THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FEMALE IN THE POETRY OF EZRA POUND

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will suggest, by citing and describing five examples, that "the female," as a symbol, as an abstraction or as an historical reality, is an important aspect of Ezra Pound's poetry.

I examine woman and sexuality in *Mauberley*, in which there is a gradual realization of the connection between artistic stultification and sexual frustration. This connection between woman and aesthetics is also discussed in Chapter Two, which traces Pound's metaphor of "the female chaos" in his poems, essays and letters. Largely under the influence of De Gourmont, Pound sees "the female" as a chaos which the artist must order into form.

The third chapter is an analysis of two of Pound's historical *personae*, Bertrans de Born and Sextus Propertius in relation to their respective mistresses. Both "Near Perigord" and *Homage to Sextus Propertius* seem to state the opposition between female passivity and male activity and between love and political expediency, but this apparent polarization is complicated by various, interwoven concerns.

The final two chapters of the thesis discuss the female mythological figures of the *Cantos*, beginning with the ambivalent benevolent and malevolent forces represented by Helen, Diana and Circe in the earlier *Cantos*. The last chapter is concerned with Pound's assertion of the value of the fertility goddesses and cults in Canto XLVII and in *The Pisan Cantos*. The goddesses Aphrodite, Demeter, Persephone and Gea

Tella are a vital part of the attempt to regain composure and hope in *The Pisan Cantos*. The thesis ends with a discussion of Pound's belief in the Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter, especially in relation to the "lynx" passage of Canto LXXIX.

Examining Committee: _

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Chiefest of these the second, the female
Is an element, the female
Is a chaos

- Canto XXIX

INTRODUCTION

The three major poets of the twentieth century all recognized a certain energy, or individuating force, which lay beyond art and beyond reality. For Yeats this energy was the dance, for Eliot "the still point of the turning world," for Pound the vortex.[1] In *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir*, Pound describes the vortex as "'the point of maximum energy'"[2] and as ". . . a radiant node or cluster . . . from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing."[3] Certain symbols, figures and motifs in Pound's poetry could be described as vortices, or "nodes" of focus where concepts and beliefs are concentrated. One elemental, pervasive vortex is the female. My thesis will suggest the importance of woman as a means of expressing, embodying and focusing many of the vital issues and values in Pound's work.

Although the "vortices" of the female, and of the sexuality associated with her, extend from the ethereal idealization of woman in Pound's early Pre-Raphaelite poetry to the goddesses of *Thrones* and *Rock Drill*, the scope of my study has necessarily been limited to the more significant aspects of this "node or cluster." Pound's early, Rossettian idealization of woman, his interpretation of the Provençal love ethic, his interest in Cavalcanti's "intellectual" love poem "Donna Mi Prega"[4] and the unsentimental delicacy of the sexual relationships in *Cathay* or *The Confucian Odes* all merit separate studies.

The opening chapter of my thesis is concerned with Pound's use of the female as a vortex which focuses his view of the relation between

art and sexuality in *Mauberley*. The chapter will outline the sexual themes in *Mauberley* and evaluate these themes through a comparison of the women in Pound's poem with those of *The Waste Land*. In Pound's earlier poetry and in the *Cantos*, the relation between art and sexuality is elaborated through one of his most unusual metaphors, in which "the female" is seen as a "chaos" which must be ordered into artistic form. Again woman could be described as a vortex, an abstract figure who embodies Pound's changing, and often confusing, view of order and chaos. Pound is not concerned with woman herself, but with concepts "the female" may represent.

The third section is an examination of two of the "heroes" of Pound's Provençal and Latin translations, Bertrans de Born and Sextus Propertius, through the "vortex" of their attitude towards love and towards their respective lovers, the Lady Maent and Cynthia. In "Near Perigord" and *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, woman becomes a means of focusing Pound's view of the interaction between male activity and female passivity and of the conflict between love and political expediency. Lady Maent and Cynthia are predominantly passive figures, usually seen in relation to the male lovers.

Once Pound progresses beyond this limited use of historical or contemporary female figures to the more colourful, mystical realm of the mythological goddesses in the *Cantos*, his view of the female gains a new dimension. In the earlier *Cantos*, Diana, Helen and Circe embody an intentional ambivalence between benevolent and malevolent forces. This ambivalence is most forcibly represented by Circe, who seduces Odysseus and enchants his crew, but who also guides him towards spiritual regen-

eration. These goddesses can also be seen as "vortices," figures who embody Pound's belief in the coexistence of good and evil, of creative and destructive impulses.

The final section of my thesis will describe and examine the fertility rituals of Canto XLVII and of *The Pisan Cantos,* especially in relation to the goddesses Aphrodite, Gea Tella, Persephone and Demeter. I will also attempt to analyze the connection between Pound's "belief" in the ancient Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter, the goddess of the earth and harvest, and the lynx passages of Canto LXXIX. This "VORTEX OF FECUNDITY"[5] is the most convincing assertion of seasonal rebirth in the *Cantos.*

At the outset I should stress that, at least in his poetry, Pound is rarely concerned either with the sociological aspects of woman or with the women he knew through his life. He shows relatively little interest in contemporary woman. His attempts to satirize modern woman, as in "The Garden,"[6] "Moeurs Contemporaines"[7] or "the old woman from Kansas" passage in Canto XXVIII,[8] often become trite and reductive.[9] Subjects like the suffragette movement[10] and the work of Florence Nightingale[11] are mentioned only in his prose. Similarly, Pound's view of the female has little relation to autobiography. In a letter written in 1932 he states that ". . . personal love poetry [is] neither in *Cantos* nor in any Epos . . . even (say) Beatrice in the *Commedia*."[12] Of course his poetry may have been written for one of the women he knew: the lynx passage of Canto LXXIX was written for his wife, Dorothy.[13] But Pound's personal relationships with Dorothy,[14] with his mistress

Olga Rudge,[15] with his mother[16] and with his daughter[17] are remote from the mythological world of the *Cantos*.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The vortex is most easily visualized in the form of a whirlpool. The whirlpool cannot be merely described in terms of water, or air, or shape, or speed; it is a very specific, unique energy which is merely recognized by these components. Similarly the female is the manifestation, the recognizable form, for several concepts in Pound's work.

Hugh Kenner sees this unique force as "a patterned energy made visible by the water" and likens it to the knot: "The knot is neither hemp nor cotton nor nylon: is not the rope. The knot is *patterned integrity*. The rope renders it visible." See Hugh Kenner, "The Rope in the Knot," *Kentucky Review*, 2, No. 3 (1968), 10-29.

[2]Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 81.

[3]Ibid., p. 92.

[4]Ezra Pound, *Collected Shorter Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 265.

[5]*Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir*, p. 23.

[6]*Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 93.

[7]Ibid., p. 196.

[8]Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 135.

[9]Richard Giannone has shown how Pound's "Portrait d'une Femme" compares unfavourably with Eliot's "Portrait of a Lady." See Richard J. Gianonne, "Eliot's 'Portrait of a Lady' and Pound's 'Portrait d'une Femme'," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 5, No. 3 (Oct. 1959), 131-34.

[10]In his article on suffragettes Pound agrees with franchise for women, but says: "The suffragettes as a body are foolish, not only because they demand a shadow, but because of their tactics. They seem to have very little intellect back of their campaign. . . ." See Ezra Pound, "Suffragettes," *The Egoist*, 1, No. 13 (1 July 1914), 255.

[11]Ezra Pound, *Instigations* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1967), p. 227.

[12]Ezra Pound, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: New Directions, 1971), p. 240.

[13]See Hugh Kenner, "D.P. Remembered," *Paideuma*, 2, No. 3 (Winter 1973), 491.

[14]Through her mother, Olivia Shakespear, who was a close friend of Yeats, Dorothy became part of the London artistic scene of the first decade, herself an amateur artist. She became engaged to Pound in 1914 and married him on 20 April at St. Mary Abbots. For many years of their married life, Pound loved, and lived with, the violinist Olga Rudge. Dorothy seems to have treated this relationship with her usual reserve and sense of decorum. Although Pound, Dorothy and Olga all lived in a small house at Sant' Ambrogio during the war years, in later life Dorothy seemed to preserve a distance between herself and Olga. According to Hugh Kenner, she "remained aloof" from modern changes and she ". . . behaved as she would have behaved had nothing changed, without effort asserting simply her habitual presence." See "D.P. Remembered," pp. 485-93, and Noel Stock, *The Life of Ezra Pound* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), pp. 153-55.

[15]Olga Rudge was an accomplished and successful violinist, who became Pound's lover. In 1923 they travelled together to the Italian Tyrol, where Olga gave birth to Pound's daughter, Mary. She played a key part in the music festivals held at Rapallo from 1933 to 1934 and in the revival of interest in Vivaldi. The 1939 Vivaldi festival, the Siena "Settimana Vivaldiana," and the catalogue of Vivaldi's work, were mainly brought about through the efforts of Olga Rudge. See Stephen Adams, "Pound, Olga Rudge, and the 'Risveglio Vivaldiano'," *Paideuma*, 4, No. 1 (Spring 1975), 111-18.

Pound had another mistress, the Englishwoman Bride Scratton, who he knew for several years. He was named as corespondent in her divorce. See Stock, pp. 243-44.

[16]According to his wife, Pound regarded his mother, Isabel Pound, as "the most discerning person in her rather limited Philadelphia environment." She was of "high society," formal, with a general interest in "cultural" activities. See Michael Reck, *Ezra Pound: A Close-Up* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), pp. 4-6.

