rational discourse and the esoteric spirituality are fundamentally similar. As it happens in the case of discourse in its encounter with the irrational, the esoteric technology, as adapted by Pound, leaves his hero (and, ultimately the poem) stranded in a no man's land.

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[40] The question of fetishization is to be discussed in detail in a following chapter.

Fable and Miss

Mohandas C.B. “The Poetry of the Process: a Study of the Cantos of Ezra Pound ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 1999

cargo from the orient

> He said: Keep your mind (will, directio voluntatis) on the process (the way things function) (Pound, 1956, 42).
>
> He said: Shan, my process is unified, penetrating, it holds things together and sprouts (*Ibid.*, 26)

Obviously, the unified vision the *Cantos* seeks to evolve needs a frame of reference that can harmonize the various components of the ideogram-in-making, such as the homecoming of Pound-Odysseus, the Eleusinian mysteries, and the infernal, purgatorial and paradisal states of the human soul. That is the only way the poem's meaning can surpass the sum total of all these recurrent motifs. Deep down in the *Cantos*, an attempt is made to explore and identify the interrelations between these apparently dissimilar elements and to activate the field of force, which holds them as parts of a unified whole. The attempt is not going to be successful, for the technologies invoked in the poem cannot get Pound-Odysseus beyond the realm of the manifest; but that is a different question altogether, to be discussed later on. What is to be emphasized here is the persistence of a desire that leaves Pound entrenched in the Enlightenment tradition: a de-

sire to arrive at a systematic understanding of the cosmos. This is not as simple as it appears to be since the system in question is enlightenment's own creation. The objectives as well as the limits are delineated at the moment when the dream is conceived. Adorno and Horkheimer have commented on this reductionist impulse:

> In advance, the Enlightenment recognizes as being and occurrence only what can be apprehended in unity: its ideal is the system from which all and everything follows. Its rationalist and empiricist versions do not part company on that point. Even though the individual schools may interpret the axioms differently, the structure of scientific unity has always been the same . . . . The multiplicity of forms is reduced to position and arrangement, history to fact, things to matter. (1986, 7) [41]

The energy that is invoked in the *Cantos* is none other than that which holds the cosmos together, keeping it well-knit and harmonious, that arranges the "steel dust" in predetermined patterns:

> Hast 'ou seen the rose in the steel dust
> (or swansdown ever?)
> so light is the urging, so ordered the dark petals of iron . . . . (1987, 463)

It is not surprising that Pound found the answer in Neo-Confucianism,[42] the emergence

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[41] To a certain extent, Pound agrees with the stance of modern logical positivism: "that which does not reduce to numbers, and ultimately to the one, becomes illusion; modern positivism writes it off as literature" (*Ibid.*, 7). In Poundworld, what is not functional is written off, not as literature, but as ornamentation.

[42] Pound's Confucianism is deeply influenced by the twelfth century Neo-Confucian

of which marks the second phase of the Chinese Enlightenment. Its European counterpart was inspired and instructed by the Chinese modernity, as the Occident became aware of it in the 17th and 18th centuries through the western accounts of Chinese culture and politics and the Confucian texts in translation. The structure of the *Cantos* reflects these continuities when the Chinese history cantos are followed by the Adams sequence; the chronological links between these—John Adams was born in 1835, the year emperor Yong Ching died—are of lesser importance.

Pound's version of the Confucian classic, *The Unwobbling Pivot* meticulously brings out what he thinks to be the principle that sustains everything in the universe:

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thinker, Zhu xi (in Pound, Chu Hsi). In his essay, "Ezra Pound and Li Xue" (*Paideuma* 19 1&2 [1990]) Peter Crisp argues that the misreading of Pound as "a Taoist in his deepest impulses" (Kenner, 1972, 456) was caused by this inheritance. He writes:

> What we term Neo-Confucianism was a successful attempt to wrest the spiritual and metaphysical initiative from Daoism (Taoism) and, especially Buddhism. Zhu xi took Daoist Buddhist ideas and in using them to justify Confucian morality radically transformed them. (38)

Crisp, in the concluding part of the essay, discusses the implications of this affinity:

> Pound's ethics and metaphysics are not, any more than Zhu xi's, an inconsistent mix of Confucian activism and Daoist quietism. They are perfectly consistent. His involvement and dissatisfaction with the this-worldly monism of his own culture, and his great imaginative gifts, gave him access to a world of truly Confucian spirituality. Pound was not the first westerner who had gained such success via a form of Neo-Platonism: Leibnitz, in whom he showed interest, preceded in this. But he was the first western poet to do this. He was not Daoist, or Buddhist, in deepest impulses, but he was perhaps as Confucian as a westerner could be. (49)

Crisp makes a valid point here, though we need not subscribe to the view that Pound was "perhaps as Confucian as a westerner could be" which is an exaggeration.

> Sun, moon and the stars, the sun's children, the signs of the zodiac measuring the times, warners of transience, it carries all these suspended, thousand on thousand, looking down from above the multitude of things created, it carries them, now here, now there, keeping watch over them, inciting them, it divides the times of their motions; they are bound together, and it determines their successions in a fixed order. (Pound, 1952a, 183-85)

This principle, the unwobbling pivot of the universe is a representation of its still center, the root and fountainhead of the Process. The Zhong Yong, (the Doctrine of the Mean—Pound's Chung Yung/The Unwobbling Pivot) the second of the four sacred books of Confucianism, can be read as a meditation on the metaphysics of the Process, apparently a departure from the school's characteristic emphasis on ethics. However, the middle sections of the Pivot that deal with the role of man in the cosmic order, attempt a more comprehensive ethical statement than the other three books, since it is welded to the motif of the Process.

In fact, the Confucian emphasis on ethics is inherent in the middle sections of the *Pivot* in a deeper way: they are concerned with the question of morality in its basic form as it is placed within the appropriate framework, i.e., that of the Process. The opening and closing sections of the book, which are metaphysical in tone and intent, contain utterances like the following, highly relevant to any discussion of Pound's Confucian inheritance:

> What heaven has disposed and sealed is called the inborn nature. The realization of this nature is called the process. (*Ibid.*, 99)

> Happiness, rage, grief, delight. To be unmoved by these emotions is to stand in the axis, in the center; being moved by these passion each in due degree constitutes being in harmony. That axis in the center is the great root of the universe; that harmony is the universe's outspread process [of existence]. From this root and in this harmony, heaven and earth are established in their precise modalities, and the multitudes of all creatures persist, nourished on their meridians. (*Ibid.*, 101-03)
>
> The celestial and earthly process can be defined in a *single phrase*; [italics mine] its actions and its creations have no duality. [The arrow has not two points] . . . . The celestial and earthly process pervades and is substantial; it is on high and gives light, it comprehends the light and is lucent, it extends without bound, and endures. (*Ibid.*, 183)

This is precisely what the *Cantos* requires: a master code that can be summed up in a "single phrase," that can bring everything down to its referential limits. In other words, what is sought is a system that can represent the totality of the cosmos. Representation, which ultimately leads to displacement, is the first step in the projected transformation.

Confucian contemplation, by its very nature, leads to action. The quality of mysticism implicit in the passages cited above is not reclusive or asocial. On the contrary, it becomes meaningful only when allowed to come alive as a corrective force in society, acting at all levels. This conforms to the aspirations of the Enlightenment, modern and ancient. According to Confucian ideology, awareness becomes a natural force of correction when a ruler "roots" himself in the Process and is in harmony with it. Such harmony results from a contemplative act that spans from the lofty heavens to the

depths of the human soul, taking place in an environment of total sincerity and deep humility. Inherent goodness is another factor which can lead man closer to the Process: "If a man have goodwill at his center [sympathy in his midheart] the process is not far from him" (Pound, 1952a, 121). Canto XCIII states it in a more compact way:

> "A man's paradise is his good nature"
>
> sd/ Kati. (1987, 637)

Sincere contemplation, it is assumed, leads to the precise definition of the various shades of thoughts and emotions, which later become the springboard of action. (The insistence on verbal precision, it has to be remembered, remained one of the principal concerns of Pound from the beginning of his career as poet and critic. Such precision is insisted on by modern science as well.) In his introductory note to the translation of the *Ta Hio* Pound defines the "cheng" ideogram as follows:

> "Sincerity." The precise definition of the word, pictorially the sun's lance coming to rest on the precise spot verbally. The righthand half of this compound means: to perfect, bring to focus. (Pound, 1952a, 20)

The sun, an image that recurs in the *Cantos* under various guises, functions as one of the many links between the motifs of precision and the illumination of the Process. In his version of the *Pivot*, Pound examines the connections between sincerity and the contemplation of the Process:

> He who defines his words with precision will perfect himself and the process of this perfecting is in the process [that is in the process par excellence . . . the total process of nature]. (*Ibid.*, 177)
>
> The inborn nature begets this activity naturally, this looking straight into oneself and thence acting. These two activities constitute the process which unites outer and inner, object and subject, and thence constitutes a harmony with the seasons of earth and heaven. (*Ibid.* 179)

This steady gaze into the depths of the soul, it is believed, finally reveals the "signature" of the divine, which it bears, and this experience enables one to read similar signatures in the outside world. The closing lines of Pound's *Pivot* highlight this motif further by dwelling the pervading action of the light of the awareness of the Process. Linking it with the tradition of Neoplatonic light philosophy, Pound transforms the Confucian text into a more penetrating utterance, illuminating the core of the Process-vision. He quotes a passage from the *Classic Anthology*,

> *As silky light, King Wen's virtue*
> Coming down with the sunlight,
> what purity!
> He looks in his heart
> And does.

and comments:

> Here the sense is: In this way was Wen perfect.
>
> The *unmixed* functions [in time and

in space] without bourne.

This unmixed is the tensile light, the

Immaculata. There is no end

to its action. (*Ibid.*, 187)

The *Cantos* strives to reach and register the celestial realm of incorruptible light, similar to the one beheld by Dante in the final phases of his vision. Pound introduces a number of heroes who seek light (the central paradisal motif of the poem) in their different ways: Scotus Erigena, Guido Cavalcanti, Grosseteste and the rest, who belong to the "ecstatic-beneficent-benevolent" (1952b, 223) tradition. There are many instances in the poem in which the Confucian ruler rooted in the Process is described in terms of Neoplatonic light philosophy. Consider the following passage from Canto LV where Pound pays tribute to emperor Chin-Tsong (1068-1086) and philosopher Tcheou Tun-y (1017-1073) by interspersing de Mailla's prose with snippets from Grosseteste ("Lux enim per se omnem in partem" [for light of herself into every region] and "seipsum seipsum diffundit" [itself, it diffuses itself]) and Cavalcanti ("risplende" [it gleams]):

Honour to CHIN-TSONG the modest
Lux enim per se omnem in partem
Reason from heaven, said Tcheou Tun-y
Enlighteneth all things
seipsum seipsum diffundit, risplende
Is the beginning of all things, et effectu,
Said Ngan: YAO, CHUN were thus in government
Died now the master of Nenuphar.[43] (Pound, 1987, 298)

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[43] Chou Tun-i, who lived by a stream where water-lilies grew was known as the "master

The significance of the term, "master of Nenuphar" becomes clear only when it is placed in the context of the related images. In the *Cantos*, lotus and water lily, rooted in mud and reaching towards the heavens, are associated with the Process, and have the same function as the ling^2 ideogram and Yggdrasail the Nordic tree of life, to be discussed in the next section. The lotus and nenuphar grow in the poem's paradise as well; there they are linked with Kuanon:

> Emanuel Swedenborg . . . . "do not argue"
> In the 3rd sphere do not argue
>
> above which, the lotus, white nenuphar
> Kuanon, the mythologies . . . . (Pound, 1987, 486)

It is through the recurrence of such images as the lotus, the ling^2 ideogram and the Yggdrassail that the Neo-Confucian-Neoplatonic conceptual framework outlined above is activated in the *Cantos*. The major contentions of the Enlightenment are thus encrypted in the poem. At this point, it would be useful to examine some examples of these to see how this encryption is done and how far-reaching their implications are.

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of Nenuphar" (John Nolde, "The Sources of Canto LV," *Paideuma* 7-1,2, 235).

the ling[2] ideogram: ruling the represented

Of the many representations of the all-embracing vision the *Cantos* attempts to project, the ling[2] ideogram which opens "Section: Rock-Drill" is possibly the most compact and the most revealing. It reflects not only the conception of the scope and nature of the Enlightenment's object of study—which is nothing less than the cosmos in its "totality"—but also its nervous desire to reduce everything into master-codes. A careful look at the ideogram would clarify many points regarding the dynamics of the poem's cosmos:

LING[2] 

Our dynasty came in because of a great sensibility. (1987, 557)

The upper third of the ideogram represents heaven with clouds hanging from it and three falling raindrops form the middle part. (In a later canto, Pound reads the middle component not as raindrops but as "three mouths": "under the cloud / the three voices" [1987, 754]. This reading is significant as the reference is meant to extend to the heavenly knowledge that is being imparted.) The lower third suggests magic, ritual or ceremonial dance. The line that follows the ideogram translates it as "great sensibility," but as Pound was well aware, it has other meanings and deeper implications.

Pound's critics seldom move beyond the elucidation of the *meaning* of the ideogram, whereas its function in the poem's structure is of greater importance. Even as semantic clarifications, the readings are not often satisfactory. Consider, for instance, James J. Wilhelm's comments:

> Pound is telling us that sensibility or a knowledge of the traditions of the past is, in Confucian terms, an absolute essential for good government or the ideal life; it is a sentient, feminine force, and is observable all around us in the beating heart of nature . . . . (1977, 32)

Ling[2], as will be argued below, is much more than a "knowledge of past traditions" and it represents not just "a sentient feminine force." Bacigalupo's gloss is more appropriate:

> . . . *ling* contains at the top the sky radical, below which are three "mouths," and at the bottom a character meaning "A wizard or witch; a medium. Magical arts. Dancing and posturing in order to induce the descent of the spirits"(M 7164). We gather that the sky speaks, that nature brings forth shadows, signs, and that these are interpreted by magic. Sensibility, we conclude, consists in reverent attention to the words and traces of nature. (1980, 235)

He adds that its "foremost concern is with the writing of the world" and that it is restated in Canto CX: "The restatement is: "'From the colour the nature / & by the nature the sign!'" By watching the colors or shadows we may come to the essence of things—and vice versa, nature brings forth the true sign." Hugh Kenner defines ling[2] as "the

nd vice versa, nature brings forth the true sign." Hugh Kenner defines ling^2 as "the spirit or energy of a being, in harmony with the invisible and by ritual drawing down benefice: we may say, *sensibility*" (1972, 15). George Kearns comes closer to Pound's meaning when he writes, "the ideogram suggests transfers of energy between heaven and earth, and an awareness (of the Process) necessary for good government" (1980, 198).

Paying too much attention to the literal meaning of the radicals often results in a distortion of Pound's sense. The reference of the top radical is not confined to the spirits of the ancestors, just as the implications of the bottom radical go far deeper than the ones suggested by its literal meanings, "a wizard," "a medium," "ritual dance" etc. In order to grasp and clarify what he wants to establish as the essential meaning of a text, and to convey its precise tone and nuances, Pound often takes liberties with the literal sense in his translations. In his version of the 242nd ode of *The Classic Anthology* Pound renders ling^2 as "spirit tower," "Park Divine" and "haunted pool" (1955, 158). Similarly, to determine the significance of the ideogram in the *Cantos*, its literal meaning has to be qualified with an understanding of its function as a whole, and a consideration of its rich suggestiveness.

As Bacigalupo points out, the ling^2 ideogram (as it appears on p. 557) is the "largest character in the poem" (*Ibid.*, 235). This is just one indication of its prominence. Evidently, the ideogram is crucially important to the *Cantos* as it contains, though in seed form, all their major concerns. In fact, it is patterned like the *Cantos*: ling^2 spans from

the earth to the heavens, from the infernal to the paradisal. What makes it so prominent is its supposed ability to represent the harmonious interaction of the spiritual, natural and social orders, which make the *paradiso terrestre* possible. The great sensibility arises, we are told, out of the sovereign's awareness of the forces that activate society and nature. When the great ling[2] is in action the social and natural processes come to be in tune with the heavenly processes and they form the one current, the one Process:

> The sun under it all:
> Justice, d'urbanité, de prudence
> wei heou,[44] Σοφία [Sophia[45]]
> the sheltered grass hopes, chueh, cohere.
> (No, that is *not* philological)
> Not led of lusting, not of contriving
> but is as the grass and tree
> eccelenza
> not led of lusting,
> not of the worm, contriving
> THE FOUR TUAN[1 46]
> or foundations. (1987, 558-59)

Rooted in earth and embracing heaven and thus referring all aspects of life, the great ling[2] is presented as a code that can give an insight into the underlying unity and harmony beneath the apparent fragmentation of the world. Pound associates it with

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[44] Sovereign.

[45] Wisdom.

[46] The four principles (of Confucianism).

Yggdrasail, the ash-tree of Norse mythology, which connects the underworld, earth and heaven and thus represents the Process with great clarity and simplicity:

> That you lean 'gainst the tree of heaven,
> and know Ygdrasail. (1987, 559)

In the present ideological framework, knowing Yggdrasail means knowing the Divine, or the Process, which illumines the soul and sends out its brilliance. When the sovereign becomes the fountainhead of such awareness, Pound assumes, it transforms the entire community, revitalizing its various spheres of activity: politics, economy, art, sexuality, religion etc. Responding to this, nature itself becomes benign:

> "Birds and terrapin lived under Hia,
> beast and fish held their order,
> Neither flood nor flame falling in excess"
> i [and]
> moua [likewise]
> pou [all were]
> gning [in tranquillity]. (1987, 559)

Pound's Yggdrasail is more than the tree of 'the dynasty' and the unwobbling pivot of Confucianism as M. Bacigalupo suggests, (*Ibid.*, 264) though it refers to both. The tree is conceived as one that represents the still center of life and also life's totality. In the cosmos of the *Cantos*, it represents nothing less than the Process; it is the tree of the Process. The ash-tree offers the ling[2] ideogram a parallel, highlights its significance and stresses its overall importance in the poem. According to this Confucian reading, a

great dynasty comes into being when a prince becomes an instrument of the Will of Heaven. The loss of ling[2] reverses the process and the consequences are disastrous. Without the great awareness, the sovereign loses "the feel of the people" (1987, 574) and this inevitably causes political and moral disintegration. Disorder creeps into the administrative system, corrupting and weakening it, breeding rebellions and wars. No domain of life is free from its poisoning influence: the word loses its precision, relationships are tainted, and culture as such is threatened with the possibility of extinction. The poetry that manages to survive in such a hostile environment deals mainly with sorrow, loneliness, disintegration and similar themes[47]. What happened to the Hsia and Shang dynasties happened to the Chou in the course of time: the descendants of King

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[47] The *Classic Anthology*, for instance, contains many pieces like the 29th ode which presents an abandoned wife:

> Sun constant, and O moon that art ever in phase
> shall ye pretend to move
> over the earth
> to find him who returns not my love,
> nor shall have calm who makes no fair exchange! (Pound, 1955, 13)

The wife is abandoned, according to Confucian thinking, because of various cultural and socio-economic factors and for these, the sovereign is ultimately responsible. Of the 305 odes in the Anthology, "cheng" or rectified odes are few in number, the rest being "pien" or unrectified odes deal with the evil influences of the ruler who has lost touch with the great ling[2]. Some of them perceive the situation with stunning clarity:

> Defilement of inner light
> brings blight,
> and dire, on all thy folk. (Pound, 1955, 178)

Political oppression, poverty, social disorder and moral decay are not the only consequences of this defilement; nature itself becomes malign and destructive:

> Death rains and chaos from heaven down
> swamping the king and throne,
> worms gnaw thru root and joint of the grain,
> woe to the Middle Land, murrain and mould.
> Prospect of plenty is sudden emptiness .... (Pound, 1955, 180)

Wen became self-indulgent, forgetting both the Will of Heaven and the people. Some of them went extremes like Yu Wang (781—771 BC), who sold himself to one of his concubines, Pao Sse, whose excesses provoked Heaven:

> The Lady Pao Sse brought earthquakes. TCHEOU falleth,
> folly, folly, false fires no true alarm
> Mount Ki-chan is broken.
> Ki-chan is crumbled in the 10th moon of the 6th year of
> Yeou Ouang
> Sun darkened, the rivers were frozen. (1987, 271)

The western Chou dynasty ended with Yu Wang who was defeated and killed in 771 BC, which Pound reads as the natural and inevitable consequence of keeping the great awareness obscure for generations. Whenever the sovereign moves away from the great sensibility, the *Classic Anthology* and the *Book of History* imply, disorder and calamity follow, whereas a strict adherence to those principles that established the Chou power ensures harmony and all-round prosperity. This is the central perception that activates not only the sections of the *Cantos* which deal with Chinese history, but the work as a whole.

When the deeper semantic implications are considered, it appears that the ling[2] ideogram represents almost everything the *Cantos* aspires to stand for. It offers the reader a clear (though emblematized) representation of central concerns of the work: the Process, man's awareness and unawareness of it, and the consequences of these, ranging from the infernal to the paradisal. The proposed meaning of the ideogram, in its pro-

found sense, may be summed up thus: the sky radical at the top represents "the root of the process," (Pound 1952a, 99) or godhead, the benevolent source of everything. The raindrops/mouths hanging from it manifest Heaven's benevolence, representing both material (raindrops) and spiritual (mouths: revelation) sustenance by which everything in the world is upheld. Likewise, the bottom radical depicts not merely the rites and dance (and thus the arts), but all those gestures that express man's submission and humility, gestures that are rewarded by heavenly benevolence. It represents the earth as well, its fecundity and its dance in response to the descent of sustenance from heaven.

Pound employs the concept of the Process mainly because it simplifies his task as the maker of a system. As a framework that unifies the poem's various components—Neoplatonism, Eleusinian mysteries, Dante, the eroticism of Cavalcanti, and the dream of an earthly paradise etc.—its function is structural as well. The Process is not just a component like these since it is all embracing in referentiality and aspires to contain everything. It also provides the reader with a perspective to approach the poem and initiates him into its mysteries as no other component can do, singly or taken together.

And, if the *Cantos* is not as well structured as it ought to be, as the principles discussed above demand, the reasons are not to be sought elsewhere. Confucianism is a philosophy of political action and hence the knowledge enhanced by the Process-vision can never protect itself from the possible political uses. In fact, this "knowledge" is conditioned (if not conceived of) by the political context. A good example is the representation of King Wen (1231—1135 BC) in *The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius*.

Wen Wang, who set in motion a political process that finally overthrew the Shang dynasty (1761—1122 BC) is eulogized in the Classic Anthology for his selfless response to Heaven's Decree:

> Wen, like a field of grain beneath the sun
> when all the white wheat moves in unison,
> coherent, splendid in severity,
> Sought out the norm and scope of Heaven's Decree
> till myriad Shang were brought under fealty. (Pound, 1955, 148-49)

The emergence, consolidation and "beneficent" achievements of the dynasty are represented in terms of the awareness and response to the vision of the Process. Wen Wang, the odes say, was chosen by Heaven to redeem the land from the degenerate descendants of the enlightened rulers who founded the Shang dynasty:

> white God above
> thine eye in awe
> looked down and saw
> neither Hia nor Yin
> trusted of men;
> probed the great states
> their walls their hates,
> and only to West
> one clan stood test.
> He therefore led
> Chou to kingstead. (Pound, 1955, 155)

Wen and his immediate successors are represented as exerting a corrective influence

upon the people, thus setting in motion a purgatorial process, which purifies both man and society:

> And as
>
> The Milky Way sets rule aloft in sky,
> in his longevity the king of Chou
> has raised up men distantly.
>
> To make true form as metal or jade he grinds;
> as needle that draws on silk,
> draws on the whole nation's mind. (Pound, 1955, 153)

The moment the vision becomes part of a discourse of power, its truth-claims lose their ground, and it is reduced to a myth, an ideological figuration. The narrative of Odysseus's kingly mission is no different. This is not to suggest that Confucianism was little more than a conspiracy to regain respectability for the Chou dynasty; such a conclusion would be too naïve, as naïve as the claim that it is a transparent statement of timeless wisdom. For the same reasons, one cannot conclude that Pound was a ruthless opportunist that Mussolini could have been—things are not that simple. It is true that his dream of a terrestrial paradise coincided with a regime that had little to do with dreams of paradise—a regime he supported and justified, the fall of which he lamented in the Pisan sequence, where his poetic powers are at their best. On the other hand, his misreading of Mussolini's Italy is not something that can be dismissed as a mistake, for it is perfectly consistent with his ideological and religious positions.

The Making of a Terrestrial Paradise

Mohandas C.B. “The Poetry of the Process: a Study of the Cantos of Ezra Pound ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 1999

Chapter 5 The Making of a Terrestrial Paradise

> *Utopias* afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical. *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'. This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*; heterotopias (such as those to be found so often in Borges) desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences (Foucault, 1973, xviii).

narrativizing paradise

The paradise Pound envisions in the *Cantos* constitutes, to borrow a phrase from Lyotard, a grand narrative of political-*and*-spiritual liberation. It is a narrative that attempts to identify the contours of "the Dark Forest" and "the purgatory of human error" (Pound, 1973, 137) so that the root causes of evil (in the social and moral spheres) may be eliminated. The objective is to prepare the ground for the construction of a community in communion with the rest of existence. This dream is firmly rooted in the Enlightenment tradition, the utopian fantasies of which evolve on a site where reason

structures the cosmos according to the noblest ideals in its (rationalized) myth-kit, and are presented as universal solutions[48]. The narrative is interpretative as well, attempting to unravel what remains concealed (unnaturally or otherwise) in the human and non-human worlds. This is the context in which the *Cantos* endeavors to include historical material, [being part of an attempt] to conceive and re-shape the world. The knowledge acquired and formulated (from history as well as the other spheres of knowledge) is not valued for its own sake: it becomes a tool that can liberate people from tyranny, and thus establish a just society. Lyotard has discussed this point:

> Knowledge is no longer the subject, but in the service of the subject: its only legitimacy (though it is formidable) is the fact that it allows morality to become reality.
>
> This introduces a relation of knowledge to society and the State which is in principle a relation of the means to the end. (1984, 36)

Such uses of knowledge give rise to a number of problems: once organized, the attempt to liberate humanity from political and spiritual oppression, evolves into a violent and oppressive system on its own. All the modern tyrannies with an ideological framework, pretentious or real, may be traced back to this weird enigma. It would be useful to re-call the comments of Adorno and Horkheimer on the sinister transformation of the "no-

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[48] Adorno and Horkheimer observe,

> As the transcendental, supraindividual self, reason comprises the idea of a free, human social life in which men organize themselves as the universal subject and overcome the conflict between pure and empirical reason in the conscious solidarity of the whole. This represents the idea of true univer-

ble" ideals that inspire such endeavors:

> Those somber writers of the bourgeois dawn—Machiavelli, Hobbes, Mandeville, and so on—who decried the egotism of the self, acknowledged in so doing that society was the destructive principle, and denounced harmony before it was elevated as the official doctrine by the serene and classical authors. The latter boosted the totality of the bourgeois order as the misery that finally fused both general and particular, society and self, into one. With the development of the economic system in which control of the economic apparatus by private groups divides men, survival as affirmed by reason—the reified drive of the individual bourgeois—was revealed as destructive natural power, no longer to be distinguished from self-destruction. The two were now indissolubly blended. Pure reason became unreason, a faultless and insubstantial mode of procedure. But the utopia which proclaimed reconciliation between nature and the individual emerged together with the revolutionary avant-garde from its concealment in German philosophy, simultaneously irrational and rational, as the idea of the combination of free men, and called down on itself all the wrath of the *ratio*. In society as it is, despite all the wretched moralistic attempts to propagate humanity as the most rational of means, survival remains free from utopia which is denounced as myth. Among the rulers, cunning self-preservation takes the form of struggle for Fascist power; among individuals, it is expressed as adaptation to injustice at any price. (1986, 90-91)

The critique of oppression and the dream of emancipation turn into the same malady it set out to cure, often in a more violent form. In its war against tyranny, the narrative of the *Cantos* allows itself to be inscribed by tyrants like Mussolini. The process of its

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sality: utopia. (1986, 83)

evolution involves a distressing struggle to extricate itself from the devices and powers that correspond to those that animate "the Dark Forest" and "the purgatory of human error," forces which are firmly established within the cosmos the poem creates. The last finished canto is thus forced to find a place to accommodate the unspecified "errors and wrecks" (1987, 810) of the poet-hero. From the very beginning, the *Cantos* is plagued by elements that threaten to undermine its "noble" ideals. In this context, it would be appropriate to outline the major objectives (stated and implicit) of this narrative, keeping an eye on the dilemmas involved.