[17]While Pound's son by Dorothy, Omar, seems to have been virtually ignored by Pound, Miss Rudge's daughter Mary was always a favourite. She was brought up in the Tyrolean village of Gais by a local peasant woman, educated in Florence, and later translated the *Cantos* into Italian. She married Prince Boris de Rachewiltz and lived in the castle at Brunnenburg, which eventually became a centre of Poundian studies. See Mary de Rachewiltz, *Discretions* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971), and Stock, pp. 388-89.

CHAPTER I

SEXUALITY AND ART IN *HUGH SELWYN MAUBERLEY*

The first significant use of the female as a means to focus Pound's view of the relation between art and sexuality occurs in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, written in 1920. The sexuality in the sequence ranges from the oblique references of the first poem to the more specific figures of the Pre-Raphaelite model, the "'Conservatrix of Milésien'," the Lady Valentine and the antithetical women of "Envoi" and "Medallion." Prior to *Mauberley* the connection between art and woman is largely derivative, often taking the form of the traditional invocation of the Muse. In "Praise of Ysolt," which was influenced by Rossetti, Swinburne and Yeats, "woman" is the source of inspiration:[1]

> And I 'I have no song',
> Till my soul sent a woman as the sun:
> Yea as the sun calleth to the seed,
> As the spring upon the bough
> So is she that cometh, the mother of songs
> (*Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 31)

In *Mauberley* there is a new subtlety and complexity to Pound's discussion of sexuality and art. One example of this complexity is the ironical use of both literary and sexual terminology to imply vacuous aestheticism and sterility. Throughout *Mauberley* the references to poetry are ironical, continually reduced to the "'sculpture' of rhyme" and Lady Valentine's "border of ideas." In "Yeux Glauques," which is concerned with the vague aesthetics of the Pre-Raphaelites, the relation between artistic stultification and perverse or self-conscious sexuality

is paradoxically implied through phrases like "a pastime for/ Painters and adulterers" and "her last maquero's/ Adulteries." The "faun's head" is the Rossettian, abstracted counterpart of the pagan, sensual "Faun's flesh" in part II, and Elizabeth Siddal, the model, is "vacant," "Questing and passive." Both art and beauty have become remote from physical experience. At the beginning of the sequence, in part II, the word "ambrosial" is simply descriptive, suggesting the apparently ideal pagan world; but when the word recurs later in *Mauberley,* the sexual, pastoral connotations of the word imply only the thwarted, unfulfilled sexuality of the persona-poet Mauberley:

> For three years, diabolus in the scale,
> He drank ambrosia
> (*Collected Shorter Poems,* p. 217)

> A Minoan undulation,
> Seen, we admit, amid ambrosial circumstances
> (*Collected Shorter Poems,* p. 219)

Similarly, in part XI, the word "instinct" implies only its opposite, the absence of instinct, and, in part XII, Lady Valentine's name and words such as "stimulate" are again part of the poem's irony, for the Lady is preoccupied with the trivia of "the stuffed-satin drawing-room" and the "well-gowned approbation/ Of literary effort." Only the exterior trimmings of both "poetry" and "passion" exist for Lady Valentine. Paradoxically, the beauty of the unnamed woman of "Envoi," the only sensual woman in *Mauberley,* is not described through explicitly sexual terminology, but through more abstract references to colour and magic. In fact, the sexual vocabulary of *Mauberley* is *only* used ironically.

Even so, the sexual connotations become more apparent and more incisive as the poem progresses, and, for this reason, I feel *Mauberley*

must be examined as a sequence rather than as a convergence of themes.

In the first poem, the dichotomy between sexuality and aestheticism is implied obliquely, and cannot be fully appreciated without reference to exterior sources and to several of Pound's other works. As the title indicates, the poem is concerned with the burial of "E.P." and with the need "to resuscitate the dead art/ Of poetry." The subtle relation between sensuality and this concern with aesthetics is inferred in the second stanza:

> No, hardly, but seeing he had been born -
> In a half savage country, out of date;
> Bent resolutely on wringing lilies from the acorn;
> Capaneus; trout for factitious bait;

The reader has already been attracted into the illusion that the "he," or "E.P.," is a heroic figure, unsuccessfully striving against "his time" and the "half savage country." The "lilies" are presumably preferable to the "acorn." Yet, beyond the surface attraction of the tense, presumptuous language, the sound, rather than the sense, of the words "Bent resolutely" and "wringing" introduces an element of doubt, a questioning of the value of the lilies. After all, this apparent hero has failed, has already been buried. On one level the lilies represent the beautiful poem and the acorn represents the imperfection of "reality," of experience, but, beyond this interpretation, the acorn has a further, physical significance. For, as J. J. Espey has pointed out,[2] the acorn means "*glans* in Latin and *gland* in French." Through the opposition between the lilies and the acorn, the line is thus indirectly concerned with aestheticism and sexuality, a concern which serves as a prologue to the more explicit sexual references in the later poems of *Mauberley*. For

the acorn seems to introduce the first flaw into "E.P."'s aestheticism; he is now associated with the futility of Capaneus' gesture of revolt.[3] He has overemphasized the transient prettiness of the lilies at the expense of the acorn, the symbol of natural sensuality, growth and experience.

A full understanding of the word "acorn" in this context necessitates reference to Pound's other poems and prose statements. In the lynx passage of *The Pisan Cantos*, for example, the "acorns" are the antithesis of the rose, for the rose seems to signify the same temporal attraction as the lilies of *Mauberley:*

> Will you trade roses for acorns
> Will lynxes eat thorn leaves?
> (*Cantos*, p. 491)

The acorn is a seed, a beginning; for, as Fenollosa says, "The forces which produce the branch-angles of an oak lay potent in the acorn."[4] In the later *Cantos* the acorn is linked with the most pervasive symbol of life and continuity, light:

> I have brought the great ball of crystal;
> who can lift it?
> Can you enter the great acorn of light?
> (*Cantos*, p. 795)

The significance of the acorn in *Mauberley* is heavily disguised, but it is one of Pound's first assertions of a fundamental life-force, of instinct and fecundity. The antithesis of this life-force is futile, indulgent aestheticism.

Stanza four also admits a dual interpretation. The aestheticism implied by the phrase "the elegance of Circe's hair" is apparently opposed to the symbol of fidelity, Penelope, and to the moral responsibility and

commitment represented by the "mottoes on sun-dials":

> His true Penelope was Flaubert,
> He fished by obstinate isles;
> Observed the elegance of Circe's hair
> Rather than the mottoes on sun-dials.

Yet the complexities of language and the interplay of personae in *Mauberley* may indicate a further meaning; the criticism of the "hair" may be another illusion of the buried "E.P." Circe is an enchantress, but she is also Odysseus' lover, a symbol of sexuality. Although it is implied that the "elegance" should be avoided, the hair not only signifies aestheticism, but also the antithesis of the sterile "mottoes," sensuality. The sensuality is attractive, impelling a response.

The oblique implications of the value of sexuality in part I become more explicit in the third poem, which is one of Pound's first expressions of his neo-pagan beliefs. The vapid present is compared to the "ambrosial" era of Dionysus. References to "Sappho's barbitos" and "the mousseline of Cos" link art, the literature of Greece, with sexuality and with woman, for Sappho's idyllic world has been replaced by the mechanical pianola and the "tea-rose tea-gown." The unashamed pagan fertility cults of "Dionysus/ Phallic and ambrosial" have been followed only by the asceticism and "macerations"[5] of Christianity. In the later poem "'Siena Mi Fe'; Disfecemi Maremma," there is a similar opposition between the Church and the gods Bacchus and Terpsichore:[6]

> With raptures for Bacchus, Terpsichore and the Church.
> So spoke the author of 'The Dorian Mood'

In part III, Pound continues his catalogue of the ills of the present and the ideals of the past: Christian beauty is as extinct as the cults of Samothrace;[7] τὸ καλόν, "the beautiful," is now sold "in the market

place"; modern man can neither appreciate pagan sensuality, the "Faun's flesh," nor the Christian "saint's vision"; the wafer of communion has been replaced by the printing press; the right to vote has supplanted circumcision, the initiation to religious life. But somehow Pound's ideal of Bacchic, spontaneous love seems a little naive; the "elegance of Circe's hair" is more incisive than these overstated and dramatized comparisons.

Like Elizabeth Siddal, the woman of poem XI is afflicted with passivity and *ennui,* for although the focus has shifted to contemporary woman, the poem implies the same betrayal of instinct. As Donald Davie points out,[8] in his letters[9] Pound equates the phrase "'Conservatrice des traditions Milesienne'"[10] with Maud Gonne, the object of Yeats's unrequited love.[11] The possible connection with Yeats and Ireland is interesting, but the languor of part XI seems remote from the revolutionary antics of Maud Gonne. "'Milésien'" is derived from Miletus, a city of Asia Minor and *The Milesian Tales* were "a class of voluptuous romances mentioned by ancient writers."[12] Again the nuance of voluptuousness is used ironically. Living "with" the "most bank-clerkly of Englishmen," the "'Conservatrix'" has only the possibility of "Habits of mind and feeling," not of physical sensations.

In the second stanza Pound/Mauberley admits the irony of "'Milésien'." The instinct of *The Milesian Tales* is lost, substituted by the Victorian sensibilities of the grandmother. There is an intentional awkwardness in the position of "Possibly," in "Older than those" and in incisive rhymes like "exaggeration"/ "her station," which emphasize the sterility of the woman's life. Rhyme patterns are an essential part

of the opposition between sexuality and sterility, for the licentious connotations of "'Milésien'" are coupled with the officious "Englishmen," and "feeling" is negated by the mundane, suburban "Ealing."