No inquiry into the metaphysical and mystical implications of the *Cantos* can afford to ignore the claim that it tries to tell "the tale of the tribe" (Pound 1952b, 194). The tale has a predetermined objective: to inquire into the possibility of the realization of Pound's dream of a *terrestrial* paradise. For him, the regeneration and spiritual ascent of the protagonist are not isolated things, independent of and unrelated to the social, cultural and economic processes which surround him. This device (for it is a structural device as well, not merely a motif) makes the ascent of the protagonist rhyme with the regeneration in the world around him, in the natural, economic, cultural and spiritual realms, apparently ensuring a harmonious evolution towards an order where beauty and justice are normative. So, conforming to the norms of grand narratives, the progress of Pound-Odysseus is presented as an integral part of a greater struggle, broader in scope and significance, as it transcends the limits of the poem and extends to the dynamics of

nature and society.[49]

In Poundworld, "writing paradise" parallels the building of the celestial city in the world outside, "the city of Dioce whose terraces are the colour of stars" (1987, 439). In fact, both involve the same kind of activity, though the spheres of action are vastly different: the celestial city with its luminous terraces corresponds to the illumined state of the soul to be received *and* portrayed and to the realized poem of paradise. The dream of the celestial city is threatened by the same disruptive forces that unleash disorder in the poem in its attempt to reflect the same: the mechanics of disruption and failure are the same in both the cases. The *Cantos* dreams of a society that is made up of harmonious elements, a society that is, in its turn, in perfect harmony with the rest of exis-

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[49] It would be interesting to note that this corresponds to Mussolini's views on the religious quality of the fascist state:

> There is no concept of the State which is not fundamentally a concept of life: philosophy or intuition, a system of ideas which develops logically or is gathered up into a vision or into a faith, but which is always, at least virtually, an organic conception of the world.
>
> Thus Fascism could not be understood in many of its practical manifestations as a party organization, as a system of education, as a discipline, if it were not always looked at in the light of its whole way of conceiving life, a spiritualised way. (Gould, 1985, 598)

It is not easy to dismiss this correspondence as an accident. This is more of a case of ideological kinship than influence; however, the passage demonstrates how Pound's "faith" in the Duce was supported by the framework of a system. Mussolini continues:

> Fascism s a religious conception in which man is seen in his immanent relationship with a superior law and with an objective Will that transcends the particular individual and raises him to conscious membership of a spiritual society. (*Ibid.*, 599)

The *paradiso terrestre* of the *Cantos* is not fundamentally different from this. The

tence. It is a dream that looks ideal and desirable, but the problem with this—and similar dreams of the Enlightenment—is that it often tends to be replaced by a concept of order imposed from without, by a structure of inexorable codes which finally relapses into an oppressive system. In this context, it is illuminating to recall that both communism and fascism are the offshoots of the Hegelian dream of world-making-through-thought-control[50]. Fascism, (more relevant in this discussion) often echoes the Enlightenment's terminology in the representations of itself. In "A Visiting Card" Pound describes Mussolini's Italy in these glowing terms:

> A thousand candles together blaze with intense brightness. No one candle's light damages another's. So is the liberty of the individual in the ideal and fascist state. (Pound, 1973, 276)

An arresting description, so long as one does not bother to verify. Nevertheless, evidently, one should not forget, such "insights" are not to be verified, but to be *believed in*.

For Pound, contemplation and the resultant knowledge-bliss are not ends in themselves;

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question shall be discussed in detail in a following chapter.

[50] George Bataille refers to the Hegelian footing of fascism in the essay, "Nietzsche and the Fascists," written in 1937:

> Insofar as fascism values a philosophical source, it is attached to Hegel and not to Nietzsche. One should read the article, in the *Encilopedia Italiana*, that Mussolini himself devoted to the movement he created; the vocabulary, and even more than the vocabulary the spirit, are Hegelian than Nietzschean. (1985, 186)

they become valid and meaningful only when set to inspire and direct constructive action. In *Guide to Kulchur* he distinguishes between two kinds of ideas:

> Ideas which exist and/or are discussed in a species of vacuum, which are as it were toys of the intellect, and ideas which are intended to "go into action", or to guide action and serve us as rules (and/or measures) of conduct. (34)

This becomes even more clear when he goes on to equate the "love of wisdom" (i.e., Greece and its *philosophia*) with the "Roman" glory, (i.e., not just the glory of the Rome of "Antonius, Constantine and Justinian" but the glory of the fascist Roma of the 1930s) namely, "the responsibility that carries wisdom into details of action" (*Ibid.*, 40). Like most of the other "ideals" in Poundworld, this becomes problematic when placed in the (proper) context of fascist rhetoric. Pound himself was eager to do so: "A Visiting Card," for instance, opens with the Mussolinian motto "LIBERTY A DUTY" (1973, 276). It would be illuminating to compare the passage from *Kulchur* quoted above, with Mussolini's on views on the question of action:

> Fascism desires an active man, one engaged in activity with all his energies: it desires a man virilely conscious of the difficulties that exist in action and ready to face them. It conceives of life as a struggle, considering that it behoves man to conquer for himself that life truly worthy of him, creating first of all in himself the instrument (physical, moral, intellectual) in order to construct it. Thus for the single individual, thus for the nation, thus for humanity. Hence the high value of culture in all its forms (art, religion, science), and the enormous importance of education. Hence also the essential

> value of work, with which man conquers nature and creates the human world (economical, political, moral, intellectual). (Gould, 1985, 599)

Pound's ideas about the man of action, (or about action in general) evidently are closer to the Mussolinian ones than to those of Confucius or Richard of St. Victor,[51] for the simple reason that they are meant to share the same political milieu. In addition, these "insights", it is important to note, with all their sinister implications and inherent paradoxes, form part of the groundwork of the *Cantos*.[52]

As an internalized principle directing the vision, the emphasis on ideas-in-action becomes an integral part of the project and is meant to be present (though implicitly) everywhere in the *Cantos*. There are passages that present these directly and unambiguously. The following lines, which recount the attempts of Y Yin (chief minister of the first Shang emperor Ch'eng T'ang) to educate T'ai Chia (the young king, Ch'eng T'ang's heir) offer a striking example:

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[51] "The ends of contemplative behavior" D. James Neault observes, "are, for Pound as for Richard ultimately practical, the reformation and perfection not only of the of the individual man, but of all civilization" (1974, 226). This parallel may be cited as a fine example of the way in which Pound's fascism appropriates disparate ideologies into its framework.

[52] In this context, it would be interesting to consider certain remarks made by Pound in a conversation with Romano Bilenchi, an Italian friend. Though the source is secondary, the views expressed here conform to Pound's general stance. This is how Bilenchi reports it:

> One day he explained t me that Fascist doctrine had its origin in Confucius, passed by way of Cavalcanti, Flaubert, the German ethnologist Leo Frobenius and Enrico Pea directly to Mussolini, Hitler and Oswald Mosley.

But if you follow this process

 [Tê]

not a lot of signs, but the one sign

etcetera

plus always Τέχνη [Techne]

and from Τέχνη back to σεαυτόν [seauton]

Neither by chinks, nor by sophists,

nor by hindoo immaturities;

Dante, out of St Victor (Richardus),

Erigena with greek tags in his verses.

Y Yin sent the young king into seclusion

by the T'ang Tomb to think things over . . . . (1987, 560)

In Pound's definition Tê (virtue) is "the action resultant from [the] straight gaze into the heart. The "know thyself" carried into action. Said action also serving to clarify the self-knowledge"(1952a, 21). Tê should never be divorced from Τέχνη (skill or art). Contemplation that does not lead to action and back to σεαυτόν (oneself) is, according to this line of thought, a meaningless vanity. Τέχνη, it is important to observe, does not refer to mindless skills: it involves an awareness of the Process, rooted in which man perfects his craft and creates things of beauty (a poem, for instance, or a city) in harmony with it. These in turn illuminate the Process, so that its inner nature is revealed. So, the young king went into seclusion "to think things over" and eventually received an awareness which made him "sincerely virtuous" and when he acted upon

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(Bilenchi, 1979, 435)

this, the tê circulated in his kingdom, to a point of saturation, resulting in a total regeneration. This is meant to be read as yet another instance of political wisdom in action extending to the spiritual—the kind of wisdom that, according to Pound, that makes the terrestrial paradise possible. Even if one is willing to concede that this is a factual record of what happened to the young king—which is extremely doubtful since the passage is based on the *official* version of Chinese history, the *Chou King*—it does not follow that contemplation inevitably leads to knowledge-of-the-self in action. The self and the knowledge in question could very well be ideological constructs that are powerful enough to transform what is meant by the Process[53] into one of their components. However, the *Cantos* never pauses to ask such questions; in fact, it has no space where these can be raised.

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[53] The Process itself is an appropriation, and in this the Chinese enlightenment anticipates the European one. This shall be discussed in one of the following sections.

the adept as poet, lover and statesman

Spiritual illumination, according to the view projected in the passage discussed above, becomes more meaningful when it is not confined to the lone individual, when it becomes a potent source of creative action embracing all domains of life. This necessarily involves the creation of a terrestrial paradise, the building of the city of Dioce, the revival of Wagadu, a city "now in the mind indestructible" (1987, 444). The vision of the celestial city, as it is conceived in the *Cantos* is basically similar to the vision of the lover-adept, since it leaves a "formèd trace" in the mind charged with love, though its scope and dimension are different. The indestructible *Forma* of the dreamed city, like the *Forma* of the Lady, is part of the vision of the *Cantos* and it takes its state "where memory liveth" (1987, 177) as in the case of the lover:

> nothing matters but the quality
> of the affection—
> in the end—that has carved the trace in the mind
> dove sta memoria. (1987, 471)

The vision stays in the mind, "dove sta memoria" [where memory lives], emanates light, and inspires creative action. This love-mysticism comes in handy, when the ideology reveals its true foundations: the fascist ruler is not just a counterfeit god, he is a counterfeit lover as well, represented as an adept, whose love is supposed to have the

miraculous power of regeneration.

Pound links the strenuous efforts to realize the dream of the terrestrial paradise to the poet's attempts to register something precisely: (consider his appreciation of Cavalcanti's struggle to define the nature of love: "if ever poem seemed to me a struggle for clear definition, that poem is the *Donna mi Prega*" [Pound 1954, 177]). The ideal writer, for Pound, is one who makes possible the regeneration of a corrupt, imprecise and thus dead language with his *passion* for exactitude and clarity, which reflects his commitment to "truth" and his desire to bring language as close as possible to it. Such writing, it is implied, potent enough to influence and renovate the cultural milieu as a whole, can infuse society with a new vigor and inspire it with a fresh look at existence. It can also provide the vision of a new social and cultural order as well as the ideal of the individual deeply rooted in truth and thus in contact with the divine. This is corroborated by the perception that the forces behind the economic and cultural disintegration of a society are the same ones which corrupt language and make it imprecise. An inexact language can exist only in a society that is not concerned with clear perceptions and a society loses interest in clear perceptions when it does not want to make distinctions between the true and the false. Such a society would be morally sick to the core, and its politics, culture, economy and religion become tainted. Pound has emphasized this repeatedly, in both prose and verse and here is an instance from *ABC of Reading*:

> Good writers are those who keep the language efficient. That is to say, keep it accurate, keep it clear . . . . If an animal's nervous system does not transmit sensations and stimuli, the animal atrophies.
>
> If a nation's literature declines, the nation atrophies and decays.
>
> Your legislator can't legislate for the public good, your commander can't command, your populace . . . can't instruct its 'representatives', save by language.
>
> The fogged language of swindling classes serves only a temporary purpose. (32-33)

This is an insight that is Dantescan and Confucian to the same degree; an insight, it is important to remember, that leads to conclusions that undermine the very project the *Cantos* strive to effect. Dante placed flatterers, simonists, sorcerers, fraudulent counselors, schismatics and falsifiers of words in the same circle of hell. In the hell of the *Cantos* too, perverters of language are in the company of usurers, "monopolists, obstructers of knowledge / obstructers of distribution" (1987, 63). [Pound's wandering precisely into this circle of inferno is perhaps the most disturbing factor that the Kenner-Pearlman tradition has to overcome: but the art of ovet*looking* things provides immense solace.] Rectification of language is central to Confucian ethics as well. The repeated appearance of the ideogram, cheng (correct) meng (word)—"Call things by the names," as Pound paraphrases it in LI (1987, 261)—introduced at the end of Canto LI indicates Pound's consistent interest in the principle. It also appears in one of the crucial passages of Confucius's *Great Digest*:

> The men of old wanting to clarify and diffuse throughout the empire that light which comes from looking straight into the heart and then acting, first set up good government in their own states; wanting good government in their states, they first established order in their own families; wanting order in the home, they first disciplined themselves; desiring self-discipline, they rectified their own hearts; and wanting to rectify their hearts they sought precise verbal definitions of their inarticulate thoughts [the tones given off by the heart]; wishing to attain precise verbal definitions, they set to extend their knowledge to the utmost. This completion of knowledge is rooted in sorting things into organic categories. (Pound, 1952a, 29-31)

The struggle to define something clearly becomes meaningful only when it is informed by an illuminating vision that integrates the mind with the very source of life. The task of the writer, according to this view, parallels that of the ruler. The fascist ruler, to go back to the analogy, is a counterfeit writer too, whose master-poem is the "liberated" nation.

The vision that inspires the creation of a celestial city or a paradisal poem has to be one that embraces heaven and earth, a vision that puts everything into perspective, by revealing the unity and harmony of existence. This is precisely the alchemist's formula the Enlightenment tries to evolve. The *Cantos* constructs one such formula, drawing from the eastern and western traditions. It is a formula that can make possible the illumination, which connects man with the root of existence and thus becomes a source of unimaginable potency:

> That hath the light of the doer, as it were

a form cleaving to it.
Deo similis quodam modo [Godlike in a way]
hic intellectus adeptus [this intellect that has grasped]
Grass: nowhere out of place. (1987, 251)

The well-wrought beauty of these lines and the grandeur of the vision they offer compel the reader to forget their ideological implications. But he/she cannot remain allured for long, since these lines don't exist in isolation. They lead to:

Grass; nowhere out of place. Thus speaking in Königsberg
Zwischen die Volkern erzielt wird [Between the two peoples]
a modus vivendi [a way of life is achieved].[54]

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[54] M. Bacigalupo's comments on this passage are worth quoting:

> The theme [of Siena's Monte dei Paschi] is brought into c. 51 by the image of the grass which . . . is "nowhere out of place". . . and by the reference to another *monte*: Königsberg, the King's Mount. Elsewhere Pound tells us that "Antoninus, Constantine and Justinian were serious characters, they were trying to work out an orderly system [cf. 'nowhere out of place'], a modus vivendi for multitudes of mankind"(*K* 3). This is effected here by the Prince of the Mount, in the way prescribed by Confucius: "The proper man acting according to conscience is wind, the lesser folk acting on conscience, grass; grass with wind above it must bend" (*A* xii 19). Thus Pound's pithy defense of the precise and ordered word turns out to be a step towards a mystical and authoritarian (hence uncontrollable) conception of power—towards the worship of counterfeit gods, who are rather envoys of hell: in the second section Napoleon is replaced (as suggested by the German words) by Adolf Hitler.
>
> Pound probably wrote these lines in 1936, under the influence of the invasion of Ethiopia and of the early gestures towards the Rome-Berlin Axis. It is no coincidence that Mussolini should appear in c. 41, last of the previous section (1934): the parallel entry of Hitler encrypts the Axis in the structure of the poem. (1980, 63-64)

According to Eva Hesse's note, the reference is to "Rudolf Hess's radio message broadcast from Königsberg . . . July 8, 1934" (Terrell 1980, 198). However, this does not

This is an instance of awareness in action; an awareness that was nurtured by the Enlightenment: the theoretical context can no longer be ignored. The discourse becomes explicitly fascist, with the nazi speaker from Königsberg referring to the consolidation of the Axis. The entry of the fascist discourse into the *Cantos* imprinted in XLI is by no means unanticipated. Most of the elements in the poem that harmonize with the aesthetics and philosophy of fascism were formulated before it became a political reality in Italy during the years 1922-26.[55] Many of the apparently visionary ideas summed up in the above paragraphs belong to this category: the fusion of the poet, lover, visionary and statesman, for instance, is attained in the opening cantos composed between 1917 and 1924. Pound's poetics readily accommodates his new politics without undergoing any radical change. All it had to do was to recognize its new dimension: that the theory of the corruption of language had its mirror image in the theory of the corruption of economy. The poet who re-invigorates language has his counterpart in the ruler, who is a visionary, writing *his* poem, which is the *ideal* state. Both are inspired by an ardent passion, like the lover-adept in the courtly love tradition. Thus the fascist ruler, becomes an initiate, that "hath the light of the doer."

Canto LXXIV picks up the motif, "Grass: nowhere out of place" and sets it in a passage that brings out its wider implications. It is a passage that collocates the lover, poet,

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alter the above reading much.

[55] This, by no means, is an isolated instance: consider the case of Marinetti whose Futurism evolved into fascism in a smooth and imperceptible manner.

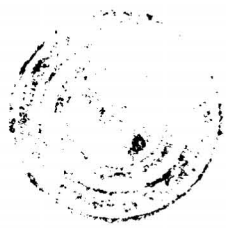
ruler (the dreamer of the city of Dioce), sage, the deities of love and compassion, and the Process:

> Cloud over mountain, mountain over the cloud
> I surrender neither the empire nor the temples
> plural
> nor the constitution nor yet the city of Dioce
> each one in his god's name
> as by Terracina rose from the sea Zephyr behind her
> and from her manner of walking
> as had Anchises
> till the shrine be again white with marble
> till the stone eyes look again seaward
> The wind is part of the process
> The rain is part of the process
> and the Pleiades set in her mirror
> Kuanon, this stone bringeth sleep;
> offered the wine bowl
> grass nowhere out of place. (1987, 448-49)

Here is cluster of ideograms that brings together the various components of Pound's vision. They are more than interrelated—they form integral parts of an envisioned unity. It is a vision that ranges from the constellation, the Pleiades, to the earth and touches all the major concerns of the *Cantos*: the celestial city, the building of the temple, the constitution, the goddesses of love and compassion, the world of energies, of nature, and nature's abundance. The components allude to the various factors that are supposed to lift the individual seeker to an exalted level of awareness: the wind (cf.

"Do not move / Let the wind speak / that is paradise" [1987, 816]), the rain, the earth, the grass, clouds, stars and along with these the natural energies personified as Aphrodite and Kuanon. In the "Pisan *Cantos*" the grass image —previously associated the abundance of nature (1987, 219) and with the creativity of the adept intellect (1987, 251)— has the additional function of alluding to the form of love that, according to this framework, bids the lover live in harmony with the Process:

> as the grass grows by the weirs
> thought Uncle William *consiros* [with grief]
> as the grass on the roof of St What's his name
> near "Cane e Gatto"
> soll deine Liebe sein [is to be your love]
> it would be about a-level the windows
> the grass would, or I dare say above that
> when they bless the wax for the Palio. (1987, 543)



The beloved of the speaker in Yeats's early poem, "Down by the Salley Gardens," asks him to "take life easy, as the grass grows on the weirs" (*CP*, 23). The allusion to Arnaut's purgatorial suffering and the reference in the last line to a festival associated with the Madonna (celebrated in San Giorgio, Siena—Pound's "St What's his name") render the Lady of this passage a Beatrice-like figure, who is to inspire him to contemplate the Process. The hoped for elevation is depicted in LXXVI:

> Lay in soft grass by the cliff's edge
> with the sea 30 metres below this
> and at hand's span, at cubit's reach moving,
> the crystalline, as inverse of water,

clear over rock-bed

ac ferae familiares [and tamed animals]
the gemmed field *a destra* [to the right] with fawn, with panther,
corn flower, thistle and sword-flower
to a half metre grass growth,
lay on the cliff's edge
. . . nor is this yet *atasal* [union with God]. (1987, 471-72)

Though this does not mean *atasal*, the experience apparently gives him a foretaste of it and further inspiration. This elevation, in the narrative design of the *Cantos*, is not confined to individuals alone—the corresponding experience of the community lifts it to the terraces of Dioce.

So, the collocation of the grass image, referring to the economic theme on the one hand and the Process motif on the other, with the voice from Königsberg was not a casual one. It marks an important moment in the construction of the metanarrative with its ambition to embrace the cosmos, extending from the blade of grass to distant constellations. Königsberg is linked with another narrative, (though the passages discussed above do not alluded to it) anti-Semitism in the German context, which was used as a master code to explain all economic evils. Pound's obsessive anti-Semitism brings him closer to the German version of fascism than to the Italian one. Anti-Semitism has the same structural function in Nazi propaganda and the *Cantos*. Slavoj Žižek's comments on Hitler's method illuminate Pound's own:

> The simple evocation of the "Jewish plot" *explains everything*: all of a sudden "things become clear", perplexity is replaced by a firm sense of orientation, all the diversity of earthly miseries is conceived as the manifestation of the "Jewish plot". In other words, the Jew is Hitler's *point de capiton*; the fascinating figure of the Jew is the product of a purely formal inversion . . . . Therein consists . . . the function of the Jew in anti-Semitic ideology: in so far as an ideological edifice gains consistency from organizing its heterogeneous "raw material" into a coherent narrative, the entity called "Jew" is a device enabling us to unify in a single large narrative the experiences of economic crisis, "moral decadence" and loss of values, political frustration and "national humiliation" and so on. (1991, 18) [56]

This describes the function of anti-Semitism in the *Cantos* precisely, but not its content. It is more than a device in the poem and its content is as significant. Even though Pound's attack on Judaism focuses on the question of usury—which, for him, explains *all* the economic evils of the world—he does not spare the fundamental tenets of the faith. This ideological resistance to Judaism is determined by a preference for the Greek forms of worship, founded on principles which the former finds abhorrent. The ideological stance Pound adopts here, it is important to note, is consistent with the re-

[56] Žižek goes on to explain how this happens:

> How is it possible that the result of a purely formal inversion acquires enough substantiality to be perceived as a flesh-and-blood personality? The psychoanalytic answer is, of course, ***enjoyment***—the only substance acknowledged by psychoanalysis, according to Lacan. The "Jew" cannot be reduced to a purely formal organizational device; the efficacy of this figure cannot be explained by reference to the textual mechanism of "quilting"; the surplus on which this mechanism relies is the fact that we impute to the "Jew" an impossible, unfathomable enjoyment, allegedly stolen from us. (19)

ligious thought of the Enlightenment, especially that of Hegel. Hegel's rejection of the Hebraic religion in favor of Greek paganism and Christianity[57] results in the formulation of the philosophical foundations of modern anti-Semitism. Of course, he is not a "fanatic"[58] like the organized adherents of this philosophy, but the difference is not great. This philosophical anti-Semitism is to be distinguished from mere race-prejudice, though the both are not unrelated. The Jew had always been a convenient political other in the pre-Enlightenment Christian societies; and these societies required no philosophical grounding for the creation of an Other. Nevertheless, the age of reason calls for the kind of rational framework one finds in the young Hegel. In fact creation of a philosophy that othered the Jew was one of the early achievements of the Enlightenment. Its large-scale political uses came later, in the 19th and 20th centuries. Now this version of anti-Semitism has almost become dysfunctional. The religious prejudices of the *Cantos* cannot be properly understood unless they are placed in this context.

Such are the enigmatic results of Pound's attempts to "include" history in the *Cantos*. History is interpreted into the schema of the poem so that it becomes part of an apparatus that is reductionist by nature. In fact, this apparatus is capable of appropriating almost anything in order to make it a component of the System. Similar devices are used

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[57] Hegel makes his stand clear in the essays collected in *Early Theological Writings*, Tr. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).

[58] The "fanaticism" of the organized modern anti-Semite is merely a device. It is extremely useful in the fascist rituals of hatred, rituals by which fascism defines and organizes itself.

when the poem addresses the question of religion.

A Paradiso in Hell: From the Kimmerian Lands to the Fire of the Nous

Mohandas C.B. “The Poetry of the Process: a Study of the Cantos of Ezra Pound ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 1999

Chapter 6 A Paradiso in Hell: From the Kimmerian Lands to the Fire of the *Nous*

the light of the doer

Strife is between light and darkness (Pound, 1987, 259)

a little light

in great darkness (Pound, 1987, 809)

It is homesickness that gives rise to the adventures through which subjectivity (whose fundamental history is presented in the *Odyssey*) escapes from the prehistoric world. The quintessential paradox of the epic resides in the fact that the notion of homeland is opposed to myth—which the fascists would present as homeland. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1986, 78)

Modernity is not a phenomenon of sensitivity to the fleeting present; it is the will to "heroize" the present. (Foucault, 1984, 40)

But let there be no misunderstanding: it is not his *curiosity* of his object, but his *intelligence*, which is all Montesquieu. His only wish was to *understand*. We have several images of him which betray this effort and his pride in it. He only delved into the infinite mass of documents and texts, immense heritage of histories, chronicles miscellanies and compilations, in order to grasp their logic and disengage their grounds. He wanted to seize the 'thread' of this skein which centuries had tangled, to seize this thread and pull it to him so that the whole followed. The whole did follow. At other times he felt himself lost in this gigantic universe of minute data as if in a boundless sea. He wanted this sea to

> have shores, he wanted to give it them and reach them. He reached them. No one went before him in this adventure. It is as if this man, who was enough in love with ships to discuss the design of their hulls, the heights of their masts and their speeds; who devoted enough interest to the first *peripli* to follow the Carthaginians down the coast of Africa and the Spaniards to India, felt some affinity with all sea-rovers. Not in vain does he invoke the sea when he finds himself in the wide open spaces of his subject: the last sentence of his book celebrates the longed-for approach to land. It is true that he set out for the unknown. But for his navigator, too, the unknown was simply a new land (Althusser, 1982, 13-14).

The paradigmatic opening Canto introduces some of the recurring motifs of the *Cantos* and tentatively offers to chalk out the design of the entire work. It attempts to trace the progress of the protagonist (not merely Odysseus or Pound-Odysseus but a composite of Pound-Odysseus and the reader[59]) from the murk of ignorance and error to the realm of light and awareness, (i.e., the light of reason and rationalized myth) through the flux of existence, encountering the people of Kimmerian lands, the Sirens, the shades of Hades and Circe. This voyage from darkness to light is intended to trace the subject's evolution from the dark world of mythic past to the enlightened present. It is crucial to remember that this paradigm of emerging into the light of the *Nous* was originally formulated in its metaphysical framework by Plato in the seventh book of *The Republic* where he uses the parable of the cave. *The Republic* is the first major statement of the Enlightenment ideology and it is natural that the *Cantos* echos some of Plato's im-

[59] The reader of the *Cantos* is invited, not only to join the process of the poem's creation as in a typical modernist text, but also to take an active part in its action, the Odyssean search for an earthly paradise. However, this is an invitation that is withdrawn the moment it is extended. He is invited to be tyrannized by the author's obsessions and

ages/ideas as they both belong to the same terrain. The darkness-light polarity, cardinal to the *Cantos* as a whole, is introduced quite early in the poem, setting the Kimmerian lands

> Covered with close-webbed mist, unpierced ever
> With glitter of sun rays
> Nor with stars stretched, nor looking back from heaven
> Swartest night stretched over wretched men there. (1987, 3)

against the radiant world of the gods (which materializes at the end of the canto and recurs under many guises throughout the poem):

> 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. (1987, 11)

> Thus the light rains, thus pours, *e lo soleills plovil*
> The liquid and rushing crystal
> beneath the knees of gods. (1987, 15)

There are numerous instances like these, and every time the divine manifestation takes place in an ambiance that is charged with intense brightness. From Pound's definition of a god—"A god is an eternal state of mind" (Pound, 1973, 47)—it is evident that these manifestations take place in what Plotinus called the *Nous*[60], the absolutely tran-

convictions, and, at times, to be abandoned in strange and uninhabitable shores.

[60] Cf. Pound's comments on the Platonic concept of the *Nous* in *Guide to Kulchur*:

scendent and incomprehensible source of everything that exists, emanating from the One.[61] The Neoplatonic framework within which these manifestations of the divine are placed is alluded to in Canto V:

> Iamblichus' light,
>
> the souls ascending,
>
> Sparks like a partridge covey,
>
> Like the "ciocco", brand struck in the game.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The fire? always, and the vision always,
>
> Ear dull, perhaps, with the vision, flitting
>
> And fading at will. (1987, 17)

The light Iamblichus (the Neoplatonic philosopher, d. circa AD 330) refers to is the light of the *Nous*, of the gods who inhabit that realm permanently ("The fire? always, and the vision always") which, when it descends to the human soul, according to this myth, creates ecstatic illumination. Referring to Iamblichus on the fire of the gods Pound observes that it "comes down into a man and produces superior ecstasies, feelings of regained youth, super-youth and so forth . . ." (Pound, 1952b, 223). In his

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> [The] Platonists . . . have caused man after man to be suddenly conscious of the reality of the *nous*, of the mind, apart from any man's individual mind, of the sea crystalline and enduring, of the bright as it were molten glass that envelops us, full of light. (44)

[61] It has to be observed that Pound is more preoccupied with the deities which exist in the *Nous*, or the spiritual energies in the created world than with the Creator, and this becomes a stumbling block when he comes to the paradise part of the poem. One of the possible reasons for the fragmentation of Pound's paradise is his attachment to his gods and goddesses, which obscures the unified vision of the Divine. Since the question is connected with Pound's anti-Semitism, it shall be discussed in a following chapter.