Repressed sensuality is also examined in part XII, but the tone has become more pathetic, even tragic, and any sexual overtones are more closely integrated with aestheticism. The quotation with which the poem begins[13] and the reference to Daphne implies both metamorphosis and simultaneously a flight from Apollo's sexuality. The triviality of Lady Valentine's "drawing-room" is related to art and aesthetics, to her "well-gowned approbation/ Of literary effort." But whereas the Lady knows "precisely" her standards of tasteful dress and evaluates her friends by their choice of coat, her view of poetry is vague and uncritical:

> Poetry, her border of ideas,
> The edge, uncertain, but a means of blending
> With other strata
> Where the lower and higher have ending;

She can only define poetry in terms of social utility: "A hook to catch the Lady Jane's attention" and "A possible friend and comforter." Lady Valentine's inability to respond either to sexuality or to art is not resolved, and the poem's focus abruptly shifts to a comparison of the past, Johnson's and Sappho's world, with the present, the "sale of half-hose."

For the first time in *Mauberley* the relation between the protagonist's artistic failure and his sexual frustration has been explicitly stated. Prior to this poem the references to Circe, Dionysus or "'Milésien'" are apparently "objective," but the "I" of poem XII, who is

presumably Mauberley, admits his desire, his need for a "durable passion." Art must involve, and partly originate from, physical and sensual experience.

The poem also encourages a sympathy for the persona Mauberley, whose pathetic, perhaps tragic, stance results from the rejection by Lady Valentine, a woman who remains asexual and anonymous. In Eliot's "Portrait of a Lady" the emphasis is reversed, for the narrator is incapable of giving "friendship" and "sympathy," while the Lady eventually becomes a tragic, isolated figure:

> Well! and what if she should die some afternoon,
> Afternoon grey and smoky, evening yellow and rose;[14]

While Eliot's Lady signifies the failure of human relationships, Pound's portrait of Lady Valentine is limited to his examination of repressed sexuality and social neuroses.

Whereas the majority of the poems in *Mauberley* are concerned with the absence of beauty, "Envoi" is about beauty itself, thus set apart from Mauberley's futile analysis of himself and of his environment. A lyric in the English song tradition, it is a pastiche of Waller's "Go Lovely Rose," and its subject is the traditional assertion of the immortality of art. The woman of "Envoi" is remote from the "'Conservatrix'" or Lady Valentine; her beauty, desirability and sensuality are simply presumed:

> I would bid them live
> As roses might, in magic amber laid,
> Red overwrought with orange and all made
> One substance and one colour
> Braving time.

Like the poem itself, the view of woman in "Envoi" is an anomaly within *Mauberley*. The concern with time and with the permanence of art is shelved in the second part of the sequence, "Mauberley 1920," in which art becomes merely "an art/ In profile" and female beauty is "Colourless." As in the first section of *Mauberley,* artistic mediocrity is continually paralleled by sexual inadequacy: in the first poem Jacquemart, the engraver, is linked with Messalina, "one of the most profligate Roman empresses"[15] and in "'The Age Demanded'" the sensual attraction of "the lion-coloured sand" disturbs only Mauberley's "imagery."

Section II of "Mauberley 1920" is Mauberley's final, desperate struggle to assert his own sexuality, and as such is a key poem in the sequence. Although, as far as "themes" are concerned, it occupies a central position in *Mauberley,* the allusions are too numerous and esoteric, the lines too fragmented and uneven.[16] The pathos of the Lady Valentine episode has become hysteria. The epigraph, which is itself concerned with "l'amour," is not written under the guise of a persona, but is a statement by Pound through his pseudonym "Caid Ali."[17] The comprehension of poetry and of "musique" is equated with "l'amour," with the physical sensations produced by "la rose" and "le parfum des violettes," but the references to "ambrosia," "ANANGKE," "Arcadia" and "her phantasmagoria" in the poem itself are only used ironically. For Mauberley is out of tune, the "diabolus in the scale."[18] "ANANGKE" is an oblique reference to Eros, for it is the Greek noun for "Necessity" and "it was during the reign of Necessity that Eros was born."[19] "NUKTIS 'AGALMA," meaning "night's jewel," is an allusion to Aphrodite.[20]

But Eros and Aphrodite are inaccessible to Mauberley, who can only drift through time, bewildered.

The sexual connotations continue through the poem: the orchid, for example, is one of the "aerial flowers," but it is also Greek for "testicle."[21] The allusion to the "mandate/ Of Eros" is paralleled by the "wide-branded irides," or irises, whose dilation suggests sexual arousal, and by the "botticellian sprays," which is a reference to Botticelli's "Birth of Venus."[22] Just as Mauberley's sexual interest is awakened, but unfulfilled, so his art is conceived, but stillborn; the "final estrangement" and "blankness" refers to Mauberley's failure to respond either to sexuality or to art. An examination of Pound's eccentric postscript to De Gourmont's *The Natural Philosophy of Love* indicates that the "sieve," the means of differentiating "TO AGATHON," "The Good," from the "chaff," has possible sexual overtones. In this postscript, Pound relates his strange notion of the "intimate connection between his sperm and his cerebration" to "the sieve or separator."[23]

Mauberley's ultimate "failure" is his substitution of vacant aestheticism for "'passion'":

> - Given that is his 'fundamental passion',
> This urge to convey the relation
> Of eye-lid and cheek-bone
> By verbal manifestation;

The "anaesthesis" finally produces the poised, anonymous and sexless woman of "Medallion," whose face, in contrast to the implicit sensuality and beauty of the woman of "Envoi," is encased beneath "the glaze" and the electric light. The "magic amber" of "Envoi" has become "intractable amber":

> Honey-red, closing the face-oval,
> A basket-work of braids which seem as if they were
> Spun in King Minos' hall
> From metal, or intractable amber;
> The face-oval beneath the glaze,
> Bright in its suave bounding-line, as,
> Beneath half-watt rays,
> The eyes turn topaz.

Integration between art and sexuality in *Mauberley* thus develops from the first oblique references, to the desperation of part XII of *Mauberley* and part II of "Mauberley 1920," to the final admittance of failure. But is it possible to evaluate *Mauberley* through an examination of this theme?

One valid approach to evaluation is comparison: following the example of several critics, it seems plausible to compare the view of woman in *Mauberley* with the female figures of *The Waste Land*. But before these differences can be discussed, certain prejudices of modern criticism must be purged.

Too often the presumption has been made that modern poetry is good when it approaches, or attains, "Waste Land" criteria or values. One Pound critic, Alice Amdur, says: "Pound felt the desiccation of modern life quite as strongly as Eliot, but not so sharply, nor could he realize its implications so broadly.[24] . . . Pound is vivid enough, but when we compare his laboriously accumulated filth with Eliot's stark 'That corpse you planted last year in the garden', we see the difference between a mind that hates and abuses and a mind that is horrified and can symbolize its horror in one unforgettable image. A river of water and disinfectant would wash away Pound's hell; Eliot's contagion is in the marrow of civilization."[25] Phrases like the "contagion . . . in the marrow of

civilization" are not only naive and melodramatic, but are also based on the fallacy that this so-called contagion should be the central concern of modern poetry. Clichés like "a world where the natural rhythms of life have broken down,"[26] "the rootless society of the twentieth century"[27] and "the great panorama of destruction that is our time"[28] pervade Pound criticism. Critical evaluation must allow flexibility in subject matter.[29]

While hoping to avoid too many generalizations and clichés, it is illuminating to compare the women of *Mauberley* with those of *The Waste Land*. In *Mauberley* Pound infers, through irony, through the asexuality or repression of sexuality in Elizabeth Siddal or Lady Valentine, the value of sexuality and of instinct. A woman, and her sensuality, are preserved in "Envoi." Walter Sutton's argument seems justified:

> Despite the appearance of perverted modern woman in *Mauberley* . . . the value of human love and of natural passion between man and woman remains a constant assumption. But in *The Waste Land* human love is lacking, and natural passion is depicted as sordid and bestial. . . . But Pound, for all the disillusionment with modern life revealed in *Mauberley*, turns at the end of both groups of poems to the image of woman as a symbol of a beauty and passion that are prized for their own sake and also recognized as the source of the motive power of the artist who would give them a continuing life in his work.[30]

Although Sutton prefers to ignore the strain of naivete in Pound's Dionysiac, romantic view of sexuality, it is true that the female in *Mauberley* is a life-force. In contrast, at least according to Eliot's *Notes*, the women of *The Waste Land* are theoretically fused into the androgynous Tiresias: "Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants,

melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias."[31] Whereas Eliot wishes to coalesce the women of his poem into an embracing, asexual figure, Pound is content to present his women as separate entities, who, largely through the use of irony, suggest the indispensability of the senses.

As in part XI and part XII of *Mauberley*, contemporary woman is satirized. But whereas the satirical view of woman in *Mauberley* is a paradoxical assertion of the value of sexuality, in *The Waste Land* sexuality is undesirable or simply vulgar:

> But at my back from time to time I hear
> The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
> Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring[32]

> Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
> Exploring hands encounter no defence;
> His vanity requires no response,
> And makes a welcome of indifference.[33]

While Eliot's lines are a renunciation of this type of sexuality, Pound's irony is an indirect affirmation:

> Knowing my coat has never been
> Of precisely the fashion
> To stimulate, in her,
> A durable passion;

Although Eliot only attempts to depict the more sordid aspects of sexuality, he does not offer a *physical* alternative or answer. Elizabeth and Leicester never married and their love was probably unconsummated; Cleopatra's sensuality becomes indulgence:

> Unguent, powdered, or liquid-troubled, confused
> And drowned the sense in odours . . .[34]

In contrast, the sensuality of the woman of "Envoi" is understated,

presumed, magical. Whereas Eliot reduces the post-war years to an easy, superficial satire, in which working class woman is only associated with adultery and abortion,[35] the war and its aftermath are the subject of the most explicit poem in *Mauberley:*

> walked eye-deep in hell
> believing in old men's lies, then unbelieving
> came home, home to a lie,
> home to many deceits,

So the women of *The Waste Land* theoretically become Tiresias, an "old man with wrinkled dugs" who has "foresuffered" sex:

> (And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
> Enacted on this same divan or bed;
> I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
> And walked among the lowest of the dead.)[36]

Tiresias may be Eliot's theoretical "answer" to social or spiritual evils, but he does not embody a resolution to human sexuality. This is not a criticism of Eliot, but more a description of one difference between *The Waste Land* and *Mauberley*. For the sensuality of the woman in "Envoi" is timeless. Paradoxically, the repressed "'Conservatrix'," the rarified beauty of the Pre-Raphaelite model and the embalmed face in "Medallion," together are one of the most convincing assertions of sexuality in Pound's work and in modern poetry. *Mauberley* is a vindication of physical experience, of the senses.