"Quotations from Richard of St. Victor," Pound includes a passage that contains more or less the same idea:

> *When this Spirit enters the rational spirit, it inflames it with its own divine ardour and transforms its qualities into its own likeness, so that it shows forth the love of its author, as is fitting.* (Pound, 1973, 74)

The implication is that the interaction of the human soul and the light of the *Nous* can elevate the former to the higher levels of existence, ultimately bringing it into contact with Godhead, from which everything flows. The means by which this is attained is, in Pound's view, contemplation in the sense Richard of St. Victor employed the term: "identification of the consciousness WITH the object" (Pound, 1952b, 328). Discussing Pound's interest in Richard, D. James Neault writes:

> What evidently appealed to Pound is the eminence that Richard ascribes to reason as the highest of man's natural faculties, and Richard's belief that in contemplation the reason, divinely illuminated, is the means by which man can come to know truth . . . . The final goal of contemplation is, for Richard, *excessus mentis*, a state of mystical ecstasy wherein the soul of man stands in the presence of the unveiled face God. (Neault, 1974, 220)

The numerous references to the philosophers of the "total light process" (Pound's gloss on the "ming" ideogram: "[t]he sun and moon, the total light process, the radiation, reception, reflection of light; hence intelligence" [Pound 1952a, 20]) including Richard, Robert Grosseteste, Ocellus and John Scotus Erigena, who were all concerned with the

descent of the "tensile light, the Immaculata," (*Ibid.*, 187) whose action is endless, highlight this desire for the enduring vision. Moreover, in the *Cantos*, the vision is sought for much more than the ecstatic illumination it provides. In fact, the desire to transform it into the fountainhead of creative action is the fundamental motivation. Thus Erigena's insight,

> Light tensile immaculata
>
> the sun's cord unspotted
>
> "sunt lumina" said the Oirishman to King Carolus,
>
> "OMNIA,
>
> all things that are are lights." (1987, 443)

is linked with the picture of the Emperor (in the Chinese Book of Rites) plowing the field and the Empress offering cocoons:

> plowed in the sacred field and unwound the silk worms early
>
> in tensile
>
> [hsien] 
>
> in the light of light is the *virtù*
>
> "sunt lumina" said Erigena Scotus. (1987, 443)

an instance of the awareness of the Process going into action. This reappears in a different form in XCIV where Erigena is replaced by Ocellus and the *Book of Rites* by the T'ang inscription, "Make It New":

> "To build light
>
>  jih

新 hsin

said Ocellus. (1987, 656)

The light of awareness acts to develop a blueprint for the Ideal City as Pound makes it clear in XCVIII where he writes about Iong Ching's commentary, *Wen-li* on Kang Hsi's *Sacred Edict*:

> Iong Ching, Canto 61
>
> of the light of 顯明 hsien ming
>
> by the silk cords of the sunlight,
>
> Chords of the sunlight (*Pitagora*)
>
> non si disuna (xiii)
>
> Splendor
>
> 2nd year
>
> 2nd month
>
> 2nd day as the *Sheng* 聖諭
>
> The Edict.
>
> (1987, 707)

Therefore, light is what emanates from the intellect in possession of awareness. This awareness is none other than the awareness of the Process and when it is obscured, deliberately or otherwise, the result is infernal darkness. Unawareness means exile from the luminous world, and this is punishment enough, as in the case of the Kimmerian people, but the willful negation of it is an act of violence that is rewarded by disastrous

consequences. The denial of Elpenor—the first character of this sort the reader meets—is of a passive kind: his fall, (literally and figuratively) was caused by his indulgent nature which allows him to succumb to the bodily lusts without offering any sort of resistance:

> "Ill fate and abundant wine. I slept in Circe's ingle.
> "Going down the long ladder unguarded,
> "I fell against the buttress,
> "Shattered the nape-nerve, the soul sought Avernus. (1987, 4)

In Canto XXXIX Pound places him among the members of Odysseus' crew, who, Pasiphae-like, allowed themselves to become degenerate beasts when the environment became favorable. Circe's magic potion is nothing more than a catalyst:

> 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. (1987, 193)

Elpenor is the embodiment of unawareness, as Homer's account of his death makes clear:

> Among them all
> the youngest was Elpenor—

> no mainstay in a fight nor very clever—
> and this one, having climbed on Kirke's roof
> to taste the cool night, fell asleep with wine.
> Waked by our morning voices, and the tramp
> of men below, he started up, but missed
> his footing on the long steep backward ladder
> and fell that height headlong. The blow smashed
> the nape cord and his ghost fled to the dark.[62]

He meets his death precisely because he has strayed far away from the light of awareness. The "ill fate" of "Ill fate and abundant wine"(1987, 4) refers not only to his accident but also to the central flaw in his character which is dramatized in his befuddled movement that made him fall. In the *Odyssey* and in the *Cantos* Elpenor is presented as a foil to Odysseus, embodying the pitfalls the hero skillfully avoids. Once this is ignored, the reader finds himself/herself landed in a number of misconceptions about the nature of Elpenor and his role in both the poems. Akiko Miyake, for example, associates Elpenor with Osiris, arguing that Pound's "Avernus" possibly derived from the Greek word *aornos* which means "without birds," indicating a land similar to the birdless island where the tomb of Osiris rests:

> It was then to Osiris's tomb that Elpenor fell . . . . His body was broken in the back of the neck inside just as Osiris was torn apart outside. The hidden resemblance of Osiris and Elpenor is noted here . . . . Mystically . . . Elpenor can acquire the name of Osiris, the sole hope of the dead for resurrec-

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[62] Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (1961; London: Collins Harvill, 1988) 193-94.

tion, because the dead should be identified with Osiris for sharing the hope of resurrection with the god. (Miyake, 1978, 83-84)

The argument is coherent but misleading; it obscures the difference between Elpenor and Odysseus that Pound evidently highlights in cantos I and XXXIX: Odysseus becomes a heroic figure (both in Homer and Pound) precisely because he cleverly avoids the errors of Elpenor and the other members of the crew. What is portrayed in the metamorphosis is the reversion to the world of mythic darkness that Odysseus seeks to transcend. In their discussion of Homer's *Odyssey* Adorno and Horkheimer highlight this point:

> In contradistinction to the tales of escape from myth as the savagery of the eater of men, the magical story of Circe refers back again to the magic stage proper. Magic disintegrates the individual, who once again succumbs to it and is thus made to revert to an older biological species. But the force by which this dissolution is brought about is once again oblivion. It uses the fixed order of time to attack the fixed will of the subject, who orientates himself by that order. Circe tempts Odysseus' men to give themselves up to instinct: therefore the animal form of the tempted men has always been connected with a reversion to basic impulse, and Circe has been made the prototype of the courtesan . . . . The enchanted men behave like the wild animals who hear Orpheus playing. The mythic commandment to which they succumb liberates at the same time the repressed nature in them. What is recalled in their reversion to myth itself myth. The repression of instinct that makes them individuals—selves—and separates them from animals, was the introversion of repression in the hopelessly closed cycle of nature, to which – as an older theory has it—the name Circe alludes. The forceful

> magic, on the other hand, which recalls them to an idealized prehistory, not only makes them animals, but . . . brings about, however delusive it may be, the illusion of redemption. But because they have already been men, the civilized epic cannot represent what has happened to them as anything other than unseemly degradation. (69-70)

In the *Cantos*, Odysseus, the sailor after knowledge, inspired by the spirit of the Enlightenment, resists such temptations. The indulgence of his followers, it is true, is merely self-destructive, as in the case of the lotos eaters (though the damage is not permanent), but in Poundworld the individual is not an isolated entity and personal tragedy is never devoid of social consequences. The private individual is a citizen as well and the poem focuses on the complex ways in which man and society interact. The same spiritual disorder (*abuleia* or paralysis of the will) can have disastrous consequences when a leader/ruler succumbs to it. The *Cantos* presents many instances like the fall of the Sui dynasty (589-618): "KONG sank in abuleia. TANG rising" (1987, 285). This pattern of decadence was established the first Chinese dynasty itself:

> 'We are up, Hia is down.'
> Immoderate love of women
> Immoderate love of riches,
> Cared for parades and huntin.' (1987, 265)

The same thing happened to the Shang dynasty that replaced the Hsia, after a period of 500 years. Wu Wang, the first emperor of the Chou, the dynasty that replaced the Shang, evolved, with the help of the duke of Chou his brother, a political philosophy

capable of checking *abuleia* and the resultant decay, based on the principle of man's awareness, not merely of the past and the living traditions but of the Process as a whole. In Canto LXXXV Pound quotes a few of their statements in detail, and thus presents some of the key utterances of the *Cantos*:

"Gentlemen from the West,
Heaven's process is quite coherent
and its main points clear. (566)

Tcheou neither watching his
own insides, nor respecting the workings.
Our dynasty came in because of great Ling[2]

sensibility

p'i

The arrow has not two points. (569-70)

We flop if we cannot maintain the awareness
Diuturna cogites [think of the future]
respect awareness and
train the fit men. (571)

The 5 laws have root in awareness

che funge [which acts].
(572)

will to light

Canto I presents, by implication, the antithesis of abuleia: *directio voluntatis* [direction of the will]. This pair of opposites is a variation on the pair already discussed[63] and both are closely connected with Enlightenment thought and the Process motif. The will of Odysseus is directed homewards; the homeland which, according to the schema of in the *Cantos*, is a kind of earthly paradise which comes into being when a society emerges out of the dark world of myths in harmony with the Process. This is not a simple process since the dream of homeland often turns into a nightmare of oppression. Adorno and Horkheimer comment on this:

> It is homesickness that gives rise to the adventures through which subjectivity (whose fundamental history is presented in the Odyssey) escapes form the prehistoric world. The quintessential paradox of the epic resides in the fact that the notion of homeland is opposed to myth—which the fascist would falsely present as homeland. (78)

The *Cantos* provides a good instance of this (con)fusion of myth and homeland, though it does not surface in the opening canto which establishes the Odysseus-Elpenor antithesis. If what brought Elpenor to Hades was the paralysis of the will, Odysseus's descent was made possible by his possessing the faculty of volition. Like the *Comme-*

dia, the *Cantos* is a study of *directio voluntatis*.[64] Elpenor lacked awareness, but his fate would not have been different if he merely possessed it, without putting it into action. "Let us deny that *real* intelligence exists until it comes into action," writes Pound in *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* (Pound, 1970a, 18). After a comment on "the remarkably full and perfect knowledge" with which insects act by instinct (which is "merely PERFECT and complete intelligence *with a limited scope* applied to recurrent conditions") he continues:

> When a human being has an analogous completeness of knowledge, or intelligence carried into a third or fourth dimension, capable of dealing with NEW circumstances, we call it genius." (*Ibid.*, 18-19)

The "many-minded," "resourceful," Odysseus is a genius in this sense, and the primary objective of Homer's epic is to glorify this dynamic intelligence. It is precisely his ability to respond to the unpredictable in a spontaneous and competent way that Pound highlights in the *Cantos*: his wisdom and will direct him homewards and his resourcefulness helps him to survive the many perilous adventures. Hermes's gift of molü signifies the divine acknowledgment of his virtues: an awareness that is dynamic and an alacrity that is spontaneous. These virtues protect him from Circe's magic. The discussion in bed with Circe does not lead to degeneration as in the case of his companions; it results in regeneration, a deepening of his awareness to such a degree that he becomes

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[63] Namely, that of light and darkness.

[64] "The whole of the Divina Commedia is a study of the 'directio voluntatis' (direction

one with the Process:

> The light has entered the cave. Io! Io!
> The light has gone down into the cave,
> Splendour on splendour!
> By prong have I entered these hills:
> That the grass grow from my body,
> That I hear the roots speaking together,
> The air is new on my leaf
> The forked boughs shake with the wind. (1987, 238)

This is one of the key passages in the poem and its precise meaning has eluded many critics. D. Pearlman's comment, for instance, fails to bring out its implications: "In his moment of ecstasy Odysseus becomes identified with the whole process of nature, whose continued fruitfulness his sacral act is intended to promote and, of course, does actually promote" (Pearlman, 1969, 188). What Odysseus "experiences" here is the concept nothing less than of the vital and hidden secret of germination, which is a visionary paradigm of the mysterious process of creation, of the celestial Process. This is precisely the kind of knowledge he is sailing after, and still, Pearlman's argument that this vision foreshadows the paradise of the *Cantos* is misleading (*Ibid.*, 191-92). Moreover, it wrong to characterize Pound's paradise as "the poet's attainment of cosmic consciousness,' the mystical identification of the Self with the immortal 'process' of nature" (*Ibid.*, 191-92). It is true that the vision of the Process and the resultant awareness mark an important development in the quest for paradise. However, aware-

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of the will)"—Pound 1970a, 17.

ness is not an end in itself, and knowledge is not sought, at least from the theoretical point of view, merely for its own sake. M. L. Rosenthal emphasizes this point (though he overlooks the complexities) involved here when he argues that Homer's hero would not have "entertained the notion of a doomed voyage to seek out knowledge for its own sake—not that archaic pragmatist whose world was a balance between absolute certainty and absolute terror!" (1977, 311). For Pound, knowledge is irrelevant unless it is acted upon and paradise would remain a solipsistic dream when the visionary experience is not translated into creative action. His break, (that is, in theory), with the Symbolist/Decadent tradition is complete: he wrote to F. E. Schelling in 1922,

> I am perhaps didactic; so in a sense, or in different senses are Homer, Dante, Villon and Omar . . . . It's all rubbish to pretend that art isn't didactic. A revelation is always didactic. Only the aesthetes since 1880 have pretended the contrary, and they aren't a very sturdy lot. (Paige, 1982 180)

Read in the context of the *Cantos*, the meaning of the reference to Lionel Johnson in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* [" . . .Johnson (Lionel) died / By falling from a high stool in a pub . . ." (Pound, 1968, 193)] becomes clearer. That Johnson is an Elpenor-figure here has been noted by the critics[65] but even more important is the fact that his death dramatizes the most serious pitfall of the Symbolist/Decadent tradition, namely the refusal to confront and deal with the world of reality. Johnson rhymes with Elpenor not merely because his fall was caused by alcohol-induced unawareness. Far more consequential is

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[65] See for instance, Brooker, 1979, 206.

the fact that his death as a poet was induced by his practice of treating poetry more or less as an intoxicant. The degeneration of the aesthete, the central theme of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, (elaborately treated in the second part of the poem,) is dramatized here, in Canto I, in a concise manner. For Pound's poetics aims at liberating poetry is not an end in itself, forming a closed system of from its self-referentiality codes.

The *Cantos* loses its ground when it fails to refer to the external world, which it endeavors to transform. The fact that it fails in both respects (in referring to the world and transforming it) does not justify Rosenthal's argument that ignores their fundamental objective. Pound's poetics, like the other elements of his general ideological stance, is inspired by the principle of *directio voluntatis*. The same principle, for instance, activates his economic vision. Pound writes in *ABC of Economics*: "No economic system is worth a hoot without 'good will'. No intellectual system of economics will function unless people are prepared act on their understanding" (Pound, 1973, 208).

In Homer, Odysseus's *nostos* does not merely signify the hero's reunion with Penelope; equally important is his political mission: the re-establishment of order in his kingdom. That the homecoming of Pound's Odysseus does not really take place in the *Cantos* does not make any difference. Visionary experience and knowledge are not really his ultimate objectives: they simply lead him on, towards the realization of the terrestrial paradise, giving him guidance and inspiration. Knowledge, for him, as for Enlightenment thinking, is a source of power, of domination.

This is further clarified when Odysseus reappears in the "Rock-Drill" and "Thrones" cantos. Here, all the scattered glimpses of the shipwrecked hero (in cantos XCI, XCV, XCVI, XCVIII, C, CIX) deal with his encounter with Leucothea who rescues him from the wrath of Poseidon. When she is introduced in XCI, Pound does not mention her name:

> As the sea-gull [Kadmou Thugater] said to Odysseus
> KADMOU THUGATER [Daughter of Cadmus]
> "get rid of parapernalia." [sic] (1987, 629)

The reference to Cadmus, founder of Thebes, is a brilliant stroke: it highlights one of the two major objectives of Odysseus' homeward voyage—that of rebuilding his kingdom. It serves to remind the reader that the hero is not just a shipwrecked sailor but also a benevolent king who ruled his people "like a gentle father,"[66] keen on returning home in order to reclaim his throne and thereby reconstruct Ithaca. When she reappears in XCV, this Kuanon of the sea is presented as a goddess of light:

> Queen of Heaven bring her repose
> [Kadmou Thugater]
> bringing light *per diafana* [through diaphanousness]
> [leukos] (shining) [Leucothoe]
> white foam, a sea-gull. (1987, 658)

The benevolent gesture of the White Goddess, i.e. her gift of the veil that takes him to

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[66] Homer, *The Odyssey*, 37.

the land of the Phaeacians concludes "Rock-Drill" and opens "Thrones," the first Canto of which traces the evolution of the Roman civilization. This clarifies things further, as Bacigalupo observes: "The bikini of amor has already evoked its communal mirror image, the myth of the City" (1980, 339). When the ideogram reappears in XCVIII it has more components which highlight the links between the light process and awareness (Ra-Set, the sun, and Ocellus), building the celestial city ("to build light," "Agada, Ganna, Faasa"--referring back to LXXIV where the African legend about the rebirth of the city Wagadu was introduced), renewal, and by implication, the Process (hsin [make new]) and benevolence that rescues and civilizes (Leucothea):

> The boat of Ra-Set moves with the sun
> "but our job to build light" said Ocellus:
>
> Agada, Ganna, Faasa
> hsin[1]
> Make it new
> [Ta ex aigyptou pharmaka][67]
> Leucothea gave her veil to Odysseus. (1987, 698)

In these lines Pound adds further emphasis to a recurrent motif: awareness is not something to be received passively for its own sake, instead, it is the source of the dynamic energy with which the celestial city is to be built on earth. When man lives with reverence and in harmony with the Process, the light of awareness flows from the mind and this fills the environment, making it resplendent. *That* is the homeland Odysseus is

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[67] From Book X of Homer's *Odyssey*, meaning "drugs from Egypt."

seeking; its brilliance is caused not just by awareness, but by awareness in action. This is realized when the direction of the will is wedded to the Process. The fourth and fifth lines of the passage quoted above refer to the inscription on the bathtub of Emperor Tching Tang (1766—1753 BC) who founded the Shang dynasty:

> AS THE SUN MAKES IT NEW
> DAY BY DAY MAKE IT NEW
> YET AGAIN MAKE IT NEW. (Pound, 1952a, 36)

This inscription expresses the awareness of the Heraclitian river of change; more important, welding the vision of the Process with the idea of *directio voluntatis* it suggests an effective way of checking degeneration—not only in the body politic, but also in the life of the individual citizen.

Re-Presenting Fascism

Mohandas C.B. “The Poetry of the Process: a Study of the Cantos of Ezra Pound ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 1999

Chapter 7 Re-Presenting Fascism

> . . . not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini–which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively–but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us (Foucault, 1983, xiii).

the dynamics of representation

A poetics that is based on the direction of the will and a poem that seeks to rewrite the world invite a host of inquiries regarding their visionary, aesthetic and ideological foundations. These become crucial issues in any discussion of the *Cantos* because the protagonist's will to knowledge is welded to his will to power. The question of representation occupies a cardinal position here, since the legitimacy of the many layers of text which constitute the poem is based on a set of assumptions that remain hidden and are never contested. The textual edifice of the *Cantos* rests on a multitude of similar (textual) edifices, the truth-claims of which are taken for granted; this state of affairs renders the problems of representation extremely complex.

One of the basic premises to be re-examined here is the one regarding the potential of language to *present* objective truth. A related question is that of the validity of the "documentary" method Pound employs in his poem. From his Imagist phase onwards,

the interconnected ideas of "presentation" and objectivity came to occupy a central position in Pound's poetics. "Objectivity, and again objectivity, and expression," (Paige, 1982, 49) he wrote in a letter to Harriet Monroe in 1915 (echoing Ford Madox Ford) emphasizing the links between his writing and the tradition of Flaubert, James and Ford. In an essay written roughly two years before this, he had defined this tradition:

> It means constatation of fact. It presents. It does not comment. It is irrefutable because it does not present a personal predilection for any particular fraction of the truth . . . . It is powerless to make the noble seem ignoble. It fights for a sane valuation.[68]

In another essay of the same year Pound compared the artist's commitment to truth with that of the scientist:

> The arts, literature, poesy, are a science, just as chemistry is a science. Their subject is man, mankind and the individual. The subject of chemistry is matter considered as to its composition.
>
> The arts give us a great percentage of the lasting and unassailable data regarding the nature of man, of immaterial man, of man considered as a thinking and sentient creature. They begin where the science of medicine leaves off or rather they overlap that science. The borders of the two arts overcross. (Pound, 1954, 42)

The point to be made is not just that Pound often departed from the principles implicit

[68] "The Approach to Paris," *New Age*, XIII (1913), 662. Quoted in Schneidau 1969, 25.

in these observations. He *did* depart from these and that was inevitable as the visionary components of the poem forced him to depict reality in a predetermined manner in order to evolve a new mythology. More important, the principles themselves are shaky, as they make certain unrealistic assumptions about the nature of language and discourse. Objectivity is a difficult virtue to sustain and "presentation" is often tainted by personal predilections, prejudices and ideological/political commitments. As Nietzsche points out in *Beyond Good and Evil*, every claim to objectivity is to be viewed with suspicion. A look into Nietzsche's charges against the philosophers may clarify at least some of the issues discussed here since the question of "presenting" objective truths is central to Pound's poetics. Nietzsche writes:

> They [the philosophers] all pose as if they had discovered and reached their real opinions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely unconcerned dialectic (as opposed to the mystics of every rank, who are more honest and doltish—and talk of "inspiration"); while at bottom it is an assumption, a hunch, indeed a kind of "inspiration"—most often a desire of the heart that has been filtered and made abstract—that they defend with reasons they have sought after the fact. They are all advocates who resent that name, and for the most part even wily spokesmen for their prejudices which they baptize "truths." (Nietzsche, 1992, 202-03)

Evidently, Nietzsche's primary reference is not to writers like Pound whose texts are fuelled by passionate convictions—the veracity of these convictions, however, is open to question—but to the philosophers who claim to use a "cold, pure, divinely unconcerned dialectic." However, in his different roles as a moral teacher, cultural theoreti-

cian and poet of history, Pound often presents his insights and conclusions in a way that is not radically different from those of the philosophers Nietzsche attacks. The fact that Pound employs the methods of modern science—to perfect his skills of observation and accurate depiction—does not make a significant difference.[69] When it comes to the question of truth-claims, there is no qualitative difference between the philosopher, the scientist and the poet (of Pound's kind).[70]. As Nietzsche reminds his reader, the "objectivity" of the sciences themselves cannot be taken for granted:

> It is perhaps just dawning on five or six minds that physics, too is only an interpretation and exegesis of the world (to suit us, if I may say so!) and *not.* a world explanation; but insofar as it is based on belief in the senses, it is regarded as more, and for a long time to come must be regarded as more—namely, as an explanation. (Nietzsche, *Ibid.*, 211-12)

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[69] This is manifest in the glorification of the method of the scientist in the early chapters of *ABC of Reading* and the glorification of Agassiz in *the Cantos.*

[70] Althusser's comments on the origins of modern political science is relevant in the discussion of this modern poetics:

> How could the mind of a Bodin, of a Machiavelli, of a Hobbes or of a Spinoza, the contemporaries of the already rigorous disciplines triumphing in mathematics and physics, have remained blind to the model of scientific knowledge that we have inherited?
>
> And in fact from the sixteenth century on we can see the birth and growth in a joint movement of a first, mathematical physics, and the demand for a second, soon to be called *moral* or *political physics*, which aimed for the rigour of the first . . . . Hobbes only saw one difference between mathematics and social sciences: the former unites men, the latter divide them. But that is only because in the former *the truth and men's interests are not opposed*, whereas in the latter *whenever reason goes against man, man is opposed to reason.* (Althusser, 1982, 17-18)

Nietzsche is brought in here as part of an attempt to define the nature of the modernist discourse and to trace its referential limits. The contention is not that "reality" is beyond the reach human beings. Nor is this an attempt to raise the specter of Gorgias, the prophet of the non-existent and the unknowable. The job at hand is to underline the obvious: Pound's "presentations" always end up as something else; at best they are *re*-presentations. This seemingly simple and transparent proposition questions some of the fundamental assumptions behind the poetics of the *Cantos* before proceeding to cast doubts about the very integrity of the poet.

Normally, poetic discourse is representational and as such, it ought to cause no aesthetic and structural predicament that threatens to unhinge the work in question. The problem here is that the mechanics of representation work against some of the basic objectives of the *Cantos*, especially its attempt to *include* history. Inclusion of history is not just one of the professed aims of the poem, but one of its major (though not intentional) achievements, and it happened in an unforeseeable fashion. History crossed the *Cantos* at D.T.C., Pisa. In the "Pisan Cantos" history is *present*, but not as something that is *presented*. Pound's deliberate attempts to include it, on the other hand, end up as interpretation; and distortion, often coming dangerously close to the containment of history. It is possible to discern the presence of this interpretative element even in the widely acclaimed and compelling tour de force like the Malatesta segment, where Pound's documentary method is at its best. There seems to be no extremism in the view that the interpretative impulse took the lead the very moment Malatesta was chosen as a hero. In fact, this choice was part of a reaction against many other (hostile and

indifferent) representations of the condottiere. Pound has an attitude toward Sigismundo—which is summed up in *Kulchur*: "he was at all events a failure worth all the successes of his age" and "[t]here is no other single man's effort equally registered" (frontispiece)—that is little less than uncritical admiration. These cantos "present" Malatesta's case convincingly and as such they do not do the poem any harm; it is the poet's privilege to assert his insights and fight his wars. However, such assertions, when not balanced by the presence of or reference to elements that make counter-assertions devalue his claims to objectivity. This is further complicated by the fact that only those figures admired or approved of by Pound are allowed to present their cases in such a convincing manner. The imbalance caused by this stricture tends to undermine the poem's polyphony. In Dostoyevsky and Dante, this tendency is kept well under control. Ivan Karamazov and Dante's Ulysses, as pointed out above, speak in their own voices and idioms, although they embody values and ideals their creators vigorously attacked. Their counterparts in *the Cantos*—the Rothschilds, Metevsky, Hamilton, Biddle etc.—on the other hand, if they are allowed to speak at all, speak in voices resembling those of the baddies in a comic strip or a Hollywood epic. This clearly indicates that Pound's fascism has deep roots; that it was not simply the outcome of an "innocent" or naïve misreading of the Italy of the thirties. In fact, the misreading (to be discussed in detail in a following section) was made possible by an inherent tendency to contain—by silencing or caricaturing—opposition. The impulse at work here is similar to what Nietzsche calls "a desire of the heart that has been made abstract"—a corresponding desire sifted and made *concrete* by the poet's subtle art.

The problem becomes even more complex when the reader attempts to verify the facts behind Pound's presentation. It has to be admitted that Pound's radical poetics make some significant advances in dealing with historical materials. Eschewing the reductive strategies of historical narration[71]—of reducing everything to the single voice of the narrator and thereby constructing a version of history that is predetermined by conscious and unconscious ideological commitments and personal prejudices—Pound employs the documentary method which allows him to bring different ideological stances into play and introduce different versions of an historical event. Still, one should not jump to the conclusion that Pound has exploited the advantages of the method fully. Critics have a tendency to gloss over the intricacies of this crucial matter. Consider, for instance, the following comments by Cantrell and Swinson:

> Pound is interested in documents, then, not as sources of some kind of simple-minded historical truth, but as reminders that every document has a human author and that every author is limited to his own perspective which is revealed in his style.
>
> The recognition that each document has its own voice means that no one document is sufficient; thus Pound's concept of reading/research necessitates looking at a *variety* of primary documents, of attending to what many different voices have to say. But not only does Pound attend to the voices, he brings them intact into the poem, rather than blending them into the smooth paste of narrative summary in the pseudo voice of the Historian—or poet. (Cantrell and Swinson, 1988, 117)

[71] The China cantos, where the narrative element is predominant, appear to be an exception. Nevertheless, it must be noted that they are documentary as well: in these cantos Pound is presenting his version of a document: Joseph de Mailla's *Histoire Générale de la Chine*.

This conforms perfectly to Pound's *concept* of documentary/polyphonic writing but not to his *practice* of it. It is true that cantos VIII-XI contain many voices and many documents but it is crucial to note that they are subtly engineered to create a particular impression: a dynamic image of the hero that corresponds to Pound's own conception of Malatesta. The reader is not as free to form his own conclusions as the potential of the documentary method promises—in fact, his responses are carefully orchestrated to a pre-defined effect. This invites one to question the ultimate validity of the documentary method: indeed, contemporary historiographers like Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra have challenged its supremacy. In his book, *Rethinking Intellectual History* LaCapra observes:

> The reconstruction of the past is an important endeavor, and reliable documentation is a crucial component of any approach that claims to be historical. But the dominance of a documentary conception distorts our understanding of both historiography and the historical process . . . . [A] *purely* documentary conception of historiography is itself a heuristic fiction, for description is never pure, in that a fact is relevant for an account only when it is selected with reference to a topic or a question posed to the past. (LaCapra, 1983, 61)

In fact, Pound implicitly instructs the reader to mistrust the corrupt "documents" fabricated by men like Pope Pius II, who are more committed to their own interests than to any notion of "objectivity." Yet, ironically, Pound's historiography suffers from similar shortcomings: it is often marred by its inconsistencies and preconceptions; he does not

display the same rigorous mistrust when it concerns the texts he approved of; such texts are christened "sacred"--Confucius and Ovid—or voices of "sanity and civilization,"—Jefferson and Adams (Pound, 1973, 124). The implicit distinction that is supposed to justify this practice, the distinction between the "conspiracy if intelligence"(Pound, 1952b, 263) and that of darkness, is often colored by prejudices and whims and hence remains dysfunctional. That is, Pound's attempts to free the *Cantos* from the shackles of conventional historiography are not as successful as they are made out to be and consequently the poem is tainted by simplistic notions about the past. It is strange that the question of textuality is underplayed when the source is de Mailla, Confucius or Coke --strange and confusing when one remembers the vehemence with which Pound attacks the "historical blackout," in the *Cantos* as well as in his prose, and lays bare its infernal workings. In Canto XXXIII he quotes the comments of John Adams on the meticulousness with which the agents of "unlimited sovereignty" rewrite history:

> Wherever it has resided
> has never failed to destroy all records, memorials,
> all histories which it did not like, and to corrupt
> those it was cunning enough to preserve . . . . (160)

Canto LXXI reiterates this by incorporating Adams' assessment of the disappearance of laws of a disciple of Pythagoras, Charondas:

> Laws of Charondas, destroyed I presume by spirit of party.
> Civic polity ecclesiastical bigotry
> destroy everything that cd/ give us true light or clear insight
> into antiquity . . .

aristocratical and democratical fury . . . . (417)

One of the major ways—indeed there are many, including the destruction of records which renders events and persons non-existent—by which historical blackout is effected is the deliberate misrepresentation of facts (copiously embellished by invented facts supporting it) that creates the desired, manipulated impact. This takes place solely on the zone of language, making a studied use of various literary devices, most often the very ones used by writers of poems and novels. Pius II's account of Malatesta may be regarded as a fine example of this. The result is the same when misrepresentation creeps into a text without the author's knowing about it. No form of historical writing is entirely free from this malaise. The reasons are not far to seek. LaCapra sums these up in an aside:

> [The] dialogical relation between the historian or the historical text and the "object" of study raises the question of the role of selection, judgment, stylization, irony, parody, self-parody, and polemic in the historian's own use of language in brief, the question of how the historian's use of language is mediated by critical factors that cannot be reduced to factual predication or direct authorial assertion about historical "reality." Significant in this respect is the manner in which the historian's approach to the "object" of study is informed or "influenced" by the methods and views of other historians or "speakers." (*Ibid.*, 25-26)

Even the comparatively "neutral" accounts of history suffer this distortion: the layers of language, where all the inscriptions are made, enable and disable transference *simulta-*

neously. The decision to ignore the simultaneity of these processes results in an easy simplicity and an equally easy relativism, and both these extremes are to be avoided carefully. The *Cantos* is seldom successful in maintaining this crucial balance. This is particularly relevant in the case of the sections where the work is done through a presentation of documents, the textuality of which is highlighted only when it suits the poet's convenience and serves his purpose. Even here, the intricacies implied are overlooked and Pound's ideas regarding the nature of the context remain mechanical and simplistic. It is interesting and useful to consider some of LaCapra's observations on this and related problems.