FOOTNOTES

[1]In the poem "Ortus," which means "birth" and so the birth of poetry, the vague, ethereal "she" signifies the poetic Muse:

> She is beautiful as the sunlight, and as fluid.
> She has no name, and no place.
> How have I laboured to bring her soul into separation;
> To give her a name and her being!

See *Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 93.

[2]John J. Espey, *Ezra Pound's* Mauberley: *A Study in Composition* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1955), p. 80.

[3]Capaneus, one of the Seven against Thebes, was struck down by Zeus for his pride.

[4]*Instigations*, p. 377.

[5]A wasting or softening process. See *OED*.

[6]The Muse of Dance.

[7]An island in the Aegean Sea.

[8]Donald Davie, *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 94-95.

[9]*Selected Letters 1907-1941*, pp. 140-41.

[10]As the letter indicates, the phrase "'Conservatrix of Milésien'" is derived from De Gourmont's *Histoires Magiques*. See K. K. Ruthven, *A Guide to Ezra Pound's* Personae (Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1969), p. 139.

[11]It is ironical that Yeats once compared Pound himself to Maud Gonne: "He has most of Maud Gonne's opinions (political and economic) about the world in general, being what Lewis calls 'the revolutionary simpleton'." See Stock, p. 274.

[12]*OED*.

[13]This is a translation of two lines from Gautier's poem "Le Château du Souvenir." See Théophile Gautier, *Émaux et Camées* (Lille: Librairie Giard, 1947), p. 105.

[14]T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 22.

[15]Ruthven, p. 142.

[16]Of course, more fanatic Pound devotees might argue that the difficulties and fragmentation are intentional, the voice of the persona. It could be argued, for instance, that the proliferation of "..." reflects Mauberley's desperation. But, as Pound himself would testify, "imitation" does not necessarily produce "good" poetry: "There are few fallacies more common than the opinion that poetry should mimic the daily speech. Works of art attract by a resembling unlikeness. Colloquial poetry is to the real art as the barber's wax dummy is to sculpture. In every art I can think of we are damned and clogged by the mimetic." See Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose 1909-1965* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 41-42.

[17]See Ruthven, p. 142.

[18]A note which "gave the medieval musicians great difficulty." See Ruthven, p. 143.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid., p. 144.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Rémy de Gourmont, *The Natural Philosophy of Love* (London: The Casanova Society, 1926), p. 180.

[24]Alice S. Amdur, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (1936; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), p. 63.

[25]Ibid., pp. 80-81.

[26]Peter Russell, *An Examination of Ezra Pound* (New York: Haskell House, 1968), p. 45.

[27]Walter Baumann, *The Rose in the Steel Dust* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1967), p. 36.

[28]Harold H. Watts, *Ezra Pound and the* Cantos (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 93.

[29]When comparing *Mauberley* and *The Waste Land,* Pound's comment should be remembered: "You don't sleep on a hammer or lawn-mower, you don't drive nails with a mattress. Why should people go on applying the SAME critical standards to writings as different in purpose and effect as a lawn-mower and a sofa cushion?" See Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 88.

[30]Walter Sutton, "*Mauberley, The Waste Land,* and the Problem of Unified Form," *Contemporary Literature,* 9, No. 1 (Winter 1968), 15-35.

[31]Eliot, p. 82.

[32]Ibid., p. 70.

[33]Ibid., p. 72.

[34]Ibid., p. 66.

[35]Ibid., pp. 68-69.

[36]Ibid., p. 72.

CHAPTER II

"THE FEMALE/IS A CHAOS":
POUND'S METAPHOR FOR CHAOS AND ORDER

In both his poetry and prose, Pound attempts to describe the creative process through the "metaphor" of the female. The artist who is, again metaphorically, "male," orders the "female" chaos into form. Ironically enough, when Pound discusses this aspect of art, the champion of linguistic precision is suddenly confronted with a barrage of abstractions. How exactly can we define "male," "female," "chaos" and "order"?

George Dekker says of Canto XXIX, in which woman is seen as a "chaos" and a "biological process": ". . . I believe that the brutal simplification of Canto XXIX is clearly uncharacteristic. His women are usually more than a 'chaos' or matter capable of receiving form."[1] But the three lines Dekker then cites from the end of Canto XXXIX have a different context and function than the passage in Canto XXIX. Nobody can doubt Pound's ability to describe woman's sensuality; Canto XXIX is not a literal assessment of "the female," but an attempt to describe art. This chapter will suggest that the metaphor in Canto XXIX, with several modifications, is frequently used by Pound to express the origins of artistic creation.

Except where the influence of Browning is prevalent, the women of Pound's earliest volumes, *A Lume Spento* and the "'San Trovaso' Notebook,"[2] are idealized, anonymous and often identified with the "Songs." Although

Pound often sees his "Muse" as female, the creative process is not described through any elaborate sexual metaphors. But two poems in these volumes are the germination of several passages in Pound's later prose and poetry, including the passage in Canto XXIX. The first is the Neo-Platonic poem "Plotinus":

> As one that would draw through the node of things,
> Back-sweeping to the vortex of the cone,
> Cloistered about with memories, alone
> In chaos, while the waiting silence sings:[3]

Apart from the Neo-Platonic associations, it is interesting to note phrases like "the node of things," "the vortex of the cone" and "alone/ In chaos." Pound is apparently speaking of "my essence" and "mine eternity," yet these phrases also prefigure the emphasis on "order" in two later theories of art. The vortex is essentially a delimitation of the "chaos," "a radiant node or cluster,"[4] and there is also a tentative connection between "alone/ In chaos, while the waiting silence sings" and ". . . the female/ Is a chaos . . . we seek to fulfill" in Canto XXIX. The "chaos" is ordered, and both the "waiting silence" and "our desire, drift" are "fulfilled." In "Ballad of Wine Skins," Pound more explicitly relates "chaos" to artistic "form":

> As winds through a round smooth knot-hole
> Make tune to the time of the storm,
> The cry of the bard in the half-light
> Is chaos bruised into form.[5]

Although "chaos" and "order" are not explicitly related to "the female," it seems that the metaphor of Canto XXIX was derived from these earlier formulations.

The idealization of woman in *A Lume Spento* turns at a strange tangent in several poems of *Personae* (1909), *Poems from Blast* (1914) and

Lustra (1916), in which Pound begins to express artistic creation through eccentric male/female metaphors. The woman of "Ballatetta" contrasts to "the female" of Canto XXIX:

> The light became her grace and dwelt among
> Blind eyes and shadows that are formed as men;
> Lo, how the light doth melt us into song:
>
> The broken sunlight for a healm she beareth
> Who hath my heart in jurisdiction.
> (*Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 52)

This poem presents an antithesis to the metaphor of Canto XXIX: in "Ballatetta" woman is described through images of light, and is a creative force who herself "doth melt us into song" and "hath my heart in jurisdiction," while "men" are "Blind eyes and shadows." The female is active, the male formless. Pound makes a more strident criticism of this apparently "male" aspect of art in "The Condolence"[6] of *Lustra*:

> O my fellow sufferers, songs of my youth,
> A lot of asses praise you because you are 'virile',
> We, you, I! We are 'Red Bloods'!
> . . . . . .
> O my fellow sufferers, we went out under the trees,
> We were in especial bored with male stupidity.
> . . . . . .
> And now you hear what is said to us:
> We are compared to that sort of person
> Who wanders about announcing his sex
> As if he had just discovered it.
> (*Collected Shorter Poems*, pp. 91-92)

Pound is attacking the American "'school of virility'" and the "'red blood'" attitude which "'seems to imagine that man is differentiated from the lower animals by possession of the phallus'."[7] In contrast, woman is "ductile," easily moulded or shaped:

> We were not exasperated with women,
> for the female is ductile.
> (*Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 92)

Pound repeats this view of "virility" in "Fratres Minores"[8] and in the Byronic satire "L'Homme Moyen Sensuel":

> Despite it all, despite your Red Bloods, febrile
> concupiscence
> Whose blubbering yowls you take for passion's essence;
> (*Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 257)

Prior to about 1916, Pound thus seems to see the "virile," "'red blood'," aspect of art as ridiculous. But it was about this time that Pound was becoming fascinated by the work of De Gourmont, and especially by *Physique de l'Amour; essai sur l'instinct sexuel*, translated by Pound as *The Natural Philosophy of Love*. Although Pound did not translate this essay until 1927, his interest in De Gourmont is first indicated by a letter written in 1913.[9] Pound wrote several essays on De Gourmont, translated his poetry, and gradually became imbued with his doctrines and his pseudo-science.[10] De Gourmont's influence on the *Cantos*, and especially on the sexual metaphor of Canto XXIX, is as significant as his influence on *Mauberley*.[11] The change from the "male stupidity" of "The Condolence" to the line ". . . and we seek to fulfill" in Canto XXIX is largely the result of De Gourmont's theories. For both De Gourmont's eccentric text and Pound's equally eccentric "Postscript" stress woman's indefinite and passive nature, and relate "the female" to aesthetics. De Gourmont's essay is concerned with animal and insect reproductive drives and finally with woman, who "inclines in general to activities entirely practical"[12] and in whom "all movements are interior, or visible only in the undulation of her curves, conserving thus her full aesthetic value, while the man, seeming at once to recede toward the primitive states of animality, appears reduced, putting off all beauty, to the

bare and simple condition of genital organ."[13] Woman is seen as an embracing, rather vague, being, while the male is aggressive, forcing a specific act.

Pound seems to alight on the most dubious and ridiculous statements that De Gourmont makes in this odd, but fascinating, book. The whole of Pound's "Postscript" is concerned with one sentence in the essay, a casual, unexplained hypothesis: "There might be, perhaps, a certain correlation between complete and profound copulation and the development of the brain."[14] Pound chooses to interpret this "correlation" in terms of the male "spermatozoid" and expands this single sentence into his own bizarre hypothesis:[15] ". . . but it is more than likely that the brain itself, is, in origin and development, only a sort of great clot of genital fluid held in suspense or reserve."[16] In the "Postscript" De Gourmont's relatively innocuous view of the "full aesthetic value" of woman becomes the melodramatic "female chaos": ". . . man really the phallus or spermatozoid charging, head-on, the female chaos. . . . Even oneself has felt it, driving any new idea into the great passive vulva of London, a sensation analogous to the male feeling in copulation."[17] The phrase "the female chaos" directly prefigures the same phrase in Canto XXIX. The "Postscript" is Pound's first formulation of the male "ordering" of the "female" chaos into art, for, like De Gourmont, Pound makes the "standard" distinction between female practicality and male genius. In doing so, he becomes caught up in his own rhetoric: "Woman, the conservator, the inheritor of past gestures, clever, practical, as Gourmont says, not inventive . . . taking the individual as the man in whom the new access, the new superfluity of spermatozoic pressure . . .

upshoots into the brain, alluvial Nile-flood, bringing new crops, new invention."[18]

Pound's essays on De Gourmont are at least a little saner, if less entertaining, than the "Postscript." The propaganda on behalf of De Gourmont did not ensure the French writer any lasting prestige, so there remains the strange impact he exerted on Pound's poetry and on his view of the relation between sex and aesthetics. In the context of the "spermatozoic pressure" and "the great clot of genital fluid," "the female chaos" and the "great passive vulva" are as ridiculous as the use of the phrase "the female chaos" in a pseudo-humorous letter written to Marianne Moore:

> The female is a chaos
> the male
> is a fixed point of stupidity, but only the female
> can content itself with prolonged conversation
> with but one sole other creature of its own sex
> and of its own unavoidable species[19]

But we cannot simply dismiss the same metaphor when it occurs in the *Cantos*. For after Pound's interest in the physiological material in De Gourmont's treatise had waned, he began to focus on the aesthetic aspects of the work; in the *Cantos* the phrase the "female chaos" is only used in the context of aesthetics.

Male "order" and female "chaos" in art is described in Canto XXIX, from the line "Drift of weed in the bay" to the end of the Canto.[20] The passage begins with a comparison of the male and female in a social context:

> Drift of weed in the bay:
> She seeking a guide, a mentor,
> He aspires to a career with honour

The aimless, futile "drift" of the mind, the mind which has not been "fulfilled," is also described through the metaphor of the floating seaweed, a metaphor which correlates with the "weed in the bay" and the phrase "She is submarine." Whether "in the bay," "dried" on the beach, or "floated," the seaweed is unmoored from its roots on the ocean bed, and merely drifts, without form or function:

> Sea weed dried now, and now floated,
> mind drifts, weed, slow youth, drifts,
> Stretched on the rock, bleached and now floated;

Canto XXIX is not one of Pound's most successful poems, but it is partly redeemed by such lines.

The line "Wein, Weib, TAN AOIDAN," translated from German and Greek, means "Wine, woman and song"; the remainder of the passage is an attempt to integrate the last two nouns, woman and song. The passage could be read as a satire on woman, who is the "chaos," "octopus" and "biological process." Certainly Pound's choice of descriptive vocabulary is unfortunate; even for a hardened mysogynist it would be difficult to imagine woman, or woman's significance, from these lines. There is no real connection, for instance, between the defined organism of the octopus and the chaotic, grotesque "biological process." But the lines are concerned with art, and only incidentally with woman; Pound is attempting to express the overwhelming mass of experience, the "female chaos," which the artist, the "we," must somehow "fulfill."

But there is a further dimension to the passage. The "female" may be a "biological process," but she is also the "element" beyond "TAN AOIDAN," the fundamental material of art and experience.[21] The irreplaceable, elemental value of "the female" is most forcibly indicated by the

words "Our mulberry leaf, woman." Through *Cathay*, *The Confucian Odes*, the "Chinese History" *Cantos* and *The Pisan Cantos*, the mulberry signifies both physical subsistence and a natural, organic pattern. After the complementing efforts of the silk worm and man, the mulberry eventually produces a created beauty, silk. The mulberry is linked to natural fecundity in the part of Mencius' work which Pound translated,[22] and throughout the "Chinese" *Cantos* it is closely associated with the economic and political welfare of the nation:

> And in the 8th moon the public works and corvée department
> presented GIN TSONG a volume on mulberry culture
> by Miao Haokien where he explains in detail the
> growing of silk worms
> and of unwinding cocoons
> and the Emperor had this engraved with all diagrams
> and distributed throughout all China
> (*Cantos*, pp. 305-6)

In most instances, the references to the mulberry in *The Confucian Odes* occur in the descriptive passages, but in the section entitled "The Old Capital," the mulberry is related with the "true man":

> Mulberry in the low-land low
> gloss of the leaf, 'tis so
> much joy to see a true man.
>
> Mulberry covers the low-land glade with
> shade that lets but small light through,
> Honesty holds men together like glue.[23]

Within the context of Pound's work as a whole, the "mulberry leaf," the elemental aspect of the "female" of Canto XXIX, signifies physical subsistence and spiritual unity. The "female" is not simply the object of unfounded satire.

Just as the female is seen as both a "biological process" and "Our mulberry leaf," so the final three lines of the passage allow a dual

apparently concerned with the ordering of "chaos" should end with vagueness and abstraction:

> Silver beaks out of night,
> Stone, bough over bough,
> lamps fluid in water,
> Pine by the black trunk of its shadow
> And on hill black trunks of the shadow
> The trees melted in air.

Artistic creation is described through the metaphor of chaos and order in several passages in the *Cantos*. One relatively long passage in Canto XXV, which is concerned with the same concept, begins with the lines:

> And Sulpicia
> green shoot now, and the wood
> white under new cortex
> "as the sculptor sees the form in the air
> before he sets hand to mallet,
> "and as he sees the in, and the through,
> the four sides
> "not the one face to the painter
> As ivory uncorrupted:
> "Pone metum Cerinthe"
> Lay there, the long soft grass,
> and the flute lay there by her thigh,
> Sulpicia, the fauns, twig-strong,
> gathered about her;
> The fluid, over the grass
> Zephyrus, passing through her,
> "deus nec laedit amantes."
> Hic mihi dies sanctus;
> (*Cantos*, pp. 117-18)

This passage, and especially the reference to Sulpicia, a Roman poetess, indicates that Canto XXIX is *not* a denial of woman's potential in art. Like "the wave cut in the stone" of Canto XXIX, the ordering of experience into form is expressed through the art of sculpture. The form is not concealed within the stone, but is "in the air," originating from the mind or intellect. Just as sculpture is "form in the air," so

Sulpicia's "flute" orders the eternal, fluid world around her and produces the poem itself, "deus nec laedit amantes."[24] The following passage, like the growth suggested by the lines "green shoot now, and the wood/ White under new cortex," is concerned with the necessity for continual renewal. Presumably the passage is "narrated" by the older poets with "heavy voices":

> "Our opinion not opinion in evil
> "But opinion borne for too long.
> "We have gathered a sieve full of water."

Like the "chaos" which must be fulfilled in Canto XXIX, "the form," without this continual renewal, reverts to "that bolge":[25]

> . . . the shadow,
> Noble forms, lacking life, that bolge, that valley
> the dead words keeping form,
> and the cry: Civis Romanus.
> The clear air, dark, dark,
> The dead concepts, never the solid, the blood rite

The passage is concerned both with the "dead words," and, like Canto XXIX, with the relation between "the shadow" and "the form." Phaethusa, the daughter of Helios, embodies the material of art, the indistinct but elemental "Fire gleam under smoke of the mountain," and as such is analogous to the "female chaos" of Canto XXIX. Only art can order the "Fire gleam": "And against this the flute: pone metum."[26] Pound has moved beyond the concepts of Canto XXIX, for in Canto XXV, through the references to Sulpicia and Phaethusa, "form" is seen as originating partly from a continual renewal of tradition and partly from the individual imagination, "gods held in the air." Once the "forms" have been attained, there is a "Bright void" where Knowledge, symbolized by Napishtim,[27] is revealed, and where all "forms" and "gods" become

part of the νους, the cosmic intellect.

At this point Pound repeats the line "'as the sculptor sees the form in the air . . .'," but elaborates the concept:

> "as glass seen under water,
> "King Otreus, my father...
> and saw the waves taking form as crystal,
> notes as facets of air,
> and the mind there, before them, moving,
> so that notes needed not move.