> One consideration of general significance is that all contexts are encountered through the "medium" of specific texts or practices, and they must be reconstituted on the basis of textual evidence. For the past arrives in the form of texts and textualized reminders—memories, reports, published writings, archives, monuments, and so forth. The difficulties in the process of inferentially reconstructing contexts on the basis of texts (in the large sense) are often obscured or repressed, especially when one is convinced that a context or a set of contexts must be a determinative force with full explanatory power. The supplementary point is that texts interact with one another and with contexts in complex ways, and the specific question for interpretation is precisely how a text comes to terms with its putative contexts. This question is prematurely foreclosed when a text is understood in a narrowly documentary or a purely formalistic manner. (LaCapra, 1985, 128)

What the reader of the Malatesta cantos has in front of him is a collage of narratives

and other texts (letters, reports, and a poem by the condottiere). The *Cantos* dramatizes the way Pound conducted his research and the reader is invited to follow Pound in his own inquiry and read the documents closely, paying attention to the tones and innuendoes, compare the styles and identify the genuine and the counterfeit and thus set Malatesta free from the false representations. He may take the next step and go back to Pound's sources—in fact, he is expected to do that whenever possible and this provision is supposed to guarantee the solidity of the documents—or to a work of history dealing with the period, and may even visit the Tempio. He may traverse a plethora of related documents, and most probably end up with the dilemma with which he started: unless this imaginary reader is Poundian enough to trust the works Pound trusted and reject what Pound rejected—that is, unless he is willing to abandon the very idea of verifying—he will be beset by inconsistencies, inaccuracies and incurable enigmas. In fact, the multiplied set of texts lands him in deeper trouble, rather than helping him to unearth the "truth" about Malatesta. Instead of one text, he has many before him now—texts created by men of knowable and unknowable persuasions, delimited by commitments that are not always ascertainable. However, none of these is of great use when he tries to get hold of "real" Malatesta. That is, these documents shy away from constituting a valid system of signifieds the moment the reader tries to get beneath them. The thing is that the "facts" are not as self-evident as they ought to be. It is extremely difficult to determine precisely what the documents signify without the help of an *interpretative* act. The problem here is not caused by this difficulty as such, but rather by its going *unnoticed*. Again, certain simplistic notions about the nature of the context are at work. A context, as LaCapra points out, is as unstable and complex as a text:

> . . . the context itself would have to be seen as a text of sorts. Its "reading" and interpretation pose problems as difficult as those posed by the most intricate written text. The systematic defect of much traditional historiography has been the attempt to employ the simplest documentary texts—or documentary texts subjected to a simplistic interpretation—as the basis for an understanding of the past or the "context" to which complex texts are made to conform. A fruitful reversal of perspectives would propose the complex itself as at times a better model for the construction of the "larger context." The relationship between text and context would then become a question of "intertextual" reading, which cannot be addressed on the basis of reductionist oversimplifications that convert the context into a fully unified or dominant structure saturating the text with a certain meaning. Meaning is indeed context-bound but context is not itself bound in any simple or unproblematic way. (LaCapra, 1983 116-17)

Though Pound is not exactly the kind of historian LaCapra criticizes here, he belongs to the same terrain for he seldom explores the implications of what is called the textuality of contexts. Moreover, his awareness of these matters becomes functional only when it suits his objectives. This leads to a number of difficulties. For instance, the materials brought into the Malatesta cantos tend to elude signification and this elusiveness is unintentional.[72] In fact Pound expects the reader to construct a vivid and "objective" im-

[72] Pound's notion that he has access to historical truth is shared by a number of critics. The following statement by Philip Furia is representative:

> he could get beyond the written text to the speaking voices buried beneath it. As poet his task was to resurrect those dead voices and let them speak again to the present age. (1984 3)

The assumption that the "speaking voice" beneath the document can lead the writer/-

age of his hero and read him as a many-minded ("a bit too POLUMETIS" [1987, 36]) Odysseus of the Renaissance. Indeed, he emerges as a colorful Odyssean hero, but problems arise when the notions of historicity and objectivity are introduced. As history, these cantos are exceedingly problematic. Even after a close reading of them, the figure of Malatesta remains stubbornly "shrouded in mystery." The suggestion is not that there is no difference between Pope Pius II's representation of Malatesta and that of Pound. In fact, Pound's version is far more "acceptable" as it results from a passion for accuracy supported by painstaking research. It is quite probable that the picture of Malatesta that emerges from these cantos is accurate to a great extent, nonetheless, one cannot know for certain.

the grammar of fascist discourse

Moreover, the interpretative act does not take place in a vacuum: its environment is charged with personal predilections and conscious and/or unconscious ideological commitments. It remains a *representation* and even those critics who claim that Pound's account of his hero is "reasonable history" concede this:

> There is more to Pound's history than his Malatesta, of course; this portrayal is implicated by (and itself implicates) a whole system of beliefs and

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reader to historical truth looks too naive. If it is capable of revealing something, it is equally capable of hiding/distorting facts.

> assumptions that is the business of the *Cantos* to articulate and that a secure judgment of the poem would have to take into account. (Harper, 1981, 100)

It is even more disturbing to consider the possibility that the authors of historical documents may not have had *all* the facts: this makes even an authority like Confucius (the authenticity of whose work Pound seldom questioned) or Joseph de Mailla (whose *Histoire Générale de la Chine* is used extensively in cantos LIII-LXI) appear not entirely reliable. It has to be remembered that the Chinese history classic, *Book of History* (the major source of cantos LXXXV-LXXXVI) is a partisan work that draws much of its materials from the *official* records, a work that glorifies the Confucian virtues. At best, it is just a Confucian interpretation of Chinese history. Moreover, the book contains many "gaps" though it is difficult to identify them all. De Mailla's *Histoire*, a compilation like the former, has as its major sources a host of Confucian and Neo-Confucian texts, which display an intense hostility towards the schools of philosophy and regimes Confucianism did not approve of. It may seem strange that *the Cantos*, written to counter "historical blackout," to expose the "mechanisms invented to humbug the public" (Pound, 1973, 137) tends to accept the Confucian history classic, without bothering to ask any questions about it, as an objective, impartial presentation of Chinese history.[73] The fact is that Pound does not intend to question any of the dis-

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[73] Pound regarded the Confucian method of writing history as a perfect, well-developed one. In the essay, "An Introduction to the Economic Nature of the United States" he writes:

> I do not believe that the method of historiography has progressed much since the days when Confucius selected the documents of the old king-

courses identified with what he calls the "conspiracy of light": such questioning would endanger the very project he has at hand. He accepts the *Book of History* obviously because it has the authority of Confucius whose *Ta Hio* is one of his "safe guides in religion" (Paige, 1982, 183). It is significant to note that Pound embraces the discourse of fascism by an extension of the same principle: his "faith" in Mussolini. This is related to the politics behind the evasions of historians: what is *not* represented in a historical narrative is as ideologically predetermined as what is represented. Such narratives are incomplete and distorted in a more significant respect: by definition, they exclude all the other voices other than their own and are monological to the core. The strategies employed by the writer of histories who suppresses the voices of dissent in order to gain control over his narrative as well as the reader are essentially the same as the ones employed by the fascist dictator. This is not to suggest that Confucius is no different from the writers on the payrolls of the usurocrats, as Pound would call them. It remains a fact that he was more or less the official philosopher of a regime,[74] his

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doms, and condensed his conclusions in the Testament. Aristotle toward the end of his life arrived at a similar method, in his collection of Greek State Constitutions. (Pound, 1973, 137)

[74] M. A. Bernstein, to substantiate his observation that the goals of Confucian historiography "were explicitly more ideological and didactic than analytic" quotes a passage from Herrlee G. Creel's book, *The Origins of Statecraft in China: The western Chou* (Chicago, 1970) which clarifies this further:

> The cornerstone of the ideology of the Chinese state is the conception of the Mandate of Heaven: the idea that the Ruler of China holds a sacred trust from the highest deity which permits him to rule as long as he does so for the welfare of all the people—but . . . if he fails in that trust Heaven will appoint another to rebel and replace him. This was the keynote of the propaganda by which the Chou sought, ultimately with complete success, to reconcile those they had conquered to their rule: it became the basis of the constitution of the Chinese state. Each succeeding dynasty claimed to hold

commitment to the ideal of sincerity notwithstanding, and this raises questions about the objectivity of his work.[75] He was part of a political and ethical establishment; he

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> the Mandate of Heaven; when the last dynasty was overthrown in 1912, this was called "ending its Mandate."

Bernstein adds:

> Thus, Confucian historiography incorporated from the beginning a curious (and very Poundian) mixture of conservative and revolutionary tendencies. As the official doctrine of regime anxious to confirm its new authority, it encouraged the virtues of obedience and civil order, and gave a divine sanction to Imperial power. At the same time, its theory of the "Mandate of Heaven" meant that if the Emperor became corrupt and the government politically irresponsible, then its violent overthrow and replacement by a new and more worthy dynasty was not only permitted, but inevitable. (1980, 53-54)

Though Bernstein emphasizes this point, he does not explore its historiographic and semantic implications properly. When he writes, for instance, "to Pound the value of the *Shu Ching* and the *Histoire Générale* is their *truth as history*, not merely as myth"(*Ibid.*, 55) he does not stop to discuss the difficulties involved in regarding these texts as "presentations" of historical "truth." His questioning of Pound's historiography is confined to the technical problems it causes, with reference to the structure and form of the poem.

[75] This comes very close to the New Historicist concern with "the historicity of texts" and "the textuality of history." In his essay, "The Poetics and Politics of Culture," Louis A. Montrose comments on these terms:

> By *the historicity of texts*, I mean to suggest the cultural specificity, the social embedment, of all modes of writing—not only the texts that critics study but also the texts in which we study them. By *the textuality of history* I mean to suggest, firstly, that we can have no access to a full and authentic past, a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question—traces whose survival we cannot assume to be merely contingent but must rather presume to be at least partially consequent upon complex and subtle social processes of preservation and effacement; and secondly, that those textual traces are themselves subject to subsequent textual mediations when they are construed as the "documents" upon which historians ground their own texts, called "histories." (Veeser, 1989, 20)

This does not mean that this study is committed to any of the New Historicist schools of criticism or any other schools for that matter. In fact this and related approaches

defined—*and* shared—most of its *convictions*, and eventually became its greatest *interpreter*. Confucius's celebrated absence from the works he compiled—"Kung said he had added nothing," Pound draws attention to it in his note to Canto LXXXV (559)—does not, by itself, guarantee any degree of objectivity or polyphony. This becomes crucial in the case of the history classic, which is *by design* a presentation of the available documents without any ideological distortion. The absence of such an ideological subjection ought to set the work free from all sorts of monologic constraints. Yet, this does not happen, since the documents in question are all framed by the official ideology of the age that produced them and (again) *by their very design* exclude the voice of the other. The *Cantos* does *not* show any awareness of this curious problem and the consequences of this limitation are significant. In fact, they suffer from the same problem and the greatest challenge to the polyphonic aspirations of the poem springs from this shortcoming. Such propositions shake the very foundations of the *Cantos* as a "poem including history" for Confucianism inspires not just the cantos dealing with Chinese history, but the poem's historiography as a whole.

The assumption underlying Daniel Pearlman's simplistic solution to the riddle of the *Cantos* as a poem "including" history—that history is "deliberately idealized and mythical" in the poem—looks one-sided in this context.[76] Instead of idealizing and mythicizing history, the poem lays bare, though unintentionally, the ways in which po-

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naturally gain currency in an age that is bent on examining itself thoroughly, especially its modes of perception and of the organization of what is perceived, the structuring of its institutions, its codes of morality and its means of repression.

[76] Quoted in Bernstein 1980, 32-33.

litical power organizes itself and the world around it. Equally one-sided is the view of Bernstein who quotes Pearlman and then counters his thesis:

> History and politics are both present in the *Cantos*—indeed, their presence is one of the poem's greatest strengths as well as a source of grievous weaknesses—and it is more damaging to Pound's intentions to deny their relevance than to confront openly their implications.[77]

Bernstein qualifies this on the next page, when he agrees with Donald Davie's view that the Coke cantos advance a "whig interpretation" of English history, yet without making any distinction between presenting history and advancing an interpretation of it. Bernstein has the excuse that he is more concerned with the poem's "characteristic *mode* of argumentation and the structures within which its historical material is inscribed." He continues:

> . . . the material must unfold in such a way as to enforce the rational and intellectual, as well as emotional or aesthetic, agreement of its audience. For this agreement to be obtainable, it is logically necessary that the actual historical incidents selected for inclusion, and the judgments made about such incidents, be placed within a framework of argumentation whose validity can be confirmed from *outside* the text as well as from within its own pages, that a set of autonomous verification criteria be established to which an "independent" appeal can be made. (*Ibid.*, 34 35)

[77] Bernstein, *Ibid.*, 33.

It is important to note that problems arise not only when this "framework of argumentation" fails to work; (as Bernstein seems to imply), but more crucially, they spring from the mistaken notions regarding the purity of historical documents. Pound's historical figures are representations made from a particular ideological standpoint, and in this respect, they are mythicized to a great extent. They are *unintentionally* so, and for different reasons than the ones in terms of which Pearlman reads the process. Pound *intends* to present the men and women of history but he can only present his versions of them inscribed in a mode that comes very close to the mythical. What he *intended* to do is as important as what he *achieves*, and this makes it impossible to explain away the political issues some of the poet's followers find embarrassing.

Some of the "Rock-Drill" and "Thrones" cantos render the Malatesta segment a somewhat "harmless" and less problematic specimen of historical writing. When the source itself is an interpretation of documents created in the past, involving distortion and suppression of information the question becomes even more baffling. An instance that has already been discussed by critics is the source of the Coke cantos (CVII-CIX), which, as Richard Sawyer points out, contains "factual and interpretative errors (1986, 61)." The reference is to Coke's comments on Edward I's expulsion of the Jewish settlers from England, on behalf of their usurious practices. After pointing out that Coke confuses (deliberately or otherwise) two documents—one prohibiting usury (1275) and the other containing the expulsion order (1290) Sawyer continues:

> Coke's peculiar version of the "expulsion" was probably shaped significantly by an intense anti-Semitism. It will be noted, for instance, that he in-

> sists on the accuracy of his account of the historical episode, in spite of the fact that a number of reputable chroniclers . . .clearly contradict him, asserting that the Jews themselves were driven from England in the 18th year of Edward's reign. Coke, moreover, can adduce no authorities to substantiate his defamatory reconstruction of the events. He merely infers, from circumstantial evidence, that Edward had only banished usury and not the Jews, and that the "cruell Jews" for their part, then elected to go in search of another country "where they might live by their usury." (*Ibid.*, 69)

This may be an insignificant trifle compared to the holocaust, but it has to be recognized that the same impulses that made the holocaust possible are at work here, in Coke's commentary as well as Pound's version of it. Curiously, Pound's anti-Semitism remains veiled in the whole passage:

> was 15 000 three score.
>
> Divers had banished
>
> but the usuries, no King before him.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Angliae exeuntibus [left England]. (1987, 779)

Edward I appears in these lines as a benign king, bent on protecting his country from the evil of usury. Questions such as the circumstances that forced the Jews to become usurers and the ways in which the throne profited from it do not arise here at all. In fact, the reader of the canto is not informed about the race of these usurers. As Sawyer points out, Pound's apparent "discretion" here is baffling:

> Nowhere . . . does the word "Jew" appear, nor do any of Coke's venomous slurs distort the spare, seemingly dispassionate utterances of Pound's text . . . . But the reader knows (or with a little initiative, will know) who they were, and Pound certainly knew. And the racial identity of these "usurers," even though Pound does not explicitly make an issue out of it here, can hardly be treated as an irrelevancy. Pound's reticence, then . . .is ultimately more disturbing than gratifying. (*Ibid.*, 69-70)

In his essay, "Anger in Paradise" Peter Dale Scott points out that Edward's expulsion of the Jews was motivated by a desire to please a group of international usurers based in Florence, whose services he badly required, as well as to please his anti-Semitic subjects.[78] Manipulations and distortions like this—although there are not many such instances—pose a serious threat to the claim of the *Cantos* as a poem including history, even from the modernist point of view. Still, to make matters more complicated, they refuse to be treated as anything else—inclusion of history remains their major concern. Moreover, the presence of such elements support the reading of the *Cantos* as a fascist epic; these are far closer to the spirit and modus operandi of fascism than the eulogistic references to Mussolini and Hitler.[79] Of the three major ways in which fascism mani-

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[78] After citing a passage from John Chancellor's biography of Edward I, Scott continues:

> We could hardly have isolated a better example, not only of merciless greed and its ideological misrepresentation, but also of the use of scapegoats to reconcile cultural ideals with contrary realities. The poem deals here with a delusion of long standing. It may well be that Pound the person shared the anti-Semitic delusions of Coke and the American fascist right. But by voicing them in epic Pound the poet has exposed them. (1990, 54)

[79] Even those critics, who take the fascism of the *Cantos* seriously, tend to limit it to the

fests itself in the *Cantos*—the other two being rationalization and eulogy—this is the most dangerous. Pound's economic and cultural theories—the exposition of which takes up a lot of space in his prose as well—attempt extensively to justify (and rationalize) the ways of the fascist ruler. However, it must be granted that these are not as effective as eulogy, since the system thrives on eulogistic mass rituals leading to a supra-political trance centered on the leader rather than rationality and the structures created by it. Yet, it is crucial to note that Pound's fascism is not confined to his roles as explainer and eulogist, the workings of which are comparatively less damaging than the

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more direct manifestations. A few have been able to offer deeper insights. Jerome J. McGann, for instance, writes:

> But when the *Cantos is* fascist, there is no mistaking the fact: for example, in Canto 104 when he presents Adolf Hitler as a Blakean figure, "furious form perception" (104: 741) because he has grasped the international Jewish conspiracy of bankers and usurocrats; or at the opening of the first of the Pisan *Cantos* . . . or throughout Canto 41's presentation of Mussolini's economic programs; or, perhaps most dramatically, in the suppressed Italian cantos, which are an extended poetic tribute to the tradition of Italian fascist ideology and personal character.
>
> The poem finds the local habitations and the names for what it signifies to be fascist. It is particular on these matters, as it should be; for being particular is what poetry does, what poetry is supposed to do. Thus the particularity of Pound's fascism is matched by the particularities of his anti-Semitism throughout the *Cantos*, as numerous passages could be adduced to show. (1988, 11)

It is interesting to note that McGann does not stop with the obvious:

> The fascism of the poem is the work's ultimate experience of metamorphosis—for Pound, obviously, but for his readers as well. The poem forces us to the brink of an ultimate spiritual catastrophe that corresponds exactly to what we associate with Pound . . . . Fascism is one way human beings decided to be human in the twentieth century, and the *Cantos* shows us how this was, how this might have been, true. (*Ibid.*,13-14)

But it must be noted that the metamorphosis McGann refers to is not a natural, spontaneous process, that Pound's fascism has deeper roots, and that it has been crucial in

working of what may be called his fascist discourse. The grammar of this discourse is transplanted directly from that of fascism's power structure. It also employs the strategies used in the system's descriptions of itself, of which the above-cited passage from Canto CVIII is a good example.

shaping the poem's vision, and, to a certain extent, in its execution.

Jefferson as Mussolini: Writing Fascism

Mohandas C.B. “The Poetry of the Process: a Study of the Cantos of Ezra Pound ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 1999

Chapter 8 Jefferson as Mussolini: Writing Fascism

from the new world to the nuevo mundo

It would be useful to consider the modus operandi of the kind of fascist discourse that is ingrained in the texture of the *Cantos*. Its basic method is the appropriation of historical figures and the initiation of them into the blood rites of the poem through textual overlayering. The metamorphosis of Jefferson into Dionysus-Mussolini, is one of the most revealing instances of this, since it gives the reader an insight into ways in which the discourse of the poem absorbs diverse materials into its texture.

It is significant to note that Canto XXXI, the first of the Jefferson sequence—Pound's next major experiment with the documentary method after VII-XI—opens with Sigismundo's personal motto ("Tempus loquendi, Tempus tacendi," [Eccles. 3, 7]) and that XLI, the concluding canto, introduces Mussolini. The Mussolini of the *Cantos*, though the lines devoted to him are few in number, is a crucial figure since two of the poem's most important motifs meet and are fused in him: the rational thought of the Enlightenment as embodied in Thomas Jefferson and John Adams and the religious cults of the pre-modern Greek world (which apparently celebrate the irrational) as embodied in Dionysus. By the end of the fourth decad, which incorporates much of the material that

went into *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*, the process of the identification of the two leaders is complete. The section, significantly, opens with Jefferson and closes with Mussolini; the structural link reinforces the thematic ones and unifies the protagonists as Odyssean heroes. It indicates further, how these figures interact and tend to melt into one another in Pound's reading. Their interaction sheds further light on the problems of historical writing manifest in the poem. Obviously, it is a process that takes place on a field of force that bears all the marks of Poundworld, and during the course of it these figures are transformed into Poundian heroes. This involves, naturally, reinterpretation and rewriting and one cannot expect to encounter the "real" Jefferson and the "real" Mussolini in Pound's representations. It is true that Pound had other intentions—he is trying to present the "facts"—but it is crucial to note the difference between what he aimed at and what he has achieved. This difference is not very obvious in the Jefferson cantos that attempt to define the multifaceted personality of the hero in his own words. Though the words are Jefferson's own and though they are reproduced without much distortion, they do not remain unaffected by the general environment of Poundworld and the particular forces that determine its layout and climate. In "Eleven New Cantos" Pound appropriates Jefferson's voice by a simple though subtle maneuver, by placing him in a musical structure in which he rhymes with Mussolini. This enables him to tone down the vehemence and the violence of texts like *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*—not because he has anything against this kind of violence but because the subtler method is far more effective. It is this difference in technique that makes "Eleven New Cantos" a more powerful text than the other, composed roughly during the same period. The objectives of these two books often coincide: a renewed, retrospective understanding of Jefferson in terms of the (fascist) present and an assessment of the

Jefferson in terms of the (fascist) present and an assessment of the Duce in terms of the American Enlightenment. Naturally, such an attempt involves redefinition and reinterpretation, and the ideological framework in which they take place determines these. The result is a set of constructs, distorted and often disproportionate, resembling phantoms rather than men. The only major difference between the two figures as we find them in the *Cantos* is that the Dionysian elements, present though not pronounced in Jefferson, are full-blown in the personality of the Duce.

The metamorphosis of Jefferson has to be understood in its depth and subtlety: the changes are almost invisible; a casual reader may not even suspect any. The surface of the discourse is left intact; Jefferson's voice remains unaltered, and the ideological content is apparently undisturbed. That is, the utterances are organized as the components of an ideogram that defines the sensibility by the action of which the New World became a civilized nation. In other words, they constitute a version of the ling2 ideogram as conceived and transcribed by Enlightenment humanism, during the germination and consolidation of the American Revolution. Read out of the context of "Jefferson—Nuevo Mundo" (as the segment is renamed in *Selected Cantos*) these cantos become a powerful tribute to American democracy. However, placed in the proper context, they do not remain unaltered by what is added to them as they grow. Transformed thus, they become ambivalent and debatable as a tribute to Jefferson and what he stands for. In Pound's prose this transformation more rapid and immediate:

> The heritage of Jefferson, Quincy Adams, old John Adams, Jackson, Van Buren is HERE, NOW *in the Italian peninsula* at the beginning of fascist second decennio, not in Massachusetts or Delaware. (Pound, 1970a, 12)
>
> If you don't believe that Jefferson was actuated by a . . ."concern" for the good of the people, you will quibble, perhaps, over details, perhaps over the same details that worried his old friend John Adams.
>
> If you don't believe that Mussolini is driven by a vast and deep "concern" or will for the welfare of Italy . . .for Italy organic, composed of the last ploughman and the last girl in the olive-yards, then you will have a great deal of trouble about the un-Jeffersonian details of his surfaces. (Pound, 1970a, 34)
>
> I insist on the identity of our American Revolution of 1776 with your Fascist Revolution. Two chapters in the same war against the usurers, the same who crushed Napoleon. (Pound, 1973, 283)

In the *Cantos*, the gambit of juxtaposition by which Jefferson is acclimatized to the fascist environment is worked out in a subtle and elaborate fashion. One of the major ways in which this is effected is by a shift of emphasis, manifest in the following interpretation of Jeffersonian democracy:

> "The best government is that which governs least." Shallow interpretation puts all the emphasis on the adverb "least" and slides gaily over the verb "to govern" . . . . No man in history had ever *done* more and done it with less violence or with less needless expenditure of energy . . . . There is . . .the opportunism of the artist, who has a definite aim, and creates out of the materials present. The greater the artist the more permanent his creation. And this is a matter of WILL.

> It is also a matter of the DIRECTION OF THE WILL. (Pound, 1970a, 15-16)

The will, in both these cases, (as Pound reads it) is motivated above all by a vision of economic justice and the Jefferson-Mussolini juxtaposition is consolidated by a timed repetition of this motif. Introduced in Canto XXXI, it is elaborated in the next:

> . . . deem it necessary to keep them down by hard labour, poverty, ignorance,
> and to take from them, as from bees, so much of their earnings
> as that unremitting labour shall be necessary to obtain a sufficient surplus
> barely to sustain a scant life. (1987, 158)

Canto XXXIII cites John Adams' dream of an American aristocracy of people who are not "land jobbers and stock jobbers" (160), that is, men and women who are not perpetrators of the crimes Jefferson refers to in the above quoted passage. This is followed, after a few lines, by excerpts from Marx on child labor, "the moral degradation" and "the intellectual desolation artificially produced by converting immature human beings into mere machines for the fabrication of surplus-value" (Marx, 1954, 377). As the reference to Soviet Marxism made towards the end of the canto comments on the system's inability to check usury, it is worth pondering why Marx is cited in this context, and why the question of child labor is brought up. On the whole, the relevant section in *Capital* illustrates some of the consequences of the money-lust Adams refers to, in a well documented yet touching fashion and thus broadens the canto's scope of reference. But this does not satisfactorily explain the choice of this particular instance, as any

similar passage in Marx would serve the purpose. The key lies in the word *child* and in the structural link established here with the tale of the greedy sailors, who, "[m]ad for a little *slave* money" (1987, 7; emphasis added) tried to sell the young boy who was actually Bacchus. In the same section, Marx comments on "the operative parents in relation to the traffic in children, that are truly revolting and thoroughly like slave dealing: "

> Taking the exchange of commodities as our basis, our first assumption was that the capitalist and labourer met as free persons, as independent owners of commodities; the one possessing money and means of production, the other labour-power. But now the capitalist buys children and young persons under age. Previously, the workman sold his own labour-power, which he disposed of nominally as a free agent. Now he sells his wife and child. He has become a slave-dealer. (*Ibid.*, 373)

Though the role of the parent as slave-dealer complicates matters a little, the basic situation is the same as that of the story of Lycabs and his avaricious friends. The Dionysus of this sordid story, as it is reworked in the decad, significantly, is not Jefferson or Adams or Marx: it is Mussolini who appears in Canto XLI in a "repeat" of the myth:

> That they were to have a consortium
> and one of the potbellies says:
> will come in for 12 million"
> And another: three millyum for my cut;
> And another: we will take eight;
> And the Boss said: but what will you
> DO with that money?"

"But! but! signore, you do not ask a man
what he will *do* with his money.
That is a personal matter.
And the Boss said: but what will you do?
You won't really need all that money
because you are all for the *confine*." (1987, 202)

That is, Mussolini is not merely the Jefferson of the twentieth century but its Dionysus as well; and the juxtaposition of Ben and the twice-born god on the opening page of "The Pisan Cantos,"

Thus Ben and la Clara *a Milano*
by the heels at Milano
That maggots shd/ eat the dead bullock
DIGÒNOS, [Digonos], but the twice crucified
where in history will you find it? (1987, 439)

is not a casual coincidence. Of course, the rational subjectivity of the Enlightenment tradition to which Jefferson and Adams belonged has little access to this realm. Pound was aware of this limitation of the tradition but his critique of the impoverishment that results from the Enlightenment's later emphasis on specialized and utility-oriented uses of reason has a long tradition behind it; is perhaps as old as the Enlightenment itself.[80]

[80] It is interesting to note that roughly during the same period, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno formulated their critique of modern science, though rooted in a very different ideological milieu. In their book, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), they write,

A return to the pre-modern rational coherence of Aquinas was difficult in the changing world after Descartes and Bacon, just as the organizing principles of Dantescan encyclopaedia looked obsolete in the site where the new sciences were being created. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno have discussed these issues though from a perspective that has little in common with Pound's:

> What appears to be the triumph of subjective rationality, the subjection of all reality to logical formalism, is paid for by the obedient subjection of reason to what is directly given. What is abandoned is the whole claim and approach of knowledge: to comprehend the given as such; not merely to determine the abstract spatiotemporal relations of the facts, which allow them just to be grasped, but on the contrary to conceive them as the superficies, as mediated conceptual moments which come to fulfillment only in the development of their social, historical, and human significance. (1986, 26-27)

The othering of the irrational and the consequent repression of every impulse and drive linked to it—projects which enjoyed privileged positions in the early agenda of the Enlightenment—led involuntarily to the Romantic insurrection that challenged the supremacy of rational subjectivity with its other and counterpart—pre-rational or supra-rational subjectivity. The Romantic subversion was the only option available to the subject that was aware of the inadequacies of pre-modern modes of thought and was yet

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> What is abandoned is the whole claim and approach of knowledge: to comprehend the given as such; not merely to determine the abstract spatiotemporal relations of the facts, which allow us to come to grips with them, but on the contrary to conceive them as superficies, as mediated conceptual moments which come to fulfillment only in the development of their social, historical, and human significance. (1986, 26-27)

unwilling to give in to the tyranny formal reason. This challenge was even more menacing because Romanticism shared some of the basic premises of the tradition it was rebelling against and was humanistic to the core. It was a continuation *and* an undermining of the Enlightenment, a rebellion from within, from the subconscious realm reserved for the repressed and the forsaken. It substituted rational subjectivity with the inspired and transcendental self that asserts its superiority over the rational in a way that often borders on the violent. This transcendental self, donned as a superior form of intelligence, gathers around itself the powers of the mythical (and hence the collective) forces which rational subjectivity sought to discredit and displace. If the emergence of Romanticism defined a particular paradox inherent in the emergence of rational subjectivity, and it was by no means free from similar internal contradictions. The emphasis on transcendental subjectivity often turned against the very values it wanted to cherish and protect—such as the liberty and sovereignty of the individual—and often joined forces with reason's own violent and destructive manifestations such as the inhuman constituents of science and technology. That is, the violent and untamed deviations from the rational and romantic traditions tend to enter into an uneasy and devastating brotherhood, manifesting itself not only in cultural formations, but also formations of political power. The man of "genius" is granted unusual privileges and a singular status of superiority and uniqueness which in turn grants him unlimited freedom, which is potentially detrimental the freedom of others. Paradoxically, freedom is one of the cherished values of both Enlightenment rationalism and the romantic revolt against it. The "man of genius" (or the woman of genius for that matter) could be a national bard like Whitman or Tennyson or Yeats or a national leader like Hitler or Mussolini.

Georges Bataille's theory of social homogeneity and heterogeneity[81] is one way of summing up this process. Bataille associates the suppressed heterogeneous elements with the similar elements in the unconscious and unveils the processes in the psyche of the race that gives birth to fascism:

> The exclusion *heterogeneous* elements from the *homogeneous* realm of consciousness formally recalls the exclusion of elements, described (by psychoanalysis) as *unconscious*, which censorship excludes from the conscious ego. The difficulties opposing the revelation of *unconscious* forms of existence are of the same order as those opposing the knowledge of *heterogeneous* forms . . . . [It] would seem that the *unconscious* must be considered as one of the aspects of the *heterogeneous*. If this conception is granted, given what we know about repression, it is that much easier to understand that the incursions occasionally made into the *heterogeneous* realm have not been sufficiently coordinated to yield even the simple revelation of its positive and clearly separate existence. (1985, 141)

Bataille goes on to link the pre-modern form of knowledge with the *heterogeneous*:

[81] "*Homogeneous* society," Bataille writes, "is productive society, namely, useful society. Every useless element is excluded, not from all of society, but from its *homogeneous* part" (Bataille, 1985, 138). He adds that *homogeneity* is a "precarious form, at the mercy of violence and even of internal dissent" (139). The term heterogeneity refers to elements that are "impossible to assimilate" (140) and are excluded or suppressed.

> It is easy to note that, since the structure of knowledge for a *homogeneous* reality is that of science, the knowledge of a *heterogeneous* reality as such is found in the mystical thinking of the primitives and in dreams: it is identical to the structure of the *unconscious*.
>
> *In summary*, compared to everyday life, *heterogeneous* existence can be represented as something *other* as *incommensurate*, by charging these words with the *positive* value they have in *affective* experience. (*Ibid.*,143)

Though these observations provide an insight into the processes which result in the fascist revolt (Bataille adds: "the fascist leaders are incontestably part of heterogeneous existence") they do not reveal the whole truth. It is important to note that fascism is *not* the revolt of the repressed elements in the racial unconscious: it is the deliberate *political use* of that revolt.[82] If this fact is kept hidden, that forms part of fascism's *artistic* success. For fascism is an art form as well, an art-form that exists for its own sake. At this point, it would be useful to look into the nature and function of this art.

Pound's critique of the Enlightenment, predictably enough, lands him in an appreciation of Jefferson and Mussolini as men of genius:

> When a human being has an analogous completeness of knowledge, or intelligence carried into a third or fourth dimension, capable of dealing with NEW circumstances, we call it genius . . . .

[82] The philosophical implications of this use shall be discussed in the following chapter.

> Jefferson was one genius and Mussolini is another. I am not putting in *all* the steps of the argument but that don't mean to say they aren't there. (Pound, 1970a, 18-19)

They are men of genius in a specific sense: they are artists, inspired by visionary and constructive impulses. Pound emphasizes this in a later passage:

> Any thorough judgment of MUSSOLINI will be in a measure an act of faith, it will depend on what you *believe* the man means, what you believe that he wants to accomplish . . . .
>
> I don't believe any estimate of Mussolini will be valid unless it *starts* from his passion for construction. Treat him as *artifex* and all the details fall into place. Take him as anything save the artist you will get muddled with contradictions. (*Ibid.*, 33-34)

The reader is invited to assume that Pound has not got "muddled with contradictions" and the "clarity" results from his "perception" of Mussolini as an artist. Mussolini's "art", as we shall see from his own statements quoted below, existed for *itself*; it was a clear instance the principles of aestheticism translated into politics.

Walter Benjamin's observations on the way fascism fuses politics with aesthetics has already been cited by critics while discussing the ideology of the *Cantos*.[83] A consideration of Benjamin's views on the subject throws some light on the unresolved issues

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[83] See M. A. Bernstein, 1980, 117 and *Tim* Redman, 1992, 118.

Pound's aesthetic admiration of Mussolini involves him in. Benjamin writes:

> The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life. The violation of the masses, whom Fascism, with its *Führer* cult, forces to their knees, has its counterpart in the violation of an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values.
>
> All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war. War and war only can set a goal for mass movements on the largest scale while respecting the traditional property system. This is the political formula for the situation. (Benjamin, 1992, 234)

Benjamin then quotes from Marinetti's manifesto, a passage on the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, which is particularly relevant to the present discussion as it questions some of Pound's basic assumptions about fascism. As per the contention of the major economic thesis of the *Cantos*, imperialist wars are caused by the conflicts between usurious monopolies backed by munitions-makers and this thesis can never satisfactorily explain Italy's imperialist war on Ethiopia. The shade of Filippo Tomaso Marinetti is one of the speakers in Canto LXXII, and Pound introduces the question of the Ethiopian war, only to gloss over the contradictions involved. Here Marinetti informs Pound,

> I sang war, you wanted peace,
> Both of us blind!
> I failed the inward, you failed the present. (Bacigalupo, 1991, 10)

Ironically, Pound failed to perceive any inconsistency in the Italian position; which he justified, by blaming the others: "If Italy wasn't driven into Abyssenia , and if Mussolini

hasn't stopped MORE wars than all the British liars put together, I will eat my hat and breeches," he wrote in 1935.[84] If Pound is somewhat apologetic about the war, Marinetti is exuberant:

> For twenty-seven years we Futurists have rebelled against the branding of war as antiaesthetic. Accordingly we state: . . . War is beautiful because it establishes man's dominion over the subjugated machinery by means of gas masks, terrifying megaphones, flame throwers, and small tanks. War is beautiful because it initiates the dreamt-of metallization of the human body. War is beautiful because it enriches a flowering meadow with the fiery orchids of machine guns . . . . Poets and artists of Futurism! . . . remember these principles of an aesthetics of war so that your struggle for a new literature and a new graphic art . . . may be illumined by them![85]

Pound's summary of this (and similar utterances) in Canto LXXII (quoted above) does not convey much of Marinetti's exuberance. In the lines which follow these he quotes Marinetti again, this time predicting Italian victory in Ethiopia (Makalle) and Egypt (Alamein), which clarifies his stand further:

> "Go! Go!
> From Makalle, on the last edge
> of the Gobi, white in the sand, a skull
> SINGS
> And is not tired, but sings and sings:
> —Alamein! Alamein!

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[84] In a letter to Cordell Hull, quoted Redman, *Ibid.*, 166.

[85] Quoted, Benjamin, *Ibid.*, 234-35.

We will return!

WE will return!—"

"I believe it," I said,

And he seemed to have peace from my answer. (Bacigalupo, *Ibid.*, 11)

This tribute to Marinetti, Futurism and fascism—Marinetti was one of the founder-members of the Fasci di Combattimento, which later evolved into the Fascist Party and the transition from Futurism to fascism was remarkably smooth—was not made at the spur of the moment as it was not the only one. In an essay on Italian Futurism, Judy Rawson cites an Italian critic to whom Pound told that "the movement which I began with Joyce, Eliot and others in London would not have existed without Futurism."[86] Pound's initiation into the Axis cult is completed in this Canto, and the inconsistencies involved in it seem to elude him totally. These inconsistencies, of course, do not spring from Pound's earlier anti-war stance and its qualification in the passage cited above. Fascism is aggressive and warlike even in peacetime. Benito Mussolini emphasizes this in his writings:

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[86] Judy Rawson, "Italian Futurism," in Bradbury and McFarlane 1991, 254. The Italian book cited here is A. Frattini's *Da Tommaseo Ungaretti* (Rocca San Casciano, 1959). However, it would be interesting to recall Pound's earlier views on the Futurist movement. In his "Vorticism" essay of 1914 he writes:

> Futurism is descended from impressionism. It is, in so far as it is an art movement, a kind of accelerated impressionism. It is a spreading, on the surface of art, as opposed to Vorticism, which is intensive.
>
> The vorticist has not this curious tic for destroying past glories. I have no doubt that Italy needed Mr. Marinetti, but he did not set on the egg that hatched me, and as I am wholly opposed to his aesthetic principles I see no reason why I, and various men who agree with me, should be expected to

> Above all, Fascism . . . believes neither in the possibility nor in the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates the doctrine of Pacifism—born of a renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice. War alone brings up to their highest tension all human energies and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it. All other trials are substitutes, which never really put a man in front of himself the alternative of life and death. A doctrine, therefore, which begins with a prejudice in favour of peace is foreign to Fascism . . . . Fascism carries over this anti-pacifist spirit even into the lives of the individuals. The proud motto . . .["I have no fear"] written on the bandages of a wound is an act philosophy which is not only stoical, it is the epitome of a doctrine that is not only political: it is education for combat, the acceptance of the risks which it brings; it is a new way of life for Italy. Thus the fascist accepts and loves life, he knows nothing of suicide and despises it; he looks on life as duty, ascent, conquest . . . . (Gould 1985, 601-02)

It should be noted that the rhetoric here raises itself not just to the philosophical level but also to the ritualistic. Fascism projects itself as a new religion of blood rites, deriving its strength form its potential martyrs. This cult transforms imperialism and territorial expansion into a "spiritual or moral" expression (*Ibid.*, 604). Mussolini continues:

> If every age has its own doctrine, it is apparent from a thousand sins that the doctrine of the present age is Fascism. That it is a doctrine of life is shown by the fact that it has resuscitated a faith. That this faith has conquered

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call ourselves futurists. We do not desire to evade comparison with the past. (Pound, 1961, 90)

> minds is proved by the fact that Fascism has had its dead and its martyrs. (*Ibid.*, 605)

Fascism, for Mussolini (and for Pound) is a *faith* with its own rituals, supported by its *martyrs*. Adorno and Horkheimer have discussed this pseudo-religious quality of Fascism in their book, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

> Religion was subsumed, and not abolished, when it became a cultural commodity. The alliance between enlightenment and domination has cut the link between the aspect of truth in religion and the consciousness, and has retained only the objectified forms of religion. This is a dual benefit for the Fascists: uncontrolled longing is channelled into nationalistic rebellion, and the descendants of the evangelistic fanatics are turned . . . into sworn members of blood brotherhoods and elite guards; religion as an institution is partly embodied in the system and partly converted into mass-culture. The fanatical faith of the leader and his followers is no different from that for which men were once willing to submit the stake; only the content has changed. But the hatred for all those who do not share the faith remains. (176)

Adorno and Horkheimer have the German situation in mind, but this is no less true in Pound's case, whose anti-Semitism far exceeded that of the average Italian of the time. Moreover, this explains how Pound, in spite of notions about wars, could allow himself to fall prey to Fascist propaganda. In addition, he manages this with the expertise of a master: he does not relinquish his perception that wars are caused primarily by economic factors, and yet refuses to apply it to Italy. The (partial) blindness which enables

him not to see what he did not want to see obviously results from the ideological conditioning to which his vision was subjected—not merely by the political milieu outside, but also from the psychological-spiritual milieu within. Moreover, this conditioning, in its turn, is inspired by his "belief" in Mussolini, in what he conjectured to be the Duce's political and economic goals. Because of this conditioning he is forced to abandon the skill of observation, of the "direct examination of phenomena" (Pound, 1951, 20) so emphasized in the writings of the early and middle phases of his career. This optional blindness, which is almost voluntary, jeopardizes another celebrated virtue of Pound-world: *cheng*[4] *ming*[2] or calling things by the right names. The resultant corrosion of language – one of the cultural evils Pound is at war with—corrupts not just his prose that justifies the ways of the Duce but the *Cantos* as well. Here one has to disagree with Jerome McGann who holds that the *Cantos* "are not vitiated or ruined by their fascism – that is merely a sentimental way of reading them, a way of allowing us to preserve our own confidence in the possession of their truth" (McGann, 1988, 13). The impact of Pound's political and economic concerns (which often tend to become obsessions) upon the language of the poem is considerable. The infiltration of the empty rhetoric of fascist oratory into the fabric of the poem's language, transforming it in such a way that it resembles the kind of writing the *Cantos* set out to fight—of the "opalescent," and the "rhetorical" tradition, as Pound himself describes it (Pound, 1954, 371)—is *not* the major form of corruption of this sort. It is true that the Middle and post-Pisan cantos (especially those in "Thrones") contain numerous passages in which language is charged not with meaning but rather with anger and obsessive invective. However, they have the advantage of being obvious and recognizable. Far more dan-

gerous are the structural and other devices that work beneath the surface of the text and enable the poet—to reverse the Confucian dictum—to call things by the wrong names, as in the example of "Eleven New Cantos" discussed above. In the Coke cantos this is simplified further: after a sequence of quotations from the *Institutes* Coke is placed in the company of Confucius, Agassiz, Heraclitus and Dante (1987, 776). The reason is stated elsewhere: "Coke: the clearest mind ever in England"(1987, 772). The clarity of the mind, however, is not evident in the quotations; and if the reader chooses to consult the sources, the *Institutes* as well as Catherine Drinker Bowen's biography, *The Lion and the Throne: the Life and Times of Sir Edward Coke*, a very different picture emerges—that of a mind obsessed with anti-Semitism and conditioned by the dominant ideology of the time. Naturally, such alter-images, brought up by Pound's own sources or by other texts, contest his conclusions. At times they are more devastating: they indicate the fluctuations in the value of the Pound-currency and hint at its potential to be counterfeit. Available evidence does not support Pound's (and Coke's representation) of Edward I's anti-usury policies —"Divers had banished / but the usuries not before him" (1987, 779)—(as suggested by Scott quoted above). Even more serious questions are raised by the studies of the economic policies of the regimes of Mussolini and Hitler: it has been argued that both these rulers accepted the assistance of (and were controlled by) the kind of big businessmen Pound would call usurious.[87] If such cases were

[87] Earle Davis cites a number of writers who attack the economic policies of these two dictators. It may be argued that such writers are politically motivated and that their accounts are distorted. Yet, they are worthy of attention, as the picture that emerges from such studies challenges the economic thesis of the *Cantos* seriously. Davis writes:

> There is a certain Gaetano Salvemini, who wrote *The Fascist Dictatorship*, a

to be proved conclusively that would render much of the *Cantos*' political and economic arguments look ridiculous, to put it mildly. This poses a serious problem as conclusions like "Adolf furious from perception" (1987, 755) and "Muss., wrecked for an error" (1987, 809) are neither isolated instances nor peripheral to the poem's primary concerns. They are little more than empty rhetorical utterances manifesting the malady his Vorticist/Ideogrammic poetics set out to fight. Pound's own arguments offer the best criticism:

> Any general statement is like a cheque drawn on a bank. Its value depends on what is there to meet it. If Mr. Rockefeller draws a cheque for a million dollars it is good. If I draw one for a million it is a joke, a hoax, it has no value. If it is taken seriously, the writing of it becomes a criminal act.
>
> The same applies with cheques against knowledge . . . . An abstract or general statement is GOOD if it be ultimately found to correspond with the facts. (Pound, 1951, 25)

Such instances in the *Cantos* (which cannot be called concrete statements) mark the continuation of the aestheticist practices from which Pound supposedly freed himself by 1920 as per the thesis of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, which is usually read as Ezra Pound's "summary farewell to London" (Witemeyer, 1969, 161) and as his farewell to

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study which makes a detailed comparison between American big business and Mussolini's program. Both Hitler and Mussolini are charged with making deals with the biggest businessmen, particularly with Fritz Thyssen and the Farbeinindustrie, prime examples of the cartels Pound attacks. The deals were for control of government contracts, war business, money expansion, and credit manipulation to the advantage of the big bankers. Pound insists that these "big boys" never controlled Mussolini, but one wonders if he made necessary concessions. (1969, 167)

the aestheticism of his early poetry. This reading looks legitimate, as the *Cantos* appears to be a didactic poem that not only aims at "containing" history, but also attempts to re-write the world and change its course. W. S. Flory sums up the obvious when she writes,

> His creation of [Mauberley] was Pound's way of justifying to himself his belief that his impulse toward a more socially conscious art was a reliable one, and that economic theory warranted a place in his program important enough to make some of his earlier, purely aesthetic goals less than all-sufficient.
>
> Pound ingeniously made Mauberley the depressing and clearly exaggerated projection of the kind of writer whom E. P. might have become had he carried out his original program and not revised it to accommodate his new economic and political insights. (Flory, 1980, 103)

Flory's interpretation is consistent with the general trend in *Mauberley* criticism. As in Kenner, Davie, Espey and Witemeyer, it is assumed here that the *Cantos* is free from the limitations of the aesthetic modes of cognition and representation. Flory continues:

> A purely aesthetic credo is inadequate, Pound is saying, as a guide to how to proceed in this postwar world. He is, of course, making a case for the importance to the serious writer of an economic philosophy. Without this, and armed only with his theories of art, the implication is that he, like Mauberley, would be a prey to "The discouraging doctrine of chances," his "desire for survival" reduced to "an Olympian *apathein* / In the presence of selected perceptions." (*Ibid.*, 104-05)

> An art whose highest achievement is to reduce its living subject to a condition of complete stasis can no longer serve the turn of a writer who is increasingly moving toward the conviction that "the truth of a given idea [is] measured by the degree and celerity wherewith it goes into action . . . ." (*Ibid.*, 106)

The neatness of this conclusion makes it look harmless, logical and even ineluctable. Yet, it conditions the reader of the *Cantos* in such a way that certain fundamental questions about the modes in which the world is apprehended and represented in it are automatically suppressed. All the questions regarding the authenticity of the so-called didacticism of the *Cantos* are forestalled here. Such questions do not arise if the reader chooses to accept the "truth" of the "ideas in action" which generate the *Cantos*; but this kind of acceptance requires a very high degree complacence and a total commitment to the values of Poundworld. For those who refuse to take the implicit assumptions of the critical tradition represented by Kenner and Flory for granted—and questioning the truth-claims of worlds like Poundworld and Joyceworld has become an essential step in understanding the modernist picture of the world that could accommodate and/or ignore imperialist, royalist or fascist politics—it is necessary to examine the ways in which the materials which supposedly make the *Cantos* didactic are appropriated and placed in the poem's fabric. Such an examination, it appears, points to the conclusion that this much-celebrated didacticism is little more than a convenient fiction.

the bacchanalia of power

One of the grosser instances that reveals the secrets of Pound's later mode of appropriation is the inextricable way in which the evolving poem gets involved with the Mussolinian ideas in action. It would be naïve to pretend that the poem's fascism is a minor embarrassment (till the seventies mainstream Pound criticism tended to evade this issue altogether) for it is not an accident resulting from Pound's residence in Italy or his naïve (critics often tend to transfer their naïveté to the author) fascination for the political idealism he read into Mussolini. It is important to see that the poem's Mussolini is not brought into it from an alien world, but he forms an intrinsic part of it, being the embodiment of some of its fundamental impulses, impulses without which it cannot come into being. The same elements, which shall be discussed in the following pages, determine the mode in which Mussolini is conceived in the poem, and this mode is not fundamentally different from the modes employed in aestheticism.

The aesthetic practices the early writing and the *Cantos* derive (in their immediate context of the schools of Rossetti and the Nineties, which influenced the young Pound) from the Romantic practice of re-writing the real, precisely in those terms *dictated* by visionary experience and/or intuitive perceptions. This violence of the imagination, sanctioned by the poet's status as a man of genius, has its parallels in the politics of fascism. It is significant that Pound takes care to legitimize the uses of "intuitions and

total perceptions" in the same chapter of *ABC of Reading* cited above:

> This doesn't in the least rule out the uses of logic, or of good guesses, or of intuitions and total perceptions, or of 'seeing how the thing HAD TO BE'.
>
> It has, however, a good deal to do with the efficiency of verbal manifestation, and with the transmittiability of a conviction. (27).

The "goodness" of guesses and the "totality" of perceptions are troublesome clauses and whenever Pound relies solely upon them, the writing is further destabilized. By the time he finished "A Draft of XXX Cantos" his ideology had fully developed and from then on, his guesses and intuitions spring strictly from a zone where everything is conditioned and even defined by his ideological commitments as well as by his obsessions. Interestingly, much of this ideology was grasped and re-formulated at an intuitive level where aesthetic principles are dominant. And their presence makes his pronouncements on subjects like money, usury, imperialist war etc. vastly different from the pronouncements of his contemporaries of similar ideological persuasions. He writes, for example,

> The beauty of the designs on ancient coins rightly symbolizes the dignity of sovereignty inherent in royal or imperial responsibility. The disappearance of numismatic art coincides with the corruption of the governments concerned.
>
> The Rothschilds financed the Austrian armies against Venice and Romagna. Naturally.

> The Rothschilds financed the armies against the Roman Republic. Naturally. (Pound, 1973, 297)

Beauty is sovereignty manifest, in this instance, and usury cannot afford to tolerate either. This is not a casual coincidence, but the natural outcome of the way economic and political realities are apprehended. Benjamin, in the essay cited above goes on to describe the way dialecticians understand the aesthetics of the war. His observations are relevant here, since they either parallel or criticize Pound's own views. He writes:

> The horrible features of imperialistic warfare are attributable to the discrepancy between the tremendous means of production and their inadequate utilization in the process of production—in other words, to unemployment and the lack of markets. Imperialistic war is a rebellion of technology which collects, in the form of 'human material,' the claims to which society has denied its natural material . . . . Fascism . . . expects war to supply the artistic gratification of a sense perception that has been changed by technology. This is evidently the consummation of *'l'art pour l'art'*. Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. (*Ibid.*, 235)

Benjamin's reading of the causes of imperialist war parallels Pound's with one major difference. Benjamin holds that the capitalist mode of production as a whole inevitably leads to imperialism and war. Pound's diagnosis isolates one particular mode of capi-

talism, that is, usurious capitalism, represented by the ugly monster Geryone, as being the source of all economic evils of the present-day world. It is significant that Pound illustrates most these evils by referring to or depicting their impact on art and literature. Yet, ironically enough, Pound is not aware of the true nature of the aesthetic dimension of his politics. In spite of his bidding farewell to it in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, aestheticism survives in his poetry, primarily in the way political and religious ideals are apprehended and represented. His reading of fascism, for instance, remains aesthetic to the core, though he remains totally unaware of it. In fact, he cannot afford to become aware of this dimension, as it would threaten to endanger his project to "write paradise." Canto LXXIII, in which the shade of Cavalcanti tells Pound of the tale of the girl in Romagna—associated with Sigismundo and Mussolini (Bacigalupo, *Ibid.*, 17)—and establishing another link between them) who, during the second world war, led a group of Canadian soldiers through a minefield, leading to the death of them all, is a particularly clear instance of the fusion of fascism and aestheticism.

What splendor!
The enemy blown to hell,
twenty were dead,
The girl also dead
among the rabble,
The prisoners went free.
Proud was the spirit
of the little gal
Singing, singing
enchanted by joy . . . .
Glory of the fatherland!

Glory! Glory!

. . . . What a beautiful winter!

In the North the fatherland is reborn,

But what girls!

what girls,

what boys,

wear black! (Bacigalupo, *Ibid.*, 18-19)

Pound reconstructed this story from newspaper reports, but chose to present it through the vision of a man who can appreciate and highlight its *beauty*. The shepherdess of this canto is the Lady (as she also the heroine of Cavalcanti's Ballet IX) in a new guise and her lover is a fascist (as per the emphasis on the boys and girls wearing black) who is also Cavalcanti. What the reader witnesses here is a metamorphosis (sinister from a non-fascist point of view) of the Amor motif, central to the poem's vision of the Process and of paradise. Incidentally, this is yet another manifestation of the fusion of the erotic and political experiences in the *Cantos*. Moreover, the presence of Marinetti and Cavalcanti in the Italian cantos—which is the most sustained direct treatment of the fascist motif in the poem—illustrates clearly the way Pound understood and interpreted fascism.

The episode of the shepherdess and the Canadian soldiers has a mythical-ritualistic significance as well. She is not merely the Lady: simultaneously she plays the role of a worshipper-priestess, in the line of the mother of king Pentheus, who, with her sisters, tore him to pieces, for having witnessed the Bacchanalian mysteries with uninitiated eyes. She sacrifices herself in order to avenge the corresponding political violation: the

very presence of "uninitiated" foreigners who have no faith in the Italian system and its "mysteries" profane the "sacred." She had a personal motive as well, since they had raped her before seeking her help in finding their way—but Pound does not emphasis this. Though the parallel with the Pentheus myth looks a little far-fetched, it is perfectly consistent with Pound's "perception" of the "mystery" of fascism: in his prose he emphasizes this repeatedly. Addressing his Italian readers, he writes in "A Visiting Card: "

> Having seen and experienced so-called reforms and revolutions which have not, in fact, taken place, the mystery of the Fascist and Nazi Revolutions interests me for reasons that would never occur to you, for you have lived through these revolutions instinctively and have experienced their results without worrying about the mystery. (Pound, 1973, 282-83)

This "mystery" is not to be dismissed with a blend of dismay and sarcasm: it is one of the keys for understanding Pound's reading of fascism. In his mind, it is linked with the mysteries of the Greek world, especially those associated with the cult of Dionysus. In addition, Italy, for him, is a land where the cult managed to survive:

> It seems that only a few persons occupied about the temples, at least at Rome, were enough to keep alive the cult of the old gods . . . . Italy has lived more fully than other nations because she has kept up the habit of placing statues in gardens. The grove calls for the column. *Nemus aram vult.* (Pound,1973, 302)

Fascism is read as a similar cult, in which the Bacchus figure is the Duce himself who

allows the "light from Eleusis" (Pound, 1973, 53) to spread in the contemporary world darkened by usury. A passage in *Kulchur* stresses this link:

> The Duce and Kung fu Tseu equally perceive that their people need poetry; that prose is NOT education but the outer courts of the same. Beyond its doors are the mysteries. Eleusis. Things not to be spoken save in secret.
>
> The mysteries self-defended, the mysteries that *can* not be revealed. Fools can only profane them. The dull can neither penetrate the secretum nor divulge it to others. (144-45)

This is much more than an appropriation of Confucius—which has already happened in *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* where Pound finds, in the Hsin ideogram, "the fascist axe for clearing away the rubbish" and "the tree, organic vegetable renewal" (Pound, 1970a, 113). Behind this and similar utterances lies Pound's response to and interpretation of the Enlightenment. Confucius was part of the Enlightenment's "discovery" of the Orient, whose rationality and civic sense nearly mirrored its own. Jefferson and Adams are the direct inheritors of this phase of the project. Confucianism has mystic domains as well, but these remain almost invisible when its ethical aspect is highlighted. The Enlightenment found this convenient, but Pound did not. He brings Confucian mysticism out into the forefront and does not stop even there. He allows his vision to grow "Between KUNG and ELEUSIS" (1987, 258)—not merely reaching to the both of them, but bringing them together in creative interaction. Thus it becomes possible for him to ground his poem in Confucian vision and yet people it with the deities of the Greco-Roman world. Their presence in the *Cantos* questions and qualifies Pound's relation-

ship with the Enlightenment, rendering it highly problematic. Many of the riddles of the poem have their origin here. It is under the auspices of these deities that Pound re-writes Jeffersonian democracy in fascist terms. Without them, it would have been much more difficult. Pound believed that the cult survived through their statues: direct contact with the deities, as in the case of Ovid's (and Pound's) Acoetes, however, was not common. This naturally leads to a search for surrogate figures and "live" idols, which makes hero-worship look not only natural, but also inevitable. Had Pound not come across Mussolini he would have needed to invent one. Evidently, he admired the man more than the system he represented—which is the case with his admiration for Jefferson, Adams and Van Buren. The reason for this is not merely the simplistic notion that a virtuous ruler can purify the state single-handedly. Pound attributes Dionysus-like powers to his heroes—whose presence, according to the notion, can charge the milieu with cleansing energies.

Idolatry and the Ideogram

Mohandas C.B. “The Poetry of the Process: a Study of the Cantos of Ezra Pound ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 1999

Chapter 9 Idolatry and the Ideogram

domesticating the other: eleusis into kung

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image . . . . (Exod. 20.4)

The question of the religious trappings of fascism is further clarified when discussed in connection with Pound's other major obsession, i.e., anti-Semitism. His fascism and anti-Semitism are linked in more than one way. The more obvious of these is fascism's supposed efficiency in checking the infection for which the Jewry is held responsible: "USURY is the cancer of the world, which only the surgeon's knife of Fascism can cut out of the life of the nations" (Pound, 1973, 270). Another connection surfaces in the language this surgery is dramatized (the myth of Dionysus and the greedy sailors and its repeat in Canto XLI, discussed above) which involves the rejection of Judaism in favor of what Pound calls a "European religion," that is not "verminous with semitic infections" (*Ibid.*, 71). The first thing to notice when one comes to this terrain is the fact that Pound's anti-Semitism is much more than racial prejudice, as it is usually thought to be. His hostility is never confined to the members of the race: [88] in fact, it customarily ex-

[88] It should be remembered that this hostility did not extend to all the Jews: he had a

tends to their sacred texts. It is an ideological stance with far-reaching implications, and certain fundamental religious issues are involved here—issues which define the poem's basic attitudes—and Pound's responses to these show great consistency.