The phrase "the waves taking form as crystal" is a reference to the birth of Aphrodite, "narrator" of this passage.[28] Musical notes are only "facets of air" until ordered by "the mind." In these earlier *Cantos* poetry, music and sculpture are all controlled by one overriding factor, the human intellect.

In an essay first published in 1928, Pound repeats the attitude of Canto XXV and XXIX: "Art very possibly *ought* to be the supreme achievement, the 'accomplished'; but there is the other satisfactory effect, that of a man hurling himself at an indomitable chaos, and yanking and hauling as much of it as possible into some sort of order (or beauty), aware of it both as chaos and as potential."[29] Once again the "man," or artist, is active, and the substance of art is "an indomitable chaos." Although this "chaos" is not given a female gender, the passage is closely related to Canto XXIX. But between 1928 and the publication of *The Pisan Cantos* in 1948 the metaphor was modified, for in Canto LXXIV the "stone" has a dynamism of its own, "knowing the form which the carver imparts it":

> that the drama is wholly subjective
> stone knowing the form which the carver imparts it
> the stone knows the form
> sia Cythera, sia Ixotta, sia in Santa Maria dei Miracoli
> (*Cantos*, p. 430)

Similarly, in *Section: Rock-Drill* (published in 1956), the stone "takes" the form in the air:

> Taking form now,
> the rilievi,
> the curled stone at the marge
> Faunus, sirenes,
> the stone taking form in the air
> (*Cantos*, pp. 607-8)

However, it is difficult to find any consistency or "development" in Pound's use of the metaphor. Curiously enough the interpretation in the later *Cantos* seems to revert to a statement made in 1921: "Gaudier had discriminated against beefy statues, he had given us a very definite appreciation of stone as stone; he had taught us to feel that the beauty of sculpture is inseparable from its material and that it inheres in the material."[30] The reference to the "stone alive"[31] in a seminal passage of *The Spirit of Romance*, published in 1910, is analogous to the "stone knowing the form" of Canto LXXIV. Pound's descriptions of artistic creation seem to follow a cyclical pattern, the idiosyncratic sexual metaphors forming the centre of this pattern.

An examination of this male/female metaphor in relation to the broader spectrum of Pound's work is instructive,[32] for there is a connection between the "female chaos" of Canto XXIX and his theories of poetic form. The connection is order. Vorticism is an energy, but it is also the ordering of this energy; the energy of the "vortex" orders the chaos, the previously unrelated facets of experience, into form, into a whole. Whereas the vortex is an energy which orders all aspects of experience and of art, the more static "Image" is confined to the "ordering" of language, to the definition of words and to the examination

of the relation between words. In 1913 Pound described the image as ". . . an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. . . . It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits. . . ."[33] The phrases "sense of sudden liberation" and "freedom from time limits" reveal the psychological and romantic aspects of the earlier formulations of Imagism. This vague "freedom" was soon withdrawn from Imagist theory and replaced by more definite analogies to mathematics, a science of order. In *Gaudier-Brzeska,* Pound described the origin of the poem "In a Station of the Metro" as an equation:[34] "I do not mean that I found words, but there came an equation . . . not in speech, but in little splotches of colour."[35] Pound's other poetic theories are also related to order and definition. The "method of Luminous Detail" is opposed to the "inexactness" of "the method of multitudinous detail";[36] the Japanese *hokku* and the Chinese ideogram are an ordering and condensation of language. On a larger scale Frobenius' "paideuma" is the "exact" arrangement or pattern of a whole ethical and social structure: "His 'Paideuma' means the mental formation, the inherited habits of thought, the conditionings, aptitudes of a given race or time."[37]

Pound is both a romanticist and a proponent of order. He is the true "bohemian" poet who affirms a pagan, Dionysiac sexuality, who is one of the instigators of *Blast* and its rebellious flourishes, and who writes a "Postscript" on the relation between sperm and the brain. Yet a fundamental belief in order pervades his work. The most significant influence on the *Cantos* and on Pound's later critical essays was the

philosophy of Confucius, in which social order is complemented by the emphasis on precision in language: "Finding the precise word for the inarticulate heart's tone means not lying to oneself."[38] "Order" is the key to man's social and personal fulfilment: ". . . wanting good government in their states, they first established order in their own families; wanting order in the home, they first disciplined themselves."[39] Paradoxically, order[40] is a central concept in the seemingly entangled *Cantos*. Just as the "precise definition" is the "'total sincerity'"[41] of language, so man only achieves integrity through order:

> If a man have not order within him
> He can not spread order about him;
> And if a man have not order within him
> His family will not act with due order;
> (*Cantos*, p. 59)

To trace one of Pound's metaphors is a fascinating and instructive, if at times confusing, pursuit. The implications of the "female chaos" of Canto XXIX range from the eccentric biology of De Gourmont to the ethics of Confucius, from a temporary display of fanaticism to belief.

FOOTNOTES

[1]George Dekker, *Sailing After Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 96.

[2]Published in the same volume as *A Lume Spento* (New York: New Directions, 1965), pp. 111-23.

[3]*A Lume Spento*, p. 56.

[4]*Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir*, p. 92.

[5]*A Lume Spento*, p. 123.

[6]The mere prevalence of the male/female metaphor justifies an examination of one of Pound's more dubious, and uncharacteristic poems. It is always difficult to determine the degree of seriousness in Pound's rantings; his special brand of sensationalism is mercifully peripheral to his art.

[7]Ruthven, p. 55.

[8]They howl. They complain in delicate and exhausted
metres
That the twitching of three abdominal nerves
Is incapable of producing a lasting Nirvana.
See *Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 168.

[9]*Selected Letters 1907-1941*, p. 21.

[10]The second decade of the century was a time of renewed enthusiasm for scientific discovery. As Kenner points out, it was the era of the radio-telegraphy of Marconi, the biological discoveries of Mendel and of a full knowledge of the powers of radium. See Hugh Kenner, "The Rope in the Knot," p. 19.

[11]See J. J. Espey, pp. 66-82.

[12]De Gourmont, p. 35.

[13]Ibid., p. 41.

[14]Ibid., p. 55.

[15]Pound could be incredibly impressionable. All of his excursions into physiology and medicine seem equally naive; Forrest Read describes Pound's various prescriptions for Joyce's ailments, prescriptions which first postulated a connection between eyesight and genius and later the effects of the glands on genius. See Forrest Read, ed., *Pound/Joyce* (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 212.

[16]De Gourmont, p. 169.

[17]Ibid., p. 170.

[18]Ibid., p. 179.

[19]*Selected Letters 1907-1941*, p. 146.

[20]*Cantos*, pp. 144-46.

[21]The two lines in Provençal are from Sordello: "Alas, that my eyes avail me not/ For they see not what I wish." See J. H. Edwards and W. W. Vasse, *Annotated Index to the* Cantos *of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1959), p. 5. The significance of the lines in this context is not clear, but they may indicate failure, the failure of vision, perhaps the futile drift of the artist in the elemental, but as yet unfulfilled, "chaos."

[22]"'Let Mulberry trees be planted about the homesteads with their five *mow* [land measure] and persons of fifty may be clothed with silk'." See *Selected Prose 1909-1965*, p. 108.

[23]Ezra Pound, trans., *The Confucian Odes* (New York: New Directions, 1954), p. 142.

[24]"Nor does God harm lovers." See Edwards and Vasse, p. 51.

[25]A "bolge" is an adaptation of the Italian "bolgia," a word applied by Dante to the gulfs of the eighth circle of the Inferno. See *OED*.

[26]"Lay aside fear." See Edwards and Vasse, p. 176.

[27]Napishtim is ". . . a character in the Babylonian epic, *Gilgamish;* he reveals to Gilgamish 'knowledge deep-hidden'." See Edwards and Vasse, p. 151.

[28]Aphrodite had told her lover Anchises that Otreus was her father. See Edwards and Vasse, p. 161.

[29]*Literary Essays*, p. 396.

[30]Ibid., p. 442.

[31]Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (New York: New Directions, 1953), p. 92.

[32]Especially in view of Pound's belief in Confucianism, a connection between the male/female metaphor and the *I Ching* would seem plausible. Two editors of the *I Ching* explain that the "most important literature of the five Confucian Classics is the *I Ching*" and that "there are two primal forces: the virile called the *Yang* (the positive element, the

male) and the docile called the *Yin* (the negative element, the female)." See Ch'u Chai and Winberg Chai, eds., *I Ching* (New York: University Books, 1964), p. xxvii and p. xli. The *I Ching* is specifically mentioned in Canto LIII:

> And they worked out the Y-king or changes
> to guess from

See *Cantos*, p. 266. It would be tempting to explain the male "fulfilling" of the "female chaos" through reference to the *I Ching*, but there is a considerable difference between these "primal forces" and a twentieth century description of artistic creation. The influence of the *I Ching*, if any, on Canto XXIX can only be surmised.

[33] *Literary Essays*, p. 4.

[34] Later in *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* Pound confuses this analogy by actual "examples" from mathematics. The "order" of Imagism can even be described through algebraic formulae. See *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir*, pp. 90-92.

[35] Ibid., p. 87.

[36] *Selected Prose 1909-1965*, p. 21.

[37] Ibid., p. 118.

[38] Ezra Pound, trans., *Confucius: The Great Digest and Unwobbling Pivot* (New York: New Directions, 1951), p. 47.

[39] Ibid., p. 31.

[40] Confucian order and moderation is expressed, for example, through the repeated "middle" ideogram and the "Ching Ming" or "true name" ideogram. See *Cantos*, p. 413 and p. 333.

[41] Ibid., p. 468.