Pound's religion is polytheistic and idolatrous (i.e., what Judaism is *not*) in spite of its Confucian affiliations. In fact, it is a strange fusion of Kung and Eleusis. Polytheism, for him, is the only way of safeguarding the individual from the "tyranny" of the Semitic religions, especially Judaism. This is consistent with the Enlightenment's materialism—its concern for and belief in material objects rhymes with idolatry's obsession with the objects of worship—as well as its liberal-democratic aspirations. His prose makes consistent use of the assumption that polytheism ensures the liberty of the individual:

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few Jewish friends, like Louis Zukofsky. In fact, he has made it clear that his war is against "a few big jews" and not against the "poor yitts" (1987, 257). However, these are isolated instances and Pound often forgets such distinctions. They do not, in any sense, make his anti-Semitism less violent or less serious. Romano Bilenchi, a friend of Ezra Pound's during the war years, writes in his reminiscences about Pound's response to the story of a young German Jew, who managed to escape from the Nazis, who massacred the rest of his family:

> My account shook him. He said he understood my grief at seeing a man like the young German brought to such desperation. He said that I was probably right from my point of view, that the Jews taken individually, especially if they were poor, were human beings like ourselves. However, collectively, and controlled by the capitalists as they were, they had organized a relentless conspiracy against mankind. The conspiracy should be denounced, combatted, and destroyed by political action and not, surely by murders and massacres. (Bilenchi, 1979, 440-41)

It is true that Pound never supported the Nazi death camps. At the same time, it is extremely difficult to distinguish between "political action" and "mass murders" in Hitler's Germany. As I understand it, the politics the regime logically and relentlessly led to the camps.

> 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. (Pound, 1973, 51)
>
> The glory of the polytheistic anschung is that it never asserted a single and obligatory path for everyone. It never caused the assertion that everyone was fit for initiation and it never caused an attempt to force people into a path alien to their sensibilities. (*Ibid.*, 56)

Moreover, he finds in polytheism a methodology that initiates the young into the mysteries in a way that is apparently smooth and apparently natural:

> The unity of God may be the supreme mystery beyond the multitudinous appearance of nature. But if you put a slab faced boob in the presence of the divine unity before he is well out of kindergarten you make it extremely unlikely that he will ever understand *anything.* (*Ibid.*, 57)

The same argument gives idolatry a privileged position: it appears to be a perfect way of initiation, for the mind is to be conditioned and trained before it is ready to encounter the formless and the infinite—a method that would be endorsed by the rational subjectivity of the modern age. Pound emphasizes the civilizing function of the idol, its potential to ensure the fullness of a nation's life, as in the passage from "A Visiting Card" cited in the previous chapter, where he praises Italy for "the habit of placing statues in gardens" (1973, 302). This idea, woven into the texture of the *Cantos* with the recurrence of the line, "Aram vult nemus"(1987, 460) [the grove needs an altar] in the Pisan and following sequences, yields its deeper meaning only when it is placed in the context

of Pound's war with Judaism.

Pound's anti-Semitism has to be understood primarily in its religious sense. His quarrel, it is important to note, is not merely with the usurious Jews or Jewrocracies, but also with the Old Testament and the Talmud—books in which he can find "almost no spiritual elevation" (Pound, 1973, 68). Derogatory remarks about the Old Testament abound in his writings and one of the major reasons for this is its apparent lack of aesthetic appeal. Pound's religion is no less aestheticized than his politics: in "Religio or the Child's Guide to Knowledge" he writes:

> By what characteristic may we know the divine forms?
> By Beauty.
> And if the presented forms are unbeautiful?
> They are demons. (1973, 47)

This (con)fusion of the beautiful with the divine is found throughout the *Cantos*. As suggested above, Pound's farewell to aestheticism announced in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is skin-deep. With this farewell, it becomes possible for him to bring in "unpoetic" themes like money and politics but the modes of perception and re-presentation are still conditioned by the tenets of aestheticism. The fact that money becomes the subject matter need not, in itself, bring about any radical change in the poetics; that would happen only if it is accompanied by a radical change in the visionary framework. Nevertheless, so long as beauty remains the principal parameter, this does not actually take place in the *Cantos*.

The Greek religion, in the poeticized form that it is accessible now, naturally appeals to Pound's sensibility: it is constituted mainly by beautiful myths (found in Homer and in Ovid after him; the *Metamorphoses*, it should be remembered, is one of Pound's sacred texts), statues and temples. Its appeal is enhanced by the framework of Platonic (and later Neoplatonic) philosophy, the transcendentalism of which inflames the imagination of men and women with a romantic inclination. The religion of the Old Testament, on the other hand, forestalls this kind of poeticizing from the very beginning: it is made clear that worship is human beings' spiritual duty toward God and God alone, and that idols are abominable. The humans are invited to encounter God directly, without any intermediaries or "sacred" technologies. In other words, they are prompted throw themselves into the unknown/unknowable. This is a frightening proposal, frightening and bordering on the impossible, assuring intense forms of agony, both physical and spiritual, like the one dramatized in The Book of Job, in which man wrestles with God. God remains unknown and unknowable—"Behold, God is great / and we cannot know Him," Elihu tells Job (36, 26). In his *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard has addressed this problem:

> What then is the Unknown? It is the limit to which the Reason repeatedly comes, and in so far, substituting a static form of conception for the dynamic, it is the different, the absolutely different. But because it is absolutely different, there is no mark by which it could be distinguished. When qualified as absolutely different, it seems on the verge of disclosure, but this is not the case, for the Reason cannot even conceive an absolute unlikeness. The Reason cannot negate itself absolutely, but uses itself for the purpose, and thus conceives only such an unlikeness within itself as it can conceive

> by means of itself; it cannot absolutely transcend itself, and hence conceives only such a superiority over itself as it can conceive by means of itself. Unless the Unknown (the God) remains a mere limiting conception, the single idea of difference will be thrown into a state of confusion, and become many ideas of many differences. The Unknown is then in a condition of dispersion . . . and the Reason may choose at pleasure from what is at hand and the imagination may suggest (the monstrous, the ludicrous, etc.). (1974, 55)

The Absolutely Other cannot be reached through the fantastic technologies devised by reason, primitive or modern. As evident from Abraham's story, the path to it is full of excruciating experiences. Conscious or unconscious fear of the resultant suffering induces some to seek other, apparently easy ways—poeticizing, idolatry, the numerous spiritual "techniques"—which often become distractions and end up in the making of fetish objects leading ultimately to fragmentation and spiritual degeneration. The various idols placed in the edifice of the *Cantos* have exactly this function, as will be shown in the following pages. Pound evidently follows the prescriptions of the Enlightenment tradition in his adherence to the realm of the knowable, even in religious questions. The Enlightenment had to reject the religion of Job and Abraham in particular, as the God worshipped by them resists all formulations. As Adorno and Horkheimer point out, "[f]or the Enlightenment, whatever does not conform to the rule of computation and utility is suspect"(1986, 6). Understandably enough, the age of reason has no place for such faith: it has to be dismissed as primitive or branded as evil. The same sentence in Pound's letter to Harriet Monroe which describes the *Metamorphoses* as a "sacred

book" condemns the Hebrew scriptures as "the record of a barbarian tribe, full of evil" (Paige, 1982, 183). Such a view is perfectly possible in the pre-Enlightenment phases of history, but as expressed now it is symptomatic of the age's distrust in things/phenomena which are not compatible with its own systems of thought.

The consequences of the total faith mentioned above are indeed frightening as it involves a rejection of the known in favor of the Unknown, a rejection that is enacted in Abraham's wanderings. It is in this context that Emmanuel Lévinas contrasts the voyages of Abraham and Odysseus:

> The heteronomous experience we seek would be an attitude that cannot be converted into a category, and whose movement unto the other is not recuperated in identification, does not return to its point of departure . . . .
>
> But then we must not conceive of a work as an apparent agitation of a ground which afterwards remains identical with itself, like an energy which, in all its transformations, remains equal to itself. Nor must we conceive it as a technical operation, which through its much-proclaimed negativity reduces an alien world to a world whose alterity is converted into my idea. Both conceptions continue to affirm being as identical with itself and reduce its fundamental event to thought which is (and this is the ineffaceable lesson of idealism) thought of itself, thought of thought. *A work conceived radically is a movement of the same unto the other which never returns to the same.* To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca, we wish to oppose the story of Abraham who leaves his fatherland forever for a yet unknown land, and forbids his servant to even bring back his son to the point of departure. (Taylor, 1986, 348)

The voyage of Homer's Odysseus, on the other hand, is bound for a knowable and manageable world: Ithaca. Even the last, projected voyage of the hero is no different: the unknown, as it is conceived there, is simply the unexplored; knowing it is only a matter of time. As Dante perceived, this Ulysses is merely an adventurer, whose dream of the unknown is evidently defined by the dreams of the known. Pound's Odysseus is no exception: he is, after all, sailing after "knowledge the shade of a shade" (1987, 236) the all-embracing knowledge of the Process, which can make him powerful and transform him into the master-builder of the paradiso terrestre. We are discussing here a very familiar strategy of the Enlightenment thought. The following comments of Althusser, which conclude his essay on Montesquieu can be read as commentary on the wanderings of Pound's Odysseus:

> And if I should close by returning to my first words, let me say of this man who set out alone and truly discovered the new lands of history, that nevertheless his own notion was always to return home. The conquered land he salutes on his last page, as I pretended to forget, was the land of return. Such a long route to come back home. To old-fashioned ideas after so many new ideas. To the past after so much future. And if this traveller, having set out for distant lands, spent many years in the unknown, believed on returning home that time stood still.
>
> But he had broken the trail. (1982, 107)

The differences between the intellectual wanderings of the thinker and those of Pound's hero are minor. The knowable is not merely the field of action; it is the source of the (political) power as well. The Unknowable is eliminated from this myth of rationality

by simple devices: not acknowledging its existence as such, calling it by the wrong names, appropriating it and bringing it down to the level of the known. The elimination of the unknowable, it has to be acknowledged, is not as thorough and systematic in Montesquieu. Anyway, it remains an important part of the agenda. The Enlightenment, as Adorno and Horkheimer observe, is the result of the same fear of the unknown that gave birth to the myths themselves, though it is directed against them:

> Man imagines himself free from fear when there is no longer anything unknown. That determines the course of demythologization, of enlightenment, which compounds the animate with the inanimate just as myth compounds the inanimate with the animate. Enlightenment mythic fear turned radical. The pure immanence of positivism, its ultimate product, is no more than so to speak universal taboo. Nothing at all may remain outside, because the mere idea of outsideness is the very source of fear. (1986, 16)

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The problematic relationship between the rational and the mythical[89] appear in a modified form in the *Cantos*: the fundamental differences between the two are deliberately ignored. The rational, civilizing function of the mythical is seldom kept out of sight and consequently, what was merely a component in Homer becomes the major preoccupation. The blood-rites of the first canto elicit the prophesy, "Odysseus / shalt *return* through spiteful Neptune" (1987, 5) the (apolitical) simplicity and the apparent spontaneity of which is highly misleading. The return, it has to be remembered, is not just to a household, but to a kingdom, to replace its present anarchy with order, to rebuild it into

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[89] Adorno and Horkheimer write: "myth is already enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts to mythology" (*Ibid.*, xvi.). Later on in the book the idea is elaborated:

> Myth intended report, naming, the narration of the Beginning; but also presentation, confirmation, explanation: a tendency that grew stronger with the recording and collection of myths. (8)

> Just as the myths already realize enlightenment, so enlightenment with every step becomes more deeply engulfed in mythology. It receives all its matter from the myths, in order to destroy them; and even as a judge it comes under the mythic curse. It wishes to extricate itself from the process of fate and retribution, while exercising retribution on that process. In the myths everything that happens must atone for having happened. And so it is in enlightenment: the fact becomes null and void, and might as well not have happened . . . . [As] the magical illusion fades away, the more relentlessly in the name of law repetition imprisons man in the cycle—that cycle whose objectification in the form of natural law he imagines will ensure his action as a free subject. The principle of immanence, the explanation of every event as repetition, that the Enlightenment upholds against mythic imagination, is the principle of myth itself. (12)

the city of Dioce. Significantly, the prophecy comes from a shade who "hath his *mind* entire," (emphasis added) that is "So full of *knowing*" (1987, 236). This becomes more evident in Canto XLVII, where a modern version of the narrative of Odysseus' descent to Hades is fused with the myths of Tammuz and Adonis. The education of the wanderer-hero in modern anthropology seldom recedes into the background. The fusion, significantly, is between the *unconscious* mythic powers represented by the deities of the fertility cults and the *mind* that strives to become aware of the same powers. The union of the goddess and her lover is modified accordingly: She represents the force by which "Wheat shoots rise new by the altar" (1987, 237) as in the cults discussed by Frazer, but her lover is Odysseus-becoming-Dionysus, who journeys through the nether-world (of death, burial and germination, of the sexual union as death and rebirth[90]) with his mind kept wakeful by Molü in a way that the act leads to a deepened awareness and the resultant power:

> To the cave art thou called, Odysseus,
> By Molü hast thou respite for a little,
> By Molü art thou freed from the one bed
> that thou may'st return to another. (1987, 237)

Molü is the herb of awareness here, and without awareness, the hero's return to

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[90] This is summed up in the following lines:

> 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? (1987, 238)

Penelope's bed would remain a dream. In the canto Molü represents not just awareness, but awareness-as-power, as clarified in the cryptic concluding lines:

> Τυ Διώνα, Και Μοῖραι
> TU DIONA KAI MOIRAI
> Και Μοῖραι' Αδονιν
> KAI MOIRAI' ADONIN[91]
> that hath the gift of healing,
> that hath the *power* over wild beasts. (1987, 239, italics mine)

The herb's "power over wild beasts" is more than a reference to Odysseus' overcoming the bestial in Circe's palace. More important, it refers to the hero's elevation to the level of Dionysus, thus clarifying further the semantic links between the first two cantos. In his analysis of the canto, M. L. Rosenthal draws attention to some of these issues:

> Simple symbolic conversion . . . would translate Molü into a gift of spiritual and intellectual power over our grosser tendencies. This interpretation would provide a "rational" explanation to nonpuritanical readers of how the hero became the goddess's lover without being reduced by her to abject bestiality. . . . [In the lines that close the canto] the spiritual meaning of Molü is obviously intended, and also a further meaning: the power of the remembering and transcendent imagination. It is the artistic equivalent of the heroic and sexual mission of Odysseus, and it puts in unsentimental yet emotionally reassuring perspective the relation of human genius to the irre-

[91] You Dione, and the fates / and the fates [cry over] Adonis.

> sistible, non-human force of natural process. This is the "knowledge" spoken of earlier, toward which the entire canto has "sailed." (1977, 317)

The objectives of my argument are different. What I want to emphasize here is the way in which the conflicting methodologies of myth and rationality are fused in the canto (and the *Cantos* in general). This fusion marks an important development in the mode of thinking that renders Pound's relationship with the legacy of the Enlightenment extremely complex.

The source of the hero's power is his direct *knowledge* of the processes of death, germination and rebirth, which the fertility myths attempt to dramatize. The Odysseus of this canto is different from his prototype in that he is aware of his awareness—that is, along with the hero's awareness of himself, the protagonist of the canto shares with his maker his own *knowledge* of the meanings of the adventures. His knowledge of himself is deepened and qualified by Homer's own knowledge of his hero—Pound's knowledge as well, shaped, among other things, by his interest in modern anthropology. Consequently, the relationship of this Odysseus with the world of myth is unique: he constitutes both the objectivity and the rationalizing subjectivity of the sacrificial victim. He is Tammuz-Odysseus and Homer-Dionysus-Pound in one. In short, the *Cantos* is not troubled by the enigmatic nature of the relationship between myth and enlightenment; instead, it accepts the enigma in with all the implications, though without looking into them keenly. The poem extends from one pole to the other—from the enlightened thinking of Confucius to the rites of Eleusis. The difficulty here is mainly theoretical;

in practice, it does not appear to face any serious problems. The reason is not far to seek: what is presented as Eleusinian in the *Cantos* is not really mythical or ritualistic: it is simply a version of Eleusis, appropriated, and translated into the idiom of modernism. Pound's Dionysus is distinctively modern; defined by the spirit of the Enlightenment. The same can be said about the other deities who are born or reborn in the *Cantos*; more than defining themselves they define the subject that shapes them. This appropriation is one of the major (and inevitable) consequences of the emergence of the philosophizing, system-constructing subject that grew into Kant and Hegel.

These issues would become clearer, when placed in the context of the Hebraic-Hellenic debate that has become one of the crucial issues in the philosophy and non-philosophy that followed the Enlightenment, surfacing in the writings of thinkers like Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Lévinas and Derrida. It is significant to note that Hegel, during his early youth and formative years had a deep veneration for the Greek genius, which, (like Pound) he never wholly outgrew. Interestingly, the young Hegel has written a poem titled "Eleusis." His attitude towards the Semitic religions, (as in the case of Pound), is shaped by this early schooling. Such a shared ground is vast enough to justify an emphasis on the similarities rather than the dissimilarities between the System of Hegel and Pound's own (often implicit) vision. Hegel's criticism of the Jewish texts is devastating[92] and his Christianity is Hellenized to the core, as in the case of Pound, who accepts the Catholic religion as far as it allows itself to be paganized. Mariolatry, for

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[92] Hegel's writings in the 1790s, like the "Life of Jesus," "The Positivity of the Christian Religion" and "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate" contain numerous references

him, is a continuation of the pagan worship of the mother-goddess. Pound's interpretation of the New Testament is Hegelian:

> The gospels on the face of them are the story of a revolt in Judaea, that is to say the protagonist was trying to provide an antidote for Judaism. He attacks nearly every feature of it that he notices. Being himself a Jew, certain things escape his notice, or he takes them for granted. (Pound, 1973, 57)

This is not radically different from Hegel's own conclusions:

> The sermon [on the Mount] does not teach reverence for the laws; on the contrary, it exhibits that which fulfils the law but sublates it as law and so is something higher than obedience to law and makes law superfluous. (Taylor, 1987, 10)

As Mark C. Taylor points out, Judaism is unacceptable to Hegel because, instead of the harmony "resounding in the Hellenic principles of unification and identification" one finds in it "*separation* and *difference* . . . . For Jews, God is radically other, totally transcendent, and completely exterior" (1987, 7). Christianity, for Hegel (and for Pound)[93]

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to Judaism, and none of them is flattering.

[93] Pound writes in Jefferson and/or Mussolini:

> The idea of genius, or of "men of intelligence" are organic and germinal, the "seed" of the scriptures.
>
> You put one of these ideas somewhere, i.e., somewhere in a definite space and time and something begins to happen . . . .
>
> The idea is as old as Aesop, who said: "We are all sons of Zeus."

reconciles these opposites. Taylor sums this up:

> Neither a soulless body nor a bodiless soul, the object of this form belief is the Word incarnate—Logos made flesh and flesh made logical . . . . When the believer recognizes the identity-in-difference of *his own self* and the divine, the truth of the *historical* divine man is appropriated as the *eternal* truth of every subject. In this act of re-cognition, the *particular* human subject grasps itself as a finite, spatial, and temporal moment in the *universal*, infinite, and eternal life of the divine. God, by implication, no longer is regarded as the wholly other or radically transcendent, but now is apprehended as the all-inclusive subjectivity that comes into completion in and through the drama of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, which is concretely enacted in the process of nature and history. (*Ibid.*, 29-30)

The Hellenic-Hebraic debate apparently finds its synthesis here, a synthesis that looks perfect and harmonious, without any loose ends. This is especially so, when regarded from the *Hellenic* point of view—or rather from the perspective of Enlightenment subjectivity. The other perspective is displaced, or rather suppressed outright. In fact, such a strategy was absolutely essential for the realization of one of the basic objectives of this subjectivity: the redefinition of every entity, (known and unknown) and every concept to make their accommodation in the subjective world of ideas possible. Every-

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> Again a little grammar or a little mediaeval scholarship would be useful, Albertus Magnus or Aquinas or some fusty old scribbler passed on an age-old distinction between the verb and the noun.
>
> The verb implies a time, a relation in to time. Be Christian, go back to the *newer* (emphasis mine) part of your Bible. Be Catholic (not Anglo-Catholic), consider the "mystery of the incarnation." (21-22)

thing had to be translated into the language of this subjectivity, and what was untranslatable had to be left out. A process similar to the one that led to the formation of polytheistic religions was at work—a process that simplified the divine by elevating natural forces and energies in the created world to the status of deities, that brings everything down to the human level. The only difference was that the Enlightenment thinkers replaced the deities of primitive men with concepts of their making—the strategy is reductive to the same degree in both the cases. These devices are not different from those used in other contexts, whenever there was a need of accommodating or appropriating the Other. This process reaches its culmination in Hegel. The so-called synthesis of the Hebraic and the Hellenic thought was no exception. The God of Abraham and Moses had no place in the systems of the philosophers of this period, because of His Otherness, and irreducibility. The question of the radical otherness of God is brought back to focus in the writings of thinkers like Søren Kierkegaard and Emmanuel Lévinas and now features in various critiques of the Enlightenment. Such discussions are relevant to the present study because they address what is simplified, displaced and suppressed in the *Cantos* as well. Taylor, in his essay on Lévinas, comments on the way Hegel effected this:

> In contrast to the utilitarian calculations of the speculator who requires a profitable return on every investment, works undertaken in response to the appeal of Good must be completely self-less. Lévinas formulates the difference between speculative work and ethical works by recourse to the difference between Greek and Hebraic experience . . . . For Lévinas, Hegel is a latter-day Ulysses, who, as Kierkegaard explains, tried to avoid the uncanny call of the sirens by "plugging the ears" . . . . The voice that Hegel's

> system is constructed to muffle is the voice of the Other. This is the Other that approaches Abraham from behind and whispers in his ear. (*Ibid.*, 213)

This passage was chosen because it illuminates the Odyssean persona of Pound as well, who refused "to accept ANY monotheistic taboos whatsoever," [in reference to the Hebrew scriptures as "record of a barbarian tribe, full of evil" (Paige 1982, 183)]. In the same letter (to Harriet Monroe, dated 16 July 1922) he asserts that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is "sacred book" and the reason is not basically different from the one implicit in Hegel's own strategy that muffles the voice of the Other. If the deities of the Greco-Roman world look less primitive to Pound, it is because they appear to be more beautiful and because they yield to the system-constructing impulse that is keen on making clear definitions. Again, the problem, in Pound's case, is related to his aestheticism, which, with its passion for beauty and clarity of definitions, has to be wary of anything that refuses to be conceptualized. His rejection of the logical mode of discourse in favor of the more dynamic mode of the ideogram, it becomes evident here, does not set him free from the riddles of conceptual thinking. In fact, his aestheticism and his "taste" forces him to perform a gambit similar to the one devised by Hegel: it enables and forces him to reject and/or silence that which refuses to be a part of the set of definitions on which his vision is built. To understand what is involved in this escapism (for escapism it is) it is necessary to consider the nature of that from which escape is being sought. Jacques Derrida discusses this in his essay, "Violence and Metaphysics":

> . . . there is no way to conceptualize the encounter [with the absolutely-other]. it is made possible by the other, the unforeseeable "resistant to all

> categories." Concepts suppose an anticipation, a horizon within which alterity is amortized as soon as it is announced precisely because it has let itself be foreseen. The infinitely-other cannot be bound by a concept, cannot be thought on the basis of a horizon; for a horizon is always a horizon of the same, the elementary unity within which eruptions and surprises are always welcomed by understanding and recognized. Thus we are obliged to think in opposition to the truisms which we believed—which we still cannot not believe—to be the very ether of our thought and language. To attempt to think the opposite is stifling. And it is a question not only of thinking the opposite which is still in complicity with the classical alternatives, but of liberating thought and its language for the encounter occurring beyond these alternatives. (1978, 95)

Hegel has to silence this "infinitely-other" not merely because there is no place for it in his System; more important, its onslaught threatens to undermine the System's sublimely majestic edifice. It is not surprising that Pound, who belongs to the same tradition (of which the thought of Hegel forms an important part) adopts a similar strategy, when it comes to the question of qualifying subjective reason with an appropriation of its opposite. He opts for a safe form of the irrational—the mythical, in its Eleusinian and fascist forms. Georges Bataille's essay, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism" (1933-34) discusses this aspect of fascism:

> Opposed to democratic politicians, who represent in different countries the platitude inherent to *homogeneous* society, Mussolini and Hitler immediately stand out as something *other*. Whatever emotions their actual existence as political agents of evolution provokes, it is impossible to ignore the *force* that situates them above men, parties and even laws: a *force* that dis-

> rupts the regular course of things, the peaceful but fastidious homogeneity powerless to maintain itself (the fact that laws are broken is only the most obvious sign of the transcendent, *heterogeneous* nature of fascist action). (1985, 143)

This spurious other, in its mythic and political manifestations is ideal for Pound's purposes, as it seldom attempts to undermine the general framework of rational subjectivity, in spite of the apparent incongruities. The irrational, as it is embodied in the Greek myths adapted by Pound is to be distinguished from the "infinitely-other" Derrida mentions: it is not the Other, but reason's version of *its* other, a version that is most congenial to its (reason's) purposes, being almost a (magic) mirror-image of reason itself. More important, this pseudo-other is used to displace/silence the Other, representing It as "primitive" or "evil." The whole maneuver is so subtle and "refined" that it evokes no suspicion. This is perhaps Pound's most serious debt to the Enlightenment

The implications of this reading are far-reaching. The "divine permanent world" (Paige, 1982, 210) the *Cantos* strives to reach, it appears, is little more than an extension of Poundworld --an extension that is qualitatively no different from the surrounding terrain. The realms of the "azure air" in which "Gods float" (1987, 11) and of the "light flowing, whelming the stars" (1987, 627) are not any more vibrant than the sculpted "wave pattern at Excideuil" (1987, 772). The difference between this stony representation and its original is the same as the difference between the idol and its original --and the differences between the "original" of the idol and the infinitely-other, the Divine are far greater. The deities of the *Cantos* are little more than appropriations,

which are merely convenient figurations that deceive the mind with the illusion of being in contact with the "permanent world." They also give protection from any possible encounter with the Other.

The Fetish, Hallowed

Mohandas C.B. “The Poetry of the Process: a Study of the Cantos of Ezra Pound ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 1999

Chapter 10 The Fetish, Hallowed

captivity in crystal

The previous chapter attempted to trace the origin and general characteristics of Pound's deities. An understanding of the way they function in the poem is equally important. These deities form part of the "sacred technology" of spiritual initiation the poem wishes to perform and, in this sense, their function may be called mediumistic. However, they do not remain transparent media enabling smooth and unproblematic transference. In fact, the opacity of these beings is often so impenetrable that they often hinder, rather than assist passage. Chances for the possible captivity is enhanced by the immense possibilities of pleasure (both spiritual and physical) they offer the initiate. Though such captivity is partially dramatized in the myth of Circe, the implications of the drama of enchantment and deliverance are not properly explored. In fact, Odysseus' liberation from the enchanted Aeaca does not ensure his release from the captivity of the other deities of the *Odyssey* and the *Cantos*. There is no desire, in both these poems, to move out of the cuddling-soft bogs of endless desire. The captivation is so powerful that the passage replaces the promised land. Once in Ithaca these powerful pleasures might metamorphose into the pleasures of sheer power—nothing more. Wax in the ears does not offer any authentic protection from the sirens.

The deities in the river of crystal in Pound's paradise promise transcendence but they have nothing to offer other than their own captivating selves. In this sense their function is not fundamentally different from that of fetish objects in psychological trauma and cultural hysteria. No discussion of fetishism can ignore the Marxian, and Freudian engagement of the subject,[94] though it must be noted that its wide currency in psychology and economics has somewhat obscured the term's broader meanings.[95] A fetish object is something that stands in relation to something else, either (metaphorically) representing it or (metonymically) contiguous to it. In the event, it tends to supplant the other, by foregrounding itself gradually. Freud's observations on fetishism, though

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[94] If the Freudian context delimits the meaning of the term to the field of psychological trauma, the Marxian one focuses on its manifestations in the sphere of economics. For a Freudian-Lacanian analysis of the *Cantos* that discusses Pound's fetishism, see Alan Durant 1981. David Trotter gives a reading of "Eleven New Cantos" as containing fetish objects in a broader sense. He writes:

> Freud was prepared to acknowledge other traumas: "In later life a grown man may perhaps experience a similar panic when the cry goes up that Throne and Altar are in danger, and similar illogical consequences will ensue." Those illogical consequences would presumably involve the treasuring of the lasting impression before an uncanny and traumatic awareness of the fallibility of Throne and Altar. They would produce a view of history based on the preservation of the last moments rather than the designing of first ones. (1984, 94)

According to this reading the snippets from the works of Thomas Jefferson define "a last impression of how things might have been, before it all went wrong"(98). This is indeed "a localized description of the fetishism of the *Cantos*"(94) and does not break free from Freud's theory, so as to be able to point out the deeper implications of the trauma in the *Cantos*.

For the Marxian discussion of the subject, see the section on commodity-fetish in *Capital*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress, 1956) 76-96.

[95] The fetishistic function of the idol has attracted the attention of many philosophers of the Enlightenment, including Kant, Locke and Voltaire.

limited to the question of sexuality, define the basic features of the malady, and are applicable to the other realms as well. In his early essay, "Sexual Aberrations" Freud writes:

> The situation becomes pathological when the longing for the fetish passes beyond the point of being merely a necessary condition attached to the sexual object and actually *takes the place* of the normal aim, and, further, when the fetish becomes detached from a particular individual and becomes the *sole* sexual object. (1977, 66-7)

In his 1927 paper on the subject, Freud links the aberration with castration complex:

> We can now see what the fetish achieves and what it is that maintains it. It remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it. It also saves the fetishist from becoming a homosexual, by endowing women with the characteristic which makes them tolerable as sexual objects. (*Ibid.*, 353-54)

Lacan's reading of fetishism is even more relevant to the present discussion because he refers to the *petrified image* of the fetish:

> And the enigmas that desire seems to pose for a 'natural philosophy'—its frenzy mocking the abyss of the infinite, the secret collusion with which it envelops the pleasure of knowing and of dominating with *jouissance*, these amount to no other derangement of instinct than that of being caught in the rails – eternally stretching forth towards the *desire for something else*– of metonymy. Hence its 'perverse' fixation at the very suspension-point of the

> signifying chain where the memory-screen is immobilized and the fascinating image of the fetish is petrified. (1989, 166-67)

Though, in worship, the fetish has more of a metaphoric (rather than a metonymic) function—the choice of the object in question could be arbitrary—these insights deepen our understanding of some of the fundamental problems plaguing the *Cantos*. What is "sculpted"[96] in the poem defines their limits and not their scope.[97] The petrified image of the fetish is a substitute that obscures and then substitutes the original. The psychoanalytical theory of the fetish that I draw upon here is merely an analogy—I am not concerned with the psychosexual origins of Pound's religious frenzy. However, what happens in the psychological trauma that manifests itself in fetishism has a lot in com-

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[96] Pound often speaks of his craft in terms of sculpture: "The material one wants to fit in doesn't always work. If the stone isn't hard enough to maintain the form, it has to go out." Donald Hall, "Ezra Pound: An Interview," *Writers At Work: The Paris Review Interviews, Second Series*, Ed. Kay Dick (New York: Viking, 1963) 39.

[97] One has to disagree with the main drift of Donald Davie's reading of the *Cantos*, elaborated in his book, *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor* (London: Routledge, 1965) and his essay "The Poet as Sculptor" in Eva Hesse's *New Approaches to Ezra Pound* (London: Faber, 1969) 198-214. In the essay he writes:

> [The] point to be made is that Pound in the *Cantos* characteristically aims at re-creating not the concept, any or all of them, but rather the *forma*, the thing behind them and common to them all. By arranging sensory impressions he aims to state, not ideas, but the form behind and in ideas, the moment before that 'fine thing held in the mind' has precipitated out now this idea, now that. (Eva Hesse, *Ibid.*, 210-11)

This preoccupation with forms lands Pound, as will be shown in the last pages of this chapter, in a terrain of isolated images with nothing to harmonize them. The images are well carved but that does not create or reflect a cosmos. They form part of a *paradiso* in disarray, devoid of a unifying force. They remain static objects, with nothing but the author's desire to enliven them. Moreover, this becomes evident, only when they are tested in a religious environment, where they claim to belong.

mon with the religious practices rooted in idolatry. In religion, all objects associated with the worship of a deity tend to become fetishes, but this is most pronounced in the case of idols—the idol gradually displaces the deity just as the deity often threatens to expel God from the worshipper's mind. More important, as in psychological trauma, the fetish object becomes a convenient device that simplifies things, alleviates the severity of the suffering involved and provides the necessary insulation—though at the expense of arresting growth. Often, the fetish object is devised by conscious or unconscious fear of an Other, the fear of the Absolute which threatens to annihilate the subject and its systems. In worship, this device is all the more convenient, since, along with its function as lightning conductor, it gives the mind a spurious satisfaction of being "religious," even though it springs from a reflection of religion, caught in the mirror of reason.

The kind of spiritual fetishism that is discussed here, which is an integral part of the design of the *Cantos*, deserves more attention than (the isolated or recurrent) manifestations of it may call for. As in the case of fascism, the more direct manifestations are the less harmful ones. The similarity is not accidental: as in the case of fascism, fetishism is linked with certain inherent dilemmas of the Enlightenment. Pound's predicament is not exactly the same as the ones the thinkers of the Age of Reason found themselves in, especially since his attitude towards the irrational is far more tolerant. Yet, a closer look reveals that these differences can be overlooked, as Pound is bent on finding a niche for the irrational in the reasoned cartography of the poem. In this context, it would be useful to take brief look into the story of these adventures of reason.

"Fetishism is a dangerous potentiality," writes David Simpson, "in all perception and representation precisely because reality itself is open to construction. Thus do metaphors pass into realities" (1982, 11). To clarify the point further, Simpson quotes, in an endnote, from Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*:

> Yet for man the invisible needs to be represented through the visible (the sensuous); yea, what is more, it needs to be accompanied by the visible in the interest of practicability and, though it is intellectual, must be made, as it were (according to a certain analogy), perceptual. This is a means of simply picturing to ourselves our duty in the service of God, a means which, although really indispensable, is extremely liable to the danger of misconstruction; for, through an *illusion* that steals over us, it is easily held to be the *service of God* itself, and is indeed, commonly thus spoken of. (*Ibid.*, 129)

This is a very interesting instance for a number of reasons. From one point of view, Kant makes a valid point here, in support of the alternative he has to offer, namely a religion conceived by the rational subjectivity, a "religion *within* the *limits* of pure reason" (emphasis mine). However, the problem is that such a religion should not be free from the dangers Kant finds in primitive, idolatrous faiths since its constructs should not be fundamentally different from those of the idolater. True, such constructs exist on the conceptual plane and are different from the graven images, but this does not make a qualitative difference since the modus operandi remains the same in both the cases. In fact, these constructs are even more treacherous in that they remain invisible. This is a characteristic maneuver of Enlightenment thinking—an invisible displacement of the

invisible. More revealing is the subtle way in which Kant formulates the rationality behind the apparently "irrational" practice of idolatry is in the passage quoted above.[98] It is implied here that the primitive forms of worship, often called pre-rational, could not have come into being without a certain amount of reasoning—reasoning that is, as far as the primitive mind is concerned, perfect. The "enlightened" mind, it interesting to remember, entertains similar notions about the perfection of *its* reasoning. It emerges that the difference between the practice Kant recommends and the one he combats is simply one of gradation—for him the reasoning behind idolatry is not "pure" enough, that is all. Pound's predicament is not exactly the same as the dilemma that relentlessly haunts the Enlightenment. He doesn't fight the irrational and mythic components of his vision. Instead, grasping the "insights" of the ensuing centuries, he accommodates the irrational by assimilating it into the fabric of his rational discourse. Whatever does not give in to this process of assimilation is thrown out, and it is not allowed leave any trace. Instances of such rationalization abound in his prose and verse (we have already discussed some of them); the following one explains why he does not accept the Kantian thesis:

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[98] Simpson quotes Max Müller to clarify the distinction between fetish and idol: "A fetish, properly so called, is itself regarded as something supernatural; the idol, on the contrary, was originally meant as an image only, a similitude or a symbol of something else" (*Ibid.*,13). Nevertheless, it must be noted that there is no qualitative difference between them: a fetish object does not come into being without a certain amount of reasoning, though it functions within the framework of the irrational. Also important is the fact that idolatry, though it involves a more sophisticated use of reasoning (than fetishism), often regresses to the latter, as the barriers to cross are almost non-existent. For the same reason, this distinction is not very useful in the present discussion.

> It is aş foolish to try to contain the *theos* in consciousness as to try to manage electricity to the physics of water . . . . The theos may affect and may have affected the consciousness of individuals, but the consciousness is incapable of knowing why this occurs, or even in what manner it occurs, or whether it be the *theos* . . . . If the consciousness receives or has received such effects from the theos, or from something not the theos yet which the consciousness has been incapable of understanding or classifying as theos or a-theos, it is incapable of reducing these sensations to coherent sequence of cause and effect. (Pound, 1973, 49-50)
>
> Nothing is, without efficient cause. Rationalizing or rather trying to rationalize the pre-rational is poor fishing. (Pound, 1952b, 45)

The quarrel here is not with "philosophy" as such—it is directed against modern metaphysics. Pound spells out the reasons in *Guide to Kulchur*:

> Definition went out in the fifteen hundreds. "Philosophy" went out in the fifteen hundreds, in the sense that after Leibniz the thought of people who labelled themselves as philosophers no longer led or enlightened the rest of the thinkers. "Abstract thought" or "general thought" or philosophic thought after that time was ancillary work of material scientists. (50)

That is, according to Pound, philosophy ceased to be "Platonic": it lost its sublimity as well as precision. *Guide to Kulchur* devotes a number of passages to highlight the difference:

> Socrates tried to make people think, or at any rate, the Socrates "of Plato" tried to make 'em use their language with greater precision and to distinguish knowledge from not-knowledge.
>
> And the Platonic inebriety comes to readers and Platonists when Plato's Socrates forgets all about logic, when he launches into "sublimity" about the heaven above the heavens, the pure light of the mind, the splendour of crystalline lastingness, or runs on with something a sibyl has told him. (33)
> [99]

This "Platonic inebriety," made "sensible" by grounding it in the world of his deities is one of the major components of Pound's paradise. Often, his "strong disbelief in abstract and general statement" and the preference for the concrete "imagistic" presentation is expressed in terms of these deities:

> 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. (Pound, 1973, 53)
>
> To replace the marble goddess on her pedestal at Terracina is worth more than any metaphysical argument.
>
> And the mosaics in Santa Maria in Trastevere recall a wisdom lost by scholasticism, an understanding denied to Aquinas. A great many images were destroyed for what they had in them. (*Ibid.*, 290)

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[99] This argument poses some difficulties: to accept it one will have to ignore thinkers like Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche who were "used" (officially and unofficially) by the totalitarian regimes of the present century. The philosophical origins of Fascism can be traced back not only to Nietzsche, but also to Hegel himself. Stalinism too owes a lot to Hegelianism, or the Marxian reading of it. These matters are rather complicated: the fact that Mussolini was, in 1914, the leader of left wing of the Socialist Party of Italy is

Nevertheless, the passion behind the erection of the temple, interestingly, is usually fused with Neoplatonic vision that inflames the paradisal segments of the *Cantos*. This Neoplatonism, in spite of the distinction Pound makes, ultimately functions in a way that is not very different from that of the abstract metaphysics he condemns, as will be shown below. There is another passage in *Guide to Kulchur* that comes very close to a version of this paradise he was to compose in the fifties:

> If Plato's ideas were the paradigms of reality in Plato's personal thought, their transmutation into phenomena takes us into the unknown. What we can assert is that Plato periodically caused enthusiasm among his disciples. And the Platonists after him have caused man after man to be suddenly conscious of the reality of the *nous*, of mind, apart from any man's individual mind, of the sea crystalline and enduring, of the bright as it were molten glass that envelops us, full of light. (44)

This imagistic-philosophical eloquence is in no way different from that of the *Cantos*. More important, the paradise of the *Cantos* never moves out of the bounds of this eloquence. Its limits are set by the Neoplatonic-imagistic/idolatrous discourses. The resplendent domain of the *nous* leaves the protagonist spellbound, and the "divine" herb of molü does not protect him from this enchantment.

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not without significance.

As the paradise the poem envisages becomes more and more identified with the crystalline world of the deities, it becomes harder to distinguish the realm (which too is a meaphor) from the metaphor of the temple that the protagonist longs to erect. As presented in Canto XCI, this paradise is little more than the temple Pound erects for his goddess in the realm of the Platonic *Nous*. The opening lines situate the canto in this realm:

> AB LO DOLCHOR QU'AL COR MI VAI
> that the body of light come forth
> from the body of fire. (1987, 624)

The first line in Provençal ("with the sweetness that comes to my heart") culled from Troubadour poetry of love, reintroduces the motif of the Lady, a composite of the speaker's beloved and Aphrodite-Artemis-Isis-Kuanon who elevates him ["m'elevasti"] from the inferno of the past and the present to the timeless (Platonic) realm of "Light & the flowing crystal" (1987, 625). The lines which follow allude to the re-emergence of the eyes of the Queen (Reina) which light up the flowing crystal for her lover:

> And that your eyes come to the surface
> from the deep wherein they were sunken
> Reina—for 300 years,
> and now sunken

That your eyes come forth from their caves
' & light then
as the holly-leaf. (1987, 624)

This is followed by allusions to the various manifestations of the Lady—as Helen of Tyre, Theodora, Elizabeth, "Merlin's moder," Diana, Rhea and Leucothea—and her various lovers. They are all simultaneously present in the crystalline river, which defines the quality of this realm of paradise. This river of crystal is not just Neoplatonic; it is Confucian as well, as the following passage, sandwiched between lines referring to the worshippers of Tammuz and the Queen as she revealed herself to Drake:

That the sun's silk
hsien  tensile
be clear. (1987, 626)

The strife "between light and darkness" (1987, 259) is also the strife between what Pound regards as the religion of light (his compound of the Eleusinian, Neoplatonic and Confucian faiths) and the religions he associates with "blackness" (cf. "All the Jew part of the Bible is black evil" (Paige, 1982, 345) and barbarity—Judaism.

The historic figures in whom the Lady manifests herself are emblematized into the design of the timeless, silencing all questions about their historicity: the reader is not to argue here, as Pound has Swedenborg admonish in Canto LXXVII,

Emmanuel Swedenborg . . . . "do not argue"
in the 3rd sphere do not argue. (1987, 486)

One is to stand back and admire, as in the correspondent political realm, the (Italian) city of the Duce. The problem here is not one of ideology as such, but of ideological inconsistency: what begins with the questioning of the past and the present moves on to a domain where questions are not allowed. This is one of the paradoxes of the modernist discourse, as pointed out before, stemming from its rootedness in the rational subjectivity of the Enlightenment, which evolved into a critique of this rationality itself and, in the course of doing so, accommodated the irrational into its fabric. Fascism is one of the political manifestations of this paradox. The irrational, as it is allowed into this discourse appears transformed into reason's version of it. The revival of interest in the occult in the 19th century falls within this pattern. Blavatsky and Mead (to mention two occultists Pound was interested in) are writers of treatises with all the scholarly trappings, and specialists in a branch of what is called *knowledge*. With all its emphasis on mystical experience, the occult remains a form of *knowledge*, which is a source of *power*. The hidden source of this power is a secret body of knowledge forming part of a secret history. Pound's attempt here is to elevate (if it is elevation) figures like Theodora and Elizabeth to the domain of this secret history. As in the case of modern occultists like Mead and Blavatsky, Pound's spirituality is rooted in non-Semitic religious thought. Two of the mystics mentioned in the canto, it is supposed, were actual practitioners of the occult: Apollonius (of Tyana) and John Heydon. This agrees with his anti-Semitic religious convictions, as Judaism, especially in its orthodox form,

doesn't tolerate the practitioners of such knowledge.[100] In the *Cantos*, the religion of the usurer (read Judaism,)[101] is ultimately linked with Geryone, the force in history "that divides, shatters and kills" and resists the force "that contemplates the unity of the mystery" (Pound 1973, 276), that is, the tradition that embraces Kung and Eleusis. This tradition survives mainly through idols and other "imagistic" representations:

> . . . the images of the gods, or Byzantine mosaics, moves the soul to contemplation and preserve the tradition of the undivided light. (Pound, 1973, 277)

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[100] It is true that mystic schools that finally got immersed in esoteric knowledge grew around Judaism, Christianity as well as Islam. However, the main thrust of these religions is against such forms of knowledge, especially in the case of Judaism and Islam.

[101] Critics who are eager to tone down Pound's anti-Semitism usually cite the following passages from his "American Notes" (1935):

> Usurers have no race. How long the whole Jewish people is to be sacrificial goat for the usurer, I know not . . . . .
>
> It cannot be too clearly known that no man can take usury and observe the law of the Hebrews. No orthodox Jew can take usury without sin, as defined in his own scriptures.
>
> The Jew usurer being an outlaw runs against his own people, and uses them as his whipping boy . . . .
>
> But the Jew is the usurer's goat. Whenever a usurer is spotted he scuttles down under the ghetto and leaves the plain man Jew to take the bullets and beatings. (Pound, 1973, 270n)

The problem with this and similar observations is that the reflective clarity found here is totally absent from Pound's anti-Semitic-fascist discourse. This discourse is closed unto itself and cannot even refer to anything that exists outside its framework. It is the creation of a deliberately worked up frenzy—and not a very fine one—that simply cannot perceive anything. He has also made statements like the following one, which refers to the whole of Jewry: "It is, of course, useless to indulge in antisemitism, leaving intact the Hebraic monetary system which is a most tremendous instrument of usury" (Pound 1973, 321).

> Dante perhaps said too much in the *Paradiso* without saying enough. In any case the theologians who put reason (logic) in the place of faith began the slithering process which has ended up with theologians who take no interest in theology whatsoever.
>
> Tradition *inheres* . . . in the images of the gods, and gets lost in dogmatic definitions. History is recorded in monuments, and *that* is why they get destroyed. (Pound, 1973, 292)

The closing lines of Canto XCI refer to this surviving tradition:

> A lost kind of experience?
>
> scarcely,
>
> O Queen Cytherea,
>
> che 'l terzo ciel movete. (1987, 631)

Queen Cytherea, Aphrodite, who moves the third heaven, (as the last line, adapted from *Paradiso* VIII.37, has it) replaces God, "the Love that moves the sun and the other stars" (*Par.* XXXIII.145) as Dante refers to Him in the last line of his song. The function and significance of Pound's adaptation of the line in the canto, "Love moving the stars" (1987, 624) becomes clear only now: he was formally preparing ground for this displacement. Not that this was something new: the displacement had taken place much before, at the very moment the poem was conceived. The reason is obvious: the cosmos of the *Cantos* has no place for the God of Abraham, who remains, above all, *unknowable*.

"Paganism never feared knowledge," Pound writes in "Terra Italica" (1973, 56). What he ignores here (deliberately or otherwise) is the fact that it has always feared the unknown. In fact, the pagan myths came into being, as the result of the early attempts to understand natural phenomena, to *know* the universe and to *use* the knowledge in order to *control* it, through rituals and mimetic magic. Pound overlooks most of these factors when he formulated his theory of the origin of myths in his essay on Dolmetsch:

> The first myths arose when a man walked sheer into 'nonsense', that is to say, when some very vivid and undeniable adventure befell him, and he told someone else who called him a liar. Thereupon, after bitter experience, perceiving that no one could what he meant when he said that he 'turned into a tree' he made a myth—a work of art that is—an impersonal or objective story woven out of his own emotion, as the nearest equation that he was capable of putting into words. That story, perhaps, then gave rise to a weaker copy of his emotion in others, until there arose a cult, a company of people who could understand each other's nonsense about the gods. (Pound 1954, 431)

This reading is naïve (which, in its naïve way sheds light on the way Pound created his own myths, including the one of the Duce) as it ignores the significant role myths played in organizing primitive man's life. They constituted a system of signs,[102] a lan-

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[102] Remember Barthes' formulation,

> [Myth] is s system of communication, that is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form . . . . Mythical speech is made of a material which has already been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth . . .presuppose a signifying

guage that could spell out a world of power(s). They attempt to transform the unknown into the known; and the unknowable has no place in their agenda; this supreme source of fear is tackled by excluding it from the map. They aim at the making of a known world; knowledge is not merely their major objective, but also their mode of being.

Pound's Odysseus, in spite of all his resourcefulness in facing the unpredictable, longs to return to a known world, his home in Ithaca. The unknown is his temporary abode, agonizing and educating him, ultimately leading him back to the first, known world, enabling him to control it better. In "Rock-Drill" he is where he derives his knowledge, the domain of his deities. He is unable to move beyond this field as the other circles (for this is a paradise divided into *circles*) have no vortices like the Cytherean. More than that, this Odysseus is chained by his pagan deities to their respective realms; they seldom allow him to transcend them. Leucothea's bikini ("my bikini is worth your raft" [1987, 630]) becomes his raft—and his anchor. It anchors him in the known/knowable world (his dream of Ithaca, of the city of Dioce are components of this world), and prevents further ascent. In this sense, the celestial music of his deities proves to be his doom: the song of these sirens captivates him. His "sailing after knowledge" does not take him beyond the sphere of his deities; and what knowledge he has—of history, money, the *Nous*—reverts into myth.

These new myths, sequential to his fetishist spirituality, now threaten to regress to fet-

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consciousness, that one can reason about them while discounting their substance. (Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," *A Barthes Reader*, Ed. Susan Sontag, 1982; (London: Vintage, 1993) 93-95

ishes on their own. The self-referential vicious circle of this brand of spirituality, it appears, can create little more than similar self-referential circles. The history the poem tries include is no exception: it is subject to the same process of mythicization that was at work in the early Greek poems which used historical and legendary material. Homer's Odysseus does not even *refer* to anybody in history; the same can be said about Pound's heroes. They refer instead, to a world of their own making, where ghosts from history clamor around an ancient trough of blood. The blood offering with which the poem started marks the beginning of the construction of a myth that sets the poem's limits. In this sense, the opening canto prophesied not only the course the poem desired to take, but also the webs of constructs in which it was to be caught.

However, this was predictable: the greatest dream of the worshipper of Aphrodite is that of union with the goddess; transcending her is not part of the agenda. Consequently, he cannot hope to gain anything better than the stat(e)us of Adonis/Tammuz—and the knowledge of the mystery of rebirth—*and* still be chained to the world of time, of the known. Mythic symbolism first pushes its signified into the background and then overwrites it with itself. Once it is formulated, myth becomes a closed system of symbols, preoccupied with itself, the referential codes unable to extend beyond its set limits. This is true even in the case of ritual practice, where every action is supposed to address a veiled field of force, invoking various energies. Ritual, like myth, is a language that gets fossilized and worn out: hence the term's acquired meaning. The problem is that they do not become absolutely powerless or meaningless; then they would at least remain harmless. They have enough power and meaning to ensnare the mind that

turns to them. Pound's hero is caught in the web of these subtle, yet resolute transformations. It is obvious that the knowledge he attains did not save him—anyway it did not save the poem. Not many critics have asserted that the *Cantos* is a success; the validity of Pound's confession that he botched it has not been seriously questioned. In his unenviable predicament, the protagonist is left with one of his ancient talents, that of manipulation, and he resorts to it much more than before. In "Thrones," the manipulation that has always been going on reaches its climax in the Coke cantos, as pointed out earlier.

To recapitulate: the fetishist spirituality of the *Cantos*, and the enigmas it inevitably leads to, may be traced back to the Enlightenment's fear of the unknown and the resultant passion for material objects, which may be used to emblematize and replace the Other. It is not accidental that this materialism is reflected in the obsessive concern for commodities that characterizes the capitalist economy.

Chapter III: The Ossified Ideogram in Fragments

> The plastic artist, like the epic poet who is related to him, is absorbed in the pure contemplation of images. (Nietzsche, 1992, 50)

> The appeal to the sun is idolatry. The sight of the burning tree inspires a vision of the majesty of the day which lights the world without setting fire to it at the same time. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1986, 219)

metaphysics, ideogram, metaphor

The distinction Pound makes between the abstract language of metaphysics and his own ideogrammic-imagistic discourse, it turns out, does not have the desired effect. The reason is not far to seek: the assumption that the imagistic mode has more representational potential than the abstract one is not as sound as it appears to be. In fact, the distinction is not valid: the difference between these two languages is of the surface alone. Both are equally metaphoric and in both the cases, the metaphor becomes literalized.[103]

[103] Joseph N. Riddel has pointed this out in his 1975 essay, "Pound and the Decentered Image" (The Georgia Review, 29 [1975]):

> The Image is a metaphor of a kind of metaphor, a graphic of a function, an equation of differences. Pound recognizes that presentation is already metamorphic. It is therefore nothing like *aletheia*, the unconcealing of a primordial presence. What, then, is presentation? What is presented? Tentatively, one can only say that an interpretation is presented. Time is presented, that "instant of time" that makes the difference between two

Nietzsche draws attention to this problem in an early essay, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" (1873):

> What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins. (Taylor, 1986, 219)

This applies to the language of the philosopher as well as that of the poet with truth-claims. In his forays against the rhetorical and metaphoric tradition, Pound remains oblivious of the vulnerability of his own poetic language. Interestingly, his critique of this tradition often echoes the attitude of philosophers toward imaginative writing. In "Addendum for C" we read,

> "A pity that poets have used symbol and metaphor
> and no man learned anything from them
> for their speaking in figures." (1987, 813)

It is amusing to read this passage in the last installment of a poem that is replete with

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metaphors—let us say, for example, the difference between the "perception" of nature as a system and the "shorthand" or graphic rendition of that "system." What is presented is the differentiating force of language, the nature of translation as a movement between two kinds of figurative language. (574)

metaphoric and (to a lesser extent) symbolic elements. The fact that "Addendum for C" was composed in the 1940s does not make a significant difference. Moreover, this is not an isolated instance of voicing a deep suspicion of the metaphoric-symbolic discourse. One need not bring in the idea that language is fundamentally metaphoric to question Pound's stance. In fact, he was acutely aware of the metaphoricity of language. It would be useful to look at his comments on a passage in Ernest Fenollosa's essay, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*. The relevant parts of Fenollosa's text are quoted below along with Pound's notes.

> The whole delicate substance of speech is built upon the substrata of metaphor . . . . Metaphor, the revealer of nature, is the very substance of poetry. The known interprets the obscure, the universe is alive with myth . . . . Poetry is finer than prose because it gives us more concrete truth in the same compass of words. Metaphor, its chief device, is at once the substance of nature and of language. Poetry does consciously* what the primitive races did unconsciously. The chief work of literary men in dealing with language, and of poets especially, lies in feeling back along the ancient lines of advance.#
>
> *[*Vide* also an article on 'Vorticism' . . . in my 'Gaudier-Brzeska.']
>
> #[I would submit in all humility that this applies in the rendering of ancient texts. The poet, in dealing with his own time, must also see to it that language does not petrify on his hands. He must prepare for new advances along the lines of true metaphor, that is interpretative metaphor, or image, as diametrically opposed to untrue, or ornamental, metaphor. (1936, 22-23)

Pound's half-hearted qualification of Fenollosa's views, with its distinction between the

ornamental and interpretative metaphors, is very revealing. It points to one of the unresolved dilemmas of his poetics. It appears that his war is actually against what he calls "ornamental metaphor" and not against metaphoricity as such. Nevertheless, he often forgets this distinction. More important, the uneasiness about metaphoricity has its roots in an apparent intolerance of substitution that closely parallels the one associated with the truth claims of philosophy. One of the fundamental ideas of Pound's poetics is his "refusal to define things in terms of something else" (Pound, 1961, 117). This nevertheless remains an unrealized dream, as corroborated by the word "figures," in the passage from "Addendum for C" quoted above, which functions as a metaphor. If the reader is unwilling to take a dead or unconscious metaphor seriously, he/she need not even turn the page to come across a sequence of obtrusive ones. On the preceding page appear the following lines on "*neschek* / the serpent":

> Snake of the seven heads, Hydra, entering all things,
> Passing the doors of temples, defiling the Grove of Paphos,
> *neschek*, the crawling evil,
> slime, the corrupter of all things. (1987, 811)

It is difficult to ignore the allegoric quality of this passage. True, the *Cantos* does not employ this mode frequently. Yet, one has to remember that the essay alluded to in the note to *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* disapproves of the symbolists for their associative technique:

> Imagisme is not symbolism. The symbolists dealt in "association," that is, in a sort of allusion, almost allegory. They degraded the symbol to the

> status of a word. They made it a form of metonymy . . . . The symbolist's *symbols* have a fixed value, like numbers in arithmetic, like 1, 2, and 7. The imagiste's images have a variable significance, like the signs a, b, and x in algebra. (Pound, 1961, 84)

He insists on the "permanent metaphor" (Pound, 1961, 84) a universal equation that "is *real* because we know it directly" (*Ibid.*, 86, emphasis mine). A few pages later, after chastising the language of philosophy ("It MAKES NO PICTURE. This kind of statement applies to a lot of facts, but it does not grip hold of Heaven") he uses the analogy of Cartesian geometry to illustrate his point:

> Space is conceived as separated by two or three axes (depending on whether one is treating form in one or more planes). One refers points to these axes by a series of coordinates. Given the idiom, one is able *actually to create*.
>
> Thus, we learn that the equation $(x - a)2 + (y - b)2 = r2$ governs the circle. It is the circle. It is not a particular circle, it is any circle and all circles. It is nothing that is not a circle. It is the circle free of space and time limits. It is the universal, existing in perfection, in freedom form space and time. Mathematics is dull ditchwater until one reaches analytics. But in analytics we come upon a new way of dealing with form. It is in this way that art handles life. The difference between art and analytical geometry is one of subject matter only. (Pound, 1961, 91)

In his 1917 essay on Eliot, Pound brings up the question of universality: "Art does not avoid universals, it strikes at them all the harder in that it strikes through particulars" (Pound, 1954, 420). Herbert Schneidau, justifiably enough, traces this theory back to

the Christian doctrine of Incarnation:

> . . . some of the most powerful ideas of western Christianity, including that fateful statement of immanence in the doctrine of Incarnation, percolated through various channels and indirect ways until they reached modernism, as it were, devoid of content but intact in shape. Doctrines of Christian immanence, or rather the insight they embody, must be seen in the background of post-Symbolist attempts to repudiate the notion of symbol as mere representation, metaphor as mere analogy or comparison . . . . Here the idea of the universal in the particular is raised to its highest power . . . . As for modernism, once the idea of the as arbitrary sign was changed to symbol as "living part in that unity of which it is the representative," the way was open to a poetry of reality. (Schneidau, 1969, 85)

The ideogrammic discourse, like the philosophical one, aims at universality. Pound's quarrel with the former, as the passage quoted above indicates, is based on its refusal to speak through images ("It MAKES NO PICTURE") which renders it powerless to grasp the divine ("it does not grip hold of Heaven"). Obviously, he takes it for granted that the ideogrammic discourse, with its sharply defined images is potent enough to "grip hold of Heaven." What this discourse grips hold of is, in fact, simply a "picture" of heaven, an image, a construct, the universality of which is highly questionable. What happens in the *Cantos* is the attempted creation of a metaphor—or rather a cluster of metaphors that are linked in a framework of myth which is literalism from the very moment of its conception, because of the implicit truth-claims. Pound relies, voluntarily or otherwise, on the supposed superiority of the Image over the metaphor (or, as per the distinction he makes, the ornate, non-interpretative metaphor) to shield this maneuver a

sleight of hand all the truth-claimants bring to perfection. Moreover, the validity of this distinction is open to question. The idea that images (no matter whether they are linguistic or non-linguistic) are free from metaphoricity is based on the simplistic notion that they *reveal* a self-sufficient and "pure" inner *essence* that is universally valid. It is important to place the "directness" of the "direct treatment of the 'thing'" in its relativistic context. Such an act would highlight the fact that the assumed "superiority" of the imagistic/ideogrammic discourse over the symbolist and abstract modes does not ensure any sort of freedom from metaphoricity.[104] The image hides what it claims to reveal, in

[104] Riddel, (who makes the following observations in the essay cited above) is an exception:

> Direct implies immediacy, but it is the "treatment" which is direct, and a treatment is already a kind of doubling. It is a reading of symptoms, of signs, and an interpretation which is at once a displacement (a kind of intensity or "shorthand") and a supplementation. In short, direct treatment involves the reinscription of one sign into another, the translation of one body of signs into another, a movement of one sign over another. It involves staging, translating. This might recall a primary myth, the invention of writing as original displacement. (574)

It should be noted that Riddel's conclusions are often incompatible with those of the present study. In spite of his deconstructive approach, he does not move far beyond the conclusions of the Kenner school of Pound criticism. Pound's "innocence," is asserted here, though indirectly, as in the following observations:

> All of Pound's definitions of the Image—for example, the Image as an "intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time"—displace the authority of a commanding subject or creative force, of an a priori unity that commands linearity and resolves thematic or imagistic play. (575)

> *The Cantos*, then, is a signifying machine, a machine producing signs out of an encounter of signs. The poem's structure can only be described by a number of metaphors it already bears within itself: it is a "rag-bag," or Malatesta's "post-bag," a montage of letters, or it is like Malatesta's Tempio, a form never quite completed or closed . . . . The poem. . .is a counterattack against usury, not only in its explicit thematic, but in its strategies of usage which refuse to repeat the effaced signs of a worn-out culture or the re-

the very instance the claim is made. It promises what is already withdrawn. Pound's term, "interpretative metaphor" is very apt; interpretation always means intervention that finally leads to displacement. At this point, it would be useful to consider Derrida's observations on supplementarity:

> But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere, something can be filled up *of itself*, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled with sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself.[105]

ceived texts of an authoritarian tradition. (590)

The dynamics of the politics of Poundworld eludes Riddel completely. Its freedom from authoritarianism is confined to the surface alone.