CHAPTER III

CASTLES OR LOVE? BERTRANS DE BORN, SEXTUS PROPERTIUS AND THEIR MISTRESSES

Pound's interpretation of history concentrates, almost exclusively, on the "men of action," while precluding or undermining the importance of historical female figures. The women of history are merely appendages to their lovers or husbands. Lady Maent, Cynthia or Isotta have little inherent value, but instead become the means of presenting concepts which centre on the male heroes. In Pound's earlier poetry, the "love" between Bertrans de Born and Lady Maent and the "love" between Sextus Propertius and Cynthia are manifestations of certain opposing, abrasive energies. The "heroes" and their respective mistresses seem to embody the opposition between male activity and female passivity, between political expediency and love, between pragmatism and romantic chivalry. But, as I will show, this apparent polarization is complicated by several integrated concerns, including an examination of the psychological state of the protagonist and of his obsession with death.

Bertrans de Born, a twelfth-century poet of Provence (c.1140-c.1215), was partly responsible for the political faction between Prince Henry Plantagenet, the eldest son of Henry II, and his brother Richard Coeur de Lion. In 1183 Prince Henry died and in the same year Richard besieged Bertrans' castle at Hautefort, capturing Bertrans. According to Provençal legend, King Henry II, after hearing the poem on the death of his son,[1]

showed Bertrans clemency. These romantic, chivalrous episodes were among the earliest influences on Pound's poetry,[2] for his fascination with Provençal literature and legends produced nearly fifty translations of troubadour poems, the lectures on medieval literature which formed the substance of *The Spirit of Romance* and five early poems[3] which are directly concerned with Bertrans.

Pound's essays and poems which involve Bertrans emphasize "subject matter," and especially the dichotomy between romantic love and political opportunism. Whereas Arnaut Daniel's technical innovations and craftsmanship had a considerable influence on Pound, Bertrans' style is rarely mentioned. Throughout the essay "Troubadours: Their Sorts and Conditions," Pound defines the difference between "romantic" and "romanic," and, by stressing the political activity in Bertrans' life, divorces troubadour poetry from notions of pretty, vapid minstrelsy: "The mirth of Provençal song is at times anything but sunburnt, and the mood is often anything but idle. For example De Born advises the barons to pawn their castles before making war . . . these songs played a very real part in love intrigue and in the intrigue preceding warfare. The time had no press and no theatre. If you wish to make love to women in public, and out loud, you must resort to subterfuge."[4] Later in the essay Pound makes a similar point: "My purpose in all this is to suggest to the casual reader that the Middle Ages did not exist in tapestry alone, nor in the fourteenth century romances, but that there was a life like our own, no mere sequence of citherns and citoles, nor a continuous stalking about in sendal and diaspre. Men were pressed for money. There was unspeakable boredom in the castles. The chivalric singing was

devised to lighten the boredom; and this very singing became itself in due time, in the manner of all things, an ennui."[5]

It is this hardened, often intellectual, attitude to love which attracted Pound to Bertrans. Influenced by the depiction of Bertrans in Canto XXVIII of Dante's *Inferno*,[6] Pound seems him as a political activist, a "man of action." Although he translated the poem "Dompna Pois de me No'us Cal,"[7] written for the Lady Maent de Montagnac, in *The Spirit of Romance* Pound undermines the importance of Bertrans' love poetry: "Yet it is not for this lament nor yet for his love songs that he is most remembered, but for the goad of his tongue, and for his scorn of sloth, peace, cowardice, and the barons of Provence."[8] Pound mentions that "Bertrans has left a number of love songs," but sees him "at his best in the war songs."[9] Only the *motivation* beyond the "love" poems enters Pound's poems about, or written in the persona of, Bertrans de Born.

When Pound translates Bertrans' poetry, however, the bias of his attitude is necessarily minimized. In the direct translation of "'Dompna Pois de me No'us Cal'," for example, there is no tangible indication of a possible political motivation beyond the romantic sentiments. This eulogy, in which Bertrans compliments the Lady Maent by comparing her with a hypothetical ideal who is the composite of the local Provençal beauties, was written to regain his Lady's favour, for his attention to her had temporarily lapsed:

> I will go out a-searching,
> Culling from each a fair trait
> To make me a borrowed lady
> Till I again find you ready.
> (*Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 115)

In "Na Audiart," which is an interpretation of Bertrans' life rather than a translation of his poetry, the woman addressed is the least cooperative of these beauties. Hugh Witemeyer rightly points out that although the poem is "commonly read as a straightforward lyric effusion chiefly distinguished by its unusual rhythm, 'Na Audiart' is actually the portrait of a detached, sophisticated, and ironic character."[10] In spite of Pre-Raphaelite archaisms like "thy" and "shouldst," the poem has an anti-romantic and "male" quality; Pound already realizes that Bertrans' poetry is not romantic outpouring. Audiart's ample proportions are described in lines which sound romantic, but whose sense is satiric:

> Where thy bodice laces start
> As ivy fingers clutching through
> Its crevices,
> . . . . . .
> Having praised thy girdle's scope
> How the stays ply back from it;
> (*Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 22)

Seemingly "poetic" phrases like "thy bodice" or "thy girdle's scope" are deflated by "clutching" and by the lines "'Cause never a flaw was there/ Where thy torse and limbs are met'," which are a reference to the Lady's genitals. The Lady understandably dislikes Bertrans, but has no control over his poems:

> Yea though thou wish me ill,
> Audiart, Audiart.
> Thy loveliness is here writ till,
> Audiart
> Oh, till thou come again.

The poem then proceeds to a "carpe diem" theme which does not appear in the poem by Bertrans on the same subject,[11] but which, by inference, is a further insult to Audiart:

> And being bent and wrinkled, in a form
> That hath no perfect limning, when the warm
> Youth dew is cold
> Upon they hands, and thy old soul
> Scorning a new, wry'd casement

The persona Bertrans is highly skilled in the dialectics of love, for the poem which began with an apparent apology has ended with "forgiveness":

> For whose fairness one forgave
> Audiart,
> Audiart
> Que be-m vols mal.

In "Sestina: Altaforte" Bertrans' dissatisfaction with romanticism, and with woman, is more explicit. The poem states a rather simplistic preference for war instead of peace, for "manly" action instead of "womanish peace." The subject is repetitive and tedious, for, as Pound admits, his interest lay more in technique, in the adaptation of Daniel's sestina form, than in "theme": "Technically it is one of my best, though a poem written on such a theme could never be very important."[12] In spite of this so-called "masculine" vigour and undirected energy, the poem prefigures "Near Perigord" through the interconnection between action, woman and art. The noise of warfare is repeatedly described through reference to "music" and through erotic, sensual vocabulary: "the standards gold, vair, purple," "my heart nigh mad" and "there's no wine like the blood's crimson."

"Near Perigord"[13] is in a different category. The poem is concerned with the opposition between love and politics, for Pound's interest lay in "'the possibility of a political intrigue behind the apparent love poem.'"[14] Although Pound was aware of Dante's condemnation of Bertrans, who was placed in the Ninth Bowge of Nether Hell as a "Sower of Discord,"[15]

he is fascinated by the sheer dynamism of this Provençal counterpart of Malatesta or Jefferson. Pound immediately alludes to the "riddle" of the poem: was Bertrans' love for Maent sincere, or simply a political and military strategy? This "riddle," in which political opportunism is represented by the word "castle," is explicitly stated several times in the poem:

> --for every lady a castle,
> Each place strong.
> . . . . . .
> Take the whole man, and ravel out the story.
> He loved this lady in castle Montaignac?
> The castle flanked him--he had need of it.
> . . . . . .
> All of his flank--how could he do without her?
> And all the road to Cahors, to Toulouse?
> What would he do without her?

Contrasting to Canto XXIX, in which "the female" becomes an abstraction and a part of a purely theoretical concept, "Near Perigord" presents a totally pragmatic attitude to woman and to sex. In fact, Pound's discussion of historical or contemporary woman is quite different from his views of an abstract or mythological "female." In his prose, sex is reduced to a financial consideration:[16] in *Guide to Kulchur* he states that "all tangled relations between men and women have been analyzed and set in two categories: those due to money and those that are independent of it."[17]

But several interwoven, and sometimes disturbing, concerns are superimposed on this opposition between love and expediency. The apparently simple dualism of the questions "Is it a love poem? Did he sing of war?" is partly complicated by the Lady herself. Although Pound does not attempt a "portrait" of Maent, she is not reduced to a symbol of

complete passivity or complacency, for she seems to have assessed Bertrans' motivation: "And Maent failed him? Or saw through the scheme?" The enigma of "the knot, the first knot of Maent," Maent's intellectual "counter-thrust" is finally narrated by Bertrans himself in part III:

> High, high and sure . . . and then the counter-thrust:
> 'Why do you love me? Will you always love me?
> But I am like the grass, I can not love you.'
> Or, 'Love, and I love and love you,
> And hate your mind, not *you*, your soul, your hands.'

Lady Maent recognizes the difference between Bertrans' "mind," his political pragmatism, and his essential nature, the "'*you*, your soul, your hands'." In spite of the element of emotional failure indicated by these lines, Maent's questions reveal her understanding of Bertrans' psychological state. Pound's Maent is limited, but neither is she a complete nonentity.

Like "Planh for the Young English King" and "Na Audiart," one of the predominant concerns of "Near Perigord" is death. At the outset of the poem Bertrans is seen in Dante's hell:

> As caught by Dante in the last wallow of hell--
> The headless trunk 'that made its head a lamp',

The discussion between Daniel and Richard takes place after Bertrans' death, Richard's own death is foretold and then described, and Maent is "Gone-ah, gone-untouched, unreachable!" at the end of the poem. Most of these references are humorous, almost farcical, yet there is a strange, sinister element in this humour. Immediately following the melodramatic account of Richard's death is a translation of the *Inferno:*

> Surely I saw, and still before my eyes
> Goes on that headless trunk, that bears for light

Its own head swinging, gripped by the dead hair,
And like a swinging lamp that says, 'Ah me!
I severed men, my head and heart
Ye see here severed, my life's counterpart.'