[105] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Spivak (1976; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994) 145. The following passage from *Dissemination* is equally relevant:

> That which is, the being-present (the matrix-form of substance, of reality, of the oppositions between matter and form, essence and existence, objectivity and subjectivity, etc.) is distinguished from the appearance, the image, the phenomenon etc., that is, from anything that, presenting it as being-present, doubles it, re-presents it, and can therefore replace and de present it. There is thus the 1 and the 2, the simple and the double. The double comes after the simple; it multiplies it as a *follow-up*. It follows . . . that the image *supervenes* upon reality, the representation upon the present in presentation, the imitation upon the thing, the imitator upon the imitated. (Derrida, 1981, 191)

The freedom the ideogrammic method claims to have, from metaphoricity on the one hand, and conceptual abstraction on the other, is illusory, to put it mildly. In fact, the differences between these modes cease to matter when certain fundamental questions about the nature of language are raised.[106] The Image and metaphor have the same functions in these subtle operations. The well-delineated Image, with its sharp features defining the *differences* that make it unique, is undermined by the same qualities that ensure its success. The supplement *supplements*. The clarity of definition and the resultant finitude cuts it off from everything, including what it purports to represent. That sets it free, and in the irresponsibility of this freedom, it usurps the latter- just as the metaphor invisibly usurps its tenor. As Derrida points out in his comment on the dialogue between Aristos and Polyphilos in Anatole France's *The Garden of Epicurus*, the language of conceptual abstraction is no different:

[106] Consider Paul de Man's remarks which conclude the essay, "The Epistemology of Metaphor: "

> . . . our argument suggests that the relationship and the distinction between literature and philosophy cannot be made in terms of a distinction between aesthetic and epistemological categories. All philosophy is condemned, to the extent that it is dependent upon figuration, to be literary and, as the depository of this very problem, all literature is to some extent philosophical. The apparent symmetry of these statements is not as reassuring as it sounds since what seems to bring literature and philosophy together is, as in Condillac's argument about mind and object, a shared lack of identity or specificity. (Shapiro, 1984, 213)

It is true that the *Cantos* determinedly pursues its epistemological goals: the hero "sails" after knowledge. Nevertheless, there are two difficulties here: (1) there is no awareness of the implications of the relationship between the epistemological and the aesthetic and (2) this epistemology is conceived in purely aesthetic terms.

> The primitive meaning, the original, and always sensory and material, figure . . . is not exactly a metaphor. It is a kind of transparent figure, equivalent to a literal meaning (*sens propre*). It becomes a metaphor when philosophical discourse puts it into circulation. Simultaneously the first meaning and the first displacement are then forgotten. The metaphor is no longer noticed, and is taken for the proper meaning. A double effacement. Philosophy would be this process of metaphorization which gets carried away in and of itself. Constitutionally, philosophical culture will always have been an obliterating one. (Derrida, 1986, 211)

This describes the *Cantos* precisely since they are an epistemological project as well. Pound's quarrel with philosophy, with western metaphysics to be precise, it must be remembered, does not question its fundamental objectives. He finds its methods wanting, and looks for alternatives in China and Eleusinian Greece. Moreover, the ideogrammic method, which he offers as an alternative, suffers from the same pitfalls he encountered in western metaphysics. Just as metaphysics, despite its adherence to conceptual abstraction fails to evade the metaphor, the imagistic/ideogrammic discourse fails to constitute a transparent, straightforward and unambiguous system of reference. This failure is caused by the same factors that undermine the metaphysical discourse, the chief of which is the literalization of the metaphor, or rather in this case, of the ideogram. The much-celebrated art of *looking*, as pointed out in the previous chapter, of the "direct examination of phenomena" (Pound, 1951, 20) slips out of the *Cantos* totally as their ideological groundwork is finalized. Observation has only a minor role to play in a poetics that is committed to the transmission of *faith*. The renouncement of the principle of observation is complete when the *Cantos* appropriates Mussolini into

its fabric. Pound might not have been able to identify the spirit of the early chapters of *ABC of Reading* as nostalgic, but it is not difficult to see that he had already abandoned the principles they set out to celebrate. In fact, this book of 1934 can be read as an ironic commentary on the *Cantos*. Whatever the excuses offered, it remains a fact that Pound gradually lost hold of the faculty of *looking* as he settled down in Italy, in the mid-twenties. The art of invention replaces that of looking and, ironically, both these arts are associated with the scientists, whose method is idealized in the first chapter of *ABC of Reading*, in the story of Agassiz and the fish. Instead of *looking* at Mussolini and *his* Italy, Pound invents these.[107] The pact, which finalized the abandonment of the creed of observation, was spelt out by 30 Jan. 1933, when Pound met the Duce, at the Palazzo Venezia. Nevertheless, this was only a formality, which made official a process that started long ago. "Muss," the Mussolini of the *Cantos*, is a gross (and interesting) instance of the literalized metaphor, a phantom of Pound's creation, modeled on his reading of the dictator. The metaphoricity of this phantom is not visible at all, if the reader's attention is confined to the *Cantos* alone, or if he has *faith* in Pound — the same kind of faith Mussolini himself tried to inspire. However, once this metaphoricity becomes evident, Muss. ceases to signify Mussolini. When this happens it turns into a sterile metaphor, signifying nothing other than itself. Still, its sterility does not make it a harmless construct: it is potent enough to be literalized again. The mythology of the *Cantos* is made up of such hollow signifiers—opaque icons that can relate only to *their own kind*. The situation would have been different, if the *Cantos* were a poem without

[107] It is ironic (and paradoxical) that Pound the poet of polities can conceive of the scientist, as a pursuer of "pure truth" totally free from the network of polities.

any truth-claims, a poem that is *not* committed to the idea of the tale of the tribe, *not* trying to include history consciously.

Instead of forming a crystalline signifier, the ideogram, as in the case of the passages from Canto XCI quoted above, tends to ossify into an opaqueness, like a hard, well-defined *idol*. The irony of crystal turning into stone--at times "a forest of marble" (1987, 78)--is a morbid one, representing a transformation that inspires the creation of more stony images and nothing more. The dynamism of the "moving image" is not exactly dynamic, since all it knows is the dynamism of a body that moves in an orbit. The hero of the *Cantos*, a worshipper of the sun--idolized in many pagan faiths—is caught in its orbit from which there is no liberation:

> Out of dark, thou, Father Helios, leadest,
> but the mind as Ixion, unstill, ever turning. (1987, 804)

This is the logical outcome of the practice of sun worship: the worshipper becomes another body like the sun, burning, "unstill, ever turning." Nothing more was offered, nothing more is to be expected.

deferring it

It can be seen that the major manifestations of the literalization of the metaphor in the *Cantos* are related (directly or indirectly) to idolatry and fetishism. Pound employs the same device that is used by the metaphysicians of the west—a maneuver that confers it the status of the real. The idol is a literalized metaphor, the one with the widest currency, the most fetishized, and the most dangerous of all. Dangerous: it provides the worshipper a false sense of clarity, of definiteness, a sense of security. For a mind that refuses to face the unknowable, the idol is the ideal choice. Self-referential to the core, it keeps up the pretense of referring to an *other*, while all it knows is a web of references of which it forms a part. The appetite for the Other is thus rendered sluggish with a false sense of realization, which is a very efficient way of *deferring* it *infinitely*. Moreover, this is the final objective (it makes no difference whether it happens consciously or otherwise) of the creation of the fetish, of the idol. The process corresponds to the way in which the poet has been forcing the reader to defer all judgment regarding the form of the poem: he/she is asked to "wait till it's there."[108] It is worth considering Alan Durant's comments on the question of deferment, (though the observations made above were arrived at independently). He writes:

[108] In 1939 he wrote in a letter, "As to the *form* of *The Cantos*: All I can say or pray is: wait till it's there. I mean wait till I get 'em written and then if it don't show, I will start exegesis" (Paige, 1982, 323).

> It may yet appear that the features which make a cohesive completion of the *Cantos* impossible are domesticated by the poet as devices to prevent the disclosure of that impossibility by avowedly deferring the moment of coherence and conclusion. Nevertheless, these features are in that very gesture by-passing the repression by means of which that aspiration is pursued, and so re-emphasizing the very condition of impossibility. Whilst incompleteness is at one level an intermediary condition on the way to completeness, it is also at another level simply incompleteness itself. Repression of fact of the poem's interminability is thus continually tied to the element it seeks to repress, and the poem from the outset condemned to live out a failure dictated by its own theoretical conditions. (1981, 69-70)

The emphasis of the present study is on the incoherence of the poem rather than its interminability and the reasons for this are sought in religious ideology rather than in the poet's psyche.

Once caught in this web of self-referentiality it is difficult to remain aware of its very existence. Pound comes very close to such awareness in the last finished canto, in these (oft-quoted) lines:

> I have brought the great ball of crystal;
> who can lift it?
> Can you enter the great acorn of light?
> But the beauty is not in the madness
> Tho' my errors and wrecks lie about me
> And I am not a demigod,
> I cannot make it cohere.
> If love be not in the house there is nothing. (1987, 809-10)

and

i.e. it coheres all right
even if my notes do not cohere. (1987, 811)

The "great ball of crystal" refers back to the paradiso attempted in the *Cantos* in general, and to the images of crystal in "Rock-Drill" (XC-XCII) and "Thrones" (Canto CVI). Interpretation of this passage proves to be crucial, as it can come very close to an assessment of the *Cantos* as a whole. Some critics tend to gloss over the issues inherent in these lines. James J. Wilhelm, for instance, does not find any serious problem here:

> Despite the words about noncoherence, the lines do not say that Pound's mind is incoherent; they say that he cannot convert his senses or feelings into a rational mould; furthermore, they *do* say that he has delivered the ball of crystal, and thus, like all of Pound's poetry—or, for that matter, poetry in general—they must be read *in context*; and they must also be balanced with differing statements elsewhere. (1977, 191-92)

The problem is not merely that the implicit distinction between the mind of Pound the poet and Pound the man is not as obvious as it is assumed here. The coherence in question has more to it than converting "his thoughts into a rational mould," since it refers to a harmony which reason need not comprehend. More important, the validity of the image, the "ball of crystal" is taken for granted without an attempt to understand its meaning, if it has any. Wilhelm continues, in the same vein, after a couple of pages:

> When Pound says "it coheres all right," he is referring to his vision, his dream not to his notes, the logical build-up for his ideas, or to the real world in Italy around him, where love is not in the house. (*Ibid.*, 194)

The proposed distinction between Pound's "vision" and his "notes" is not an easy one to make.[109] To speak of a vision that is not present in the "notes" at this stage is to un-

[109] Bacigalupo also makes a similar distinction, between the "poem" and its "compiler:"

> There is a touch of truculence in the challenge to "lift" the great ball—which is at one time the acorn of light of c. 106, Pound's *phantastikon*, the divine vision, and the poem as distinct from its compiler, now beached among errors and wreaks—but this false note is made good by the eventual reprise, beautifully articulated, of the basic theme: the House reattaches itself, beyond (and through) negation and loss, to "the drawing of this Love" (*Little Gidding*)—to a post-Christian eros in the absence of which nothing can be said to exist ("without ²muan ¹bpo / no reality"—cs. 104, 112). (1980, 488)

The point to be made is not that it is not legitimate to make such distinctions but that the *Cantos*, which sets out to define this vision in clear terms, cannot afford to have any. Walter Baumann, however, is more cautious when he writes,

> The real problems do not start until we try to find out what Pound meant by "the great ball of crystal" |l. 23|. Since "the great acorn of light" |l. 25| is clearly another name for the same thing, and since Pound saw "That the great acorn of light bulging outward bulging outward" in Canto 106 |p.755|, i.e., growing into a tree, a whole world of light, we could say that entering the acorn is . . . knowing the future, as after more conventional crystal gazing, and thus we could read the passage as follows: I, Pound, have brought you, the reader or the world of men, the key to the future. It is of course possible that he expects both questions, "who can lift it?" and "can you enter the great acorn of light?" to be answered by "No one" and "No," and if we stress "you" in the second question, the implication would be: *I* can't but can *you*? All of this suggests that Pound has his doubts as to whether anyone will be able to use his crystal ball and get closer to a "paradiso / terrestre" |117/802| than anyone before. (1983, 206)

Some of the difficulties are acknowledged here, but this does not prevent Baumann from performing that most favored act of Pound critics who are keen about avoiding unpleasantness: interpreting Pound in his own terms, a tradition that came to maturity

dermine not only the poetics on which it is built, but also the vision as such. This poem, after all, sought "to *write* paradise," to define it in utter clarity. Moreover, if this does not happen, the reasons are to be sought within the poem, as Alan Durant points out,

> Canto 116 inscribes a struggle between the poem's realization and its incompletion, and the poem's error is claimed to lie in what has not done rather than in what has, the poem paradoxically right and wrong simultaneously . . . . These 'notes', like those of the early formulations, are indications of synecdoche, of a totality to be reached only by a faith which can offer the reassurance, 'it coheres all right'. In this absence of a moment when incoherence is rendered coherent, the self-assurance of the subject as an essential unity or identity able to confer meanings upon the world suffers a further interruptive displacement: the subject is shown to be unable to fix a constant position in discourse from which to judge experience, and meanings are shown to proliferate beyond any control which might plan and achieve a coherent end. (1981, 64-65)

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with Kenner's book, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (1951). Baumann's interpretation of the lines, "i.e., it coheres all right / even if my notes do not cohere" subtly glosses over the contradictions involved:

> . . . we cannot be sure exactly what to read into the pronoun "it" in "i.e. it coheres all right," . . . but if Pound simply means the Cosmos as made by the Divine Mind, he is merely repeating what was never in doubt and what he already summed up in Canto 85 as "Heaven's process is quite coherent and its main points perfectly clear" [p.552]. But the moment we assume that "it coheres all right" also includes human history, it means . . . that it all makes sense, even if the individual by himself cannot see all the links. (*Ibid.*, 215-16)

According to this reading the canto is an assertion of the poem's achievements rather than an admission of its failure. This is puzzling, as it goes against much of what is explicitly stated in the last fragments.

This incoherence, it is important to note, does not result merely from the subject's lack of autonomy, as Durant's psychoanalytical reading would suggest.[110] It results from a fragmented vision and this fragmentation is caused not merely by psychological reasons. It is the inevitable outcome of a deliberate choice: that of conceiving the finite Image/ideogram as being capable of representing the infinite, and that of substituting the infinitely Other with the realm of the *nous* and its idols/deities. The network of ideograms, as pointed out above, creates little more than a vicious circle of self-referentiality. Though pleasurable, they are ultimately sterile. In this, they are like idols and it is more than a coincidence that in the *Cantos* the idol and the ideogram coalesce. They create a realm of fantasy, of hallucination, along with the traumas and disorders that lead to and ensue from these. Pound's statement, the "god is inside the stone," (Pound, 1954, 152) is little more than a dream, despite the tone of aggressive conviction. Jean-François Lyotard, in an essay on Freud's theories of religion discusses this and related issues:

> The point is that the figure itself bound up with wish-fulfilment. When the apparatus is under the dominance of the pleasure principle it disregards reality-testing and wishes are equated with their fulfillment. The image is a hallucination; it bears the mark of shame because being the terminal point of a regressive short-cut towards wish-fulfillment, it is associated with

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[110] Durant writes:

> The subject is now continually implicated in the field of its own enunciations. Lacan is thus able to deliver a radical critique of forms of assumption of our apparent autonomy, and to reveal the repression of the work coming into place which alone can support any presumed detachment from the symbolic orders in which we are constituted. (Ibid.,69)

> autoeroticism which accompanies hallucination . . . . Because it gives figuration a free reign, totemic religion (noble savagery) is an expression of the pleasure principle or, like art, at least of its reconciliation with the reality principle. It must be classed as one of the products of phantasy, of the avoidance of reality . . . . (1989, 72)

The evolution of the "phantasy" of the paradisal, rooted in totemic/pagan religions, is simultaneous with a devaluation and rejection of Judaism, to which Freud and Lyotard contrast them. This is done under a spiritual compulsion, the syntax and meaning of which correspond to the psychological disorders discussed in the works of Freud and Lacan. This analogy should not be pushed too far, since it is rooted not merely in the psyche of the author of the *Cantos*. Moreover, a conventional "psychological" interpretation of Pound would be of little use here, unless everything that went into the formation of that psyche—spanning from religious and political ideology to the most intimate experiences—is included. The implications of Pound's anti-Semitism can be fully understood only in its religious context. What is involved here is not just a "suburban prejudice" but the rejection of the religion of the Father in favor of a religion, not exactly of the mother, but an assortment of metamorphosing deities. The religion of the Son is accepted, precisely to the extent that the elements of paganism are allowed to seep into it. The consequences of these choices become most clearly perceptible in the attempts to envision paradise. The first thing that strikes the reader of Pound's paradise is that the much emphasized "*sense of gradations*" (Pound, 1973, 120) is obscured in this realm, to put it mildly. A look at the passage where this phrase appears would clarify the point further. In his essay on the Jefferson-Adams correspondence, Pound

quotes a line from Dante's *Paradiso*, "in una parte piu e meno altrove" (Pound, 1973, 120) and comments:

> Which detached phrase I had best translate by explaining that I take it to mean *a sense of gradations*. Things neither perfect nor utterly wrong, but arranged in a cosmos, an order, stratified, having relations with one another. (Pound, 1973, 120)

He is discussing the "Mediterranean paideuma," a "modus of order 'arose' out of Sparta" which "developed a system of graduations, an hierarchy of values among which was, perhaps above all other, 'order.'" The "clearest formulation" of this civilization, as per his "present line of measurement is the line from *Paradiso* cited above. The lines, "Ecbatan / City of patterned streets" (1987, 17) evidently refer to this sense of gradations. The streets of Pound's celestial city, to judge by appearances, are not "patterned," like those of Ecbatan. The problem is that Pound cannot accept the "Aquinas map" implicit in Dante, which places God the Father at the center of the cosmos. The stanza in Dante from which Pound quotes makes this explicit:

> The glory of the One who moves all things
> permeates the universe and glows
> in one part more and in another less. (*Par.*, I.1-3)

In his paradiso Pound attempts use this schema with one major alteration: "the One who moves all things," has no place in it and is dethroned. This dethroning is engineered in two ways: by making him one among many, as in XCI,

The golden sun boat

by oar, not by sail

Love moving the stars [para bomion (beside the altar)]

by the altar slope

"Tamuz! Tamuz!" (1987, 626)

and by attacking His text. In the same essay, Pound holds the Bible responsible for the decline of the "Mediterranean paideuma: "

> The Mediterranean paideuma fell before, or coincided with, the onslaught of brute disorder of taboo . . . . Certain things were 'forbidden'. Specifically, on parchment, they were forbidden to Hebrews. The bible emerged and broke the Church Fathers, who had for centuries quoted the bible. All sense of fine assay seemed to decline in Europe. (Pound, 1973, 120)

It should be noted that among these forbidden things, one of the most important is the "graven image." The partial use of Dante's ordered cosmos (i.e., less the "Aquinas map" lands Pound in insurmountable difficulties. He has to use the image of light and, at the same time, he has to exclude the One, the source of this light from the schema of paradise. The Confucian-Eleusinian-Platonic alternative Pound evolves does not (and cannot) move beyond the created cosmos (to be precise, the cosmos that is still in the process of creation) and reach toward the source of everything, the irreducibly Other. Pound's earth-and-sky-gods cannot carry him far because they are as part of creation as he himself is. Representing merely the component-energies of the cosmos, these deities cannot function as a unifying energy – even in the paradise of the poem, whose light is

merely a reflection. This paradise has no nucleus, no centripetal energy to hold it together. Pound's gods "moving in crystal" (1987, 625) float aimlessly. Like their deities, the *Cantos* drift on, until their inherent fragmentation becomes literal in "Drafts and Fragments." The resultant disorder corresponds (though this does not take place in the realm of the psyche) to the derangement caused by what Lacan calls the rejection of the Name-of-the-Father i.e., the Symbolic Father or "the Lord with the unpronounceable name."[111] In his essay, "On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis," Lacan asserts that "the Other[112] is the locus of . . . the unconscious" which is regarded as "the object of a question that has remained open in that it conditions the indestructibility of certain desires." He addresses the question in terms of "the conception of the signifying chain" which develops "in accordance with logical links whose grasp on that which is to be signified, namely the being . . . and the existent . . . operates through the effects of the signifier," metaphor and metonymy. Lacan continues:

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[111] J. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* Ed. J. A. Miller, tr. A. Sheridan (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977) 248. "The Lord with the unpronounceable name" is "I am who I am," or Yahweh, though Lacan's primary meaning is not religious.

[112] It must be noted that though Lacan's "Other," is different from Lévinas's, it nevertheless challenges the complacent Hegelian resolution of the opposites in subjective monologue, in its references to the phenomenon in the subject-other relationship as well as in its absolute alterity. Mark C. Taylor observes:

> The real, Lacan maintains, is *unassimilable* (*Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 55). This radical Other is "a pure negativity" (*Ecrits*, 95). Unlike the Hegalian negative, which through the magical power of self-consciousness is transformed into something positive, Lacanian negativity resists assimilation and incorporation. (1987 94)

> It is in an accident in this register and what takes place in it, namely, the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father in the place of the Other, and in the failure of the paternal metaphor, that I designate the defect that gives psychosis its essential condition . . . .
>
> For the psychosis to be triggered off, the Name-of-the-Father, *verworfen*, foreclosed, that is to say, never having attained the place of the Other, must be called into symbolic opposition to the subject.
>
> It is the lack of the Name-of-the-Father in that place which, by the hole that it opens up in the signified, sets off the cascade of reshaping of the signifier from which the increasing disaster of the imaginary proceeds, to the point at which the level is reached at which the signifier and the signified are stabilized in the delusional metaphor. (1989, 215-17)

When the Name-of-the-Father is rejected, the symbolic order which structures psychic health is disrupted. In this the state of delusion in which signifier and signified are indistinguishably blended, language receives a severe jolt. Along with this collapse of language, the network of codes which preserve order in the various domains of the psyche becomes dysfunctional. When, at the next phase, this state of isolation and delusion threatens to dissolve or confuse the corresponding codes in the social, cultural and economic realms (and this is inevitable) the disruption is complete. The suggestion is not that Pound was suffering from psychosis and that and the problems of the *Cantos* can be traced back to the delusions that are inevitable in this disorder. In fact, the disorder that undermines the poem did not originate in Pound's psyche, though he is responsible for it to an extent by deliberately adopting certain stances—political, cultural and religious—which invoked the forces of disruption. In this, he was neither a free

agent (as per the Sartrean notion regarding the freedom to choose) nor an innocent victim (in his subjection to socioeconomic forces, as Marxism would have it). Yet, he is not free from the spectrum that ranges from freedom to subjection. Moreover, he cannot be condemned or pardoned before ascertaining the degree to which he was aware of the implications of these stances, which is an extremely difficult task indeed. Yet this much is clear: the *Cantos* suffers from a malady that corresponds to the one mentioned above, but on a level that is deeper than the psychic. As argued in what went before, it is a political, moral and above all a spiritual malady. Having no nucleus and centripetal energy, the *Cantos* cannot evolve or maintain a spiritual order. Since the codes of what tends towards such an order remain self-referential and reflexive, a breakdown in communication resembling the one in psychosis is inevitable. This explains, largely, the "delusional metaphors" which dominate the poem. Moreover, since the causes for the fragmentation in political-moral vision is found resident ultimately in its religious counterpart, it may safely be concluded that the syndrome is a spiritual one. The *Cantos* is wrecked by what may be called the psychosis of the soul. A widespread disorder that tends to keep its symptoms hidden because of its penchant for reducing the Other to sameness, it becomes so conspicuous in the *Cantos* because it brings to the forefront the tools which make such reduction possible. In this sense, it reveals the nature and fortunes of at least one offshoot of the tradition of rational discourse that marked the emergence of the Enlightenment subjectivity.

In Conclusion

Mohandas C.B. “The Poetry of the Process: a Study of the Cantos of Ezra Pound ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 1999

In Conclusion

D. – Are you not forgetting something?
B. – Surely that is enough?
D. – I understood your number was to have two parts. The first was to consist in your saying what you – er – thought. This I am prepared to believe you have done. The second–
B. – *(Remembering, warmly)* Yes, yes, I am mistaken, I am mistaken (S. Beckett, *Disjecta*, 145).

Not many readers of Pound find it easy to reconcile themselves with the *Cantos* unquestioningly. On the other hand, it is important not to dismiss them with a simple gesture of disgust or disapproval. The *Cantos* is a poem that mirrors the "noble" aspirations of an age and the sinister consequences of these. The aesthetic and moral enigmas it spells out are the enigmas of the time. For these are not questions that refer merely to a particular point in history in which the wildest fantasies of an obscured realm in the mind were acted out in obscure arenas with the accompaniment of morbid blood-rites. The desires, which fuelled these rites, are still powerful; they merely remain suppressed. Consequently, mere condemnation of such happenings does not make anybody immune from the guilt of involvement. So, a gesture that dismisses the *Cantos* as someone else's nightmare would be self-deceptive and unrealistic, to say the least. It should be emphasized that the attempt made in this study is not to judge the *Cantos* and bury it along with the unpleasant remnants of the upsurge of tyranny in the twentieth century. The objective was rather to identify some of the significant factors in the en-

tanglement of one of the most seductive literary texts of the era with the sinister games of power. The concentration of poetic vigor that animates the *Cantos* and the intensely seductive nature of its allures make such an inquiry extremely important, from both the ideological and aesthetic perspectives.

The basic task was to place the *Cantos* within the context of the evolving rational subjectivity that constituted the Enlightenment. In spite of the seemingly irrational surface of the *Cantos* and its commitment to the pre-modern ways of thought, it was argued, it shares the common premises and objectives of the Enlightenment. Systems created during this period proceed by trying to spell out a master code using which the totality of existence could be handled. In Pound's poem, this function is fulfilled by the concept of the Process, which brings under its scope of reference every other code that encrypts the knowable and thus effects domination. It was further pointed out that every project that proceeds by such cryptograms of similarity encounters the problem of tackling an Other that bears no signs of similitude and thus remains irreducible. The Enlightenment's characteristic way of solving this problem was the creation of a concept/image of the other in rational terms (often christening it as the irrational) and absorbing the concept/image into the fabric of its discourse. The *Cantos* does the same thing and its heavy dependence on the *images* of the pre-modern spiritual cults does not alter this since these cults too originated in the reasoning mind in an attempt to comprehend the life world and dominate it.

The *Cantos* shares the Enlightenment's dream of an ideal republic as well—the pro-

tagonist's "sailing after knowledge" is part of a design that ensures his return to an Ithaca where political order is to be re-established. This dream reached its conceptual heights in the thought of Hegel to which the nightmarish utopias of the twentieth century—both Marxian and fascist—may be traced back. In spite of its distaste for abstract thought, the *Cantos* does not manage to evade the ideological milieu, which scripted the emergence of the modern tyrannies. In fact, it is so deeply entrenched in the tradition of the Enlightenment that no attempt is made to move away from the terrible consequences of utopian dreaming the century witnessed. It should shock no one that it embraced fascism: the combination Pound's versions of Confucianism and Eleusinian arcana logically leads a system of power like the one that was legitimized in Mussolini's Italy. Moreover, the correspondence is not limited to the level of ideology. With its insistence upon the concrete *image*, the narrative of the *Cantos* parallels the eulogized narrative of fascism, which centers on the *image* of the leader. The aestheticized politics of fascism corresponds to the aestheticized religion the poem evolves, which, for Pound, was the most effective way of checking the "verminous" influence of the Semitic religions, especially Judaism. It was pointed out that the poem's war against usury is not confined to the realm of political economy: Pound targets the very foundations of Judaic faith, including its abhorrence of idols. Pound, in conformity to the tradition of the Enlightenment with its preference for the materiality of the knowable, envisioned a cult that worships deities ranging from Dionysus to Mussolini. It was further argued that the idol, caught in a self-referential web, functions like a fetish object in psycho-dynamics. As a surrogate object that obscures and often displaces a real one, the idol offers protection from the threat of the irreducible-Other.

The last chapter argued that the incoherence of the poem might be traced back to the fragmentation that results from an adherence to the fetishist spirituality that sustains it. Intellectual coherence, one of the fundamental ambitions of the modern rational subject, is thwarted by the resurgence of the very elements suppressed in order to make such a dream of coherence possible. The consequent disorder, it was concluded, was a psychosis of the spirit, which confuses the signifier with the signified.

Such a breakdown of communication, it must be remembered, is not confined to the *Cantos* or to the literary works that belong to the same class. In the cultural milieu of the present, every ideal is reduced to a fetish, and it is not easy to set oneself free from the driving force of this reductionism. Even those who rebel against it, it is interesting to note, are in the danger of speaking the same language.

The discourse that combines "primitive" and modern elements to attain a high degree of seductiveness is not alien to the environment in which this study was conducted. The concept of nationhood that is activated in it, with minor operational differences, rests on devices like those that are employed in Poundworld. The reference is to the organized prominence of idolized deities and ritualized violence that characterize the political life of this country, in the present decade. Although I did not dwell upon such correspondences, they always loomed in the background, in a manner that borders on the macabre.

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