Dante was not joking. "Near Perigord" is by no means a deterministic poem, but the continual references to death add a new dimension to the question "Is it a love poem?"

The opposition between romance and politics is paralleled by the conflicts and inconsistencies in Bertrans' own values. Bertrans is a man of virility, action, war; he is also a poet, a man of contemplation, stillness, observation. Although "Near Perigord" is not narrated by the persona Bertrans, the lapses into description indicate that Pound was always aware of Bertrans the poet. The lands which Bertrans wishes to acquire are described as:

Spread like the finger-tips of one frail hand;
And you on that great mountain of a palm--

Similarly the lines which describe the area connected with the "new alliance" deny a total preoccupation with expediency:

Chalais is high, a-level with the poplars.
Its lowest stones just meet the valley tips
Where the low Dronne is filled with water-lilies.

Lines like "Sunset, the ribbon-like road lies, in red cross-light" are examples of Pound's descriptive skills, but also serve as a projection into the more contemplative aspect of Bertrans. For the creative, lyrical Bertrans is revealed in the final section of the poem, which is "spoken" by him:

Bewildering spring, and by the Auvezere
Poppies and day's eyes in the green émail
Rose over us; and we knew all that stream,
And our two horses had traced out the valleys;
Knew the low flooded lands squared out with poplars,

> In the young days when the deep sky befriended.
> And great wings that beat above us in the twilight,
> And the great wheels in heaven
> Bore us together...surging...and apart...
> Believing we should meet with lips and hands,

The passage is Pound's recreation of the Provençal attitude to environment, in which nature is found "in its proper place, i.e. as a background to the action, an interpretation of the mood."[18] The scene and its accompanying "mood" are remote from the political strategies and dilemmas of the preceding sections of "Near Perigord," for Bertrans is finally seen as a poet.

The conflict between Bertrans the politician and Bertrans the meditative poet perhaps explains the final enigmatic line, "A broken bundle of mirrors." Hugh Kenner sees this line as a reference to Maent who "like the lady in the canzone, *was* a collection of fragments . . . a woman not yet 'awakened', with brilliant surfaces but no center."[19] Donald Davie is more hypothetical: "Thus 'a broken bundle of mirrors' is what the whole of recorded history is."[20] But it is also possible that the "broken mirrors" are within Bertrans himself. To "'Say that he loved her'" cannot solve the riddle, for the riddle is Bertrans.

The conflict between love and social utility also occurs in *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, a poem which, according to J. P. Sullivan, is concerned with "the relation of the artist to society, the vindication of private poetic morality against public compulsions whether these be the demands of a government or promises of fame and fortune."[21] For Propertius had been asked by his patron Maecenas to write patriotic verses instead of love poems. The opposition between individual integrity, which is usually represented by Propertius' love for his mistress,

Cynthia, and the demands of imperial Rome[22] is stated several times in *Propertius,* especially in parts I, II and V. Propertius sees poetry as an eternal "dance tune" rather than "historical data" and as "something to read in normal circumstances" rather than an exposition of "the distentions of Empire." The ironical, sometimes facetious, tone of the poem is partly the result of this tension:

> Yet you ask on what account I write so many love-lyrics
> And whence this soft book comes into my mouth.
> Neither Calliope nor Apollo sung these things into my ear,
> My genius is no more than a girl.

But Pound's poem cannot simply be explained in terms of a polarized argument between social pressures and the demands of love. Pound/Propertius seems to suggest this preference for lyrical love poetry, yet simultaneously undermines the classical ideals of love poetry and the subject of love poetry, woman. In spite of the sarcastic title "Mistress," Calliope's[23] criticism remains:

> 'These are your images, and from you the sorcerizing of
> shut-in young ladies,
> 'The wounding of austere men by chicane.'
> Thus Mistress Calliope,
> Dabbling her hands in the fount, thus she
> Stiffened our face with the backwash of Philetas the Coan.

Phrases like "the sorcerizing of shut-in young ladies," "Dabbling her hands" and "the backwash of Philetas" hardly correspond with romantic, pastoral lyricism. Cynthia is not Lady Maent of "Near Perigord" or even Lady Valentine of *Mauberley,* she is a prostitute:

> And may the bought yoke of a mistress lie with
> equitable weight on your shoulders

Propertius was a love poet; Pound's persona is a love poet with reservations.

Even allowing for the "creative" aspect of translation, it is apparent that Pound chooses to exaggerate the more lewd aspects of sexuality and to undermine the idealism of love. In the first part of the poem Pound "translates" the line "Gaudeat in solito tacta puella sono" (literally, "let the heart of my mistress be moved with joy at the old familiar music"[24]) as "And the devirginated young ladies will enjoy them." In reply to criticism by W. G. Hale, a Latin scholar, Pound said of the line: "I note that my translation . . . is as literal, or rather more so than his. . . . Hale, however, not only makes the 'girl' into 'my lady', but he has to supply *something for her to be 'touched BY'*. . . . If I were, however, a professor of Latin at Chicago, I should probably have to resign on divulging the fact that Propertius occasionally copulavit, i.e. rogered the lady to whom he was not legally wedded."[25] Pound's criticism of the Victorian translator was justified, yet his explanation does not completely excuse the stringency of "devirginated." The translation is not merely "literal," but intentionally crude. Similarly he "translates" the line "Turba puellarum si mea verba colit" (literally, "That a host of maidens should adore my words?"[26]) as "There will be a crowd of young women doing homage to my palaver." This is not a criticism of Pound's scholarly pursuits, nor of his "accuracy," for *Propertius* is essentially an attempt ". . . to bring a dead man to life, to present a living figure."[27] It is a successful contemporary poem. But Pound's more deliberate deviations from the original *Elegies* do indicate an undisguised devaluation of the feminine ideal.

Pound/Propertius' attitude towards Cynthia is, to say the least, ambivalent. In part IV he narrates Lygdamus' description of her:

No gawds on her snowy hands, no orfevrerie,
Sad garment draped on her slender arms.
Her escritoires lay shut by the bed-feet.
Sadness hung over the house, and the desolated female
attendants
Were desolated because she had told them her dreams.

She was veiled in the midst of that place,
Damp woolly handkerchiefs were stuffed into her
undryable eyes

"Romantic" phrases like "her snowy hands" and "veiled in the midst" are debased by the "Damp woolly handkerchiefs," for the persona Propertius is both a romantic and an anti-romantic. The duality in Propertius' view of love attracted Pound as much as his criticism of imperialism or his assertion of artistic integrity. Part VII, in which Propertius spends a night with Cynthia, begins with the lines:

Me happy, night, night full of brightness;
Oh couch made happy by my long delectations;
How many words talked out with abundant candles;
Struggles when the lights were taken away;
Now with bared breasts she wrestled against me,
Tunic spread in delay;
And she then opening my eyelids fallen in sleep,
Her lips upon them: and it was her mouth saying:
Sluggard!

The passage is ironic, bathetic. Archaic vocabulary like "delectations" and "poeticisms" like "Me happy" create a pseudo-romanticism which is immediately deflated by "Sluggard!" Similarly, the following reference to Helen and Paris is reduced to "--such at least is the story" and to "Though you give all your kisses/ you give but few." In part X, the description of Cynthia's "beauty" is counteracted by Propertius' expectation of another bed-companion and the final cryptic remark about "pure form":

I was stupified.
I had never seen her looking so beautiful,
No, not when she was tunick'd in purple.

Such aspect was presented to me, me recently emerged
from my visions,
You will observe that pure form has its value.

Pound gives little indication of the "character" or psychology of Cynthia herself, for she is largely a catalyst for Propertius' meditations on love, politics, death and art. But Pound's limited account of her and his arbitrary selections from her speech, indicate that she would not have encouraged romantic idealization. Her realism makes her a far more credible, and vigorous figure. Her incisive reply "Sluggard!" and her speech about the hypothetical "other woman" certainly matches Propertius' facetiousness:

'Let her lovers snore at her in the morning!
May the gout cramp up her feet!
'Does he like me to sleep here alone,
Lygdamus?

Her apt reply to Propertius' accusations of infidelity indicates her own expertise with irony:

'You are a very early inspector of mistresses.
'Do you think I have adopted your habits?'
. . . . . .
'No incubus has crushed his body against me,
'Though spirits are celebrated for adultery.
'And I am going to the temple of Vesta. . .'

In spite of the devaluation of love in *Propertius*, and perhaps in spite of Pound's original intentions, Cynthia is reborn.

But the unresolved tensions in *Propertius* do not primarily stem from Cynthia or from Propertius' love for her, but from Propertius himself. He doubts his ability both as an artist and as a lover; a passage in part II indicates the Dionysiac lover he wishes to be:

Orgies of vintages, an earthen image of Silenus
Strengthened with rushes, Tegaean Pan,
The small birds of the Cytharean mother,
their Punic faces dyed in the Gorgon's lake;
Nine girls, from as many countrysides
bearing her offerings in their unhardened hands

But in the following section of the poem, after Cynthia has invited Propertius to her bedroom, this Dionysiac anticipation becomes apprehension:

Shall I entrust myself to entangled shadows,
Where bold hands may do violence to my person?

In two passages Pound even seems to add an element of homosexuality: the "small boys" who capture Propertius for Cynthia are described as "naked, the lot of them,/ And one of the lot was given to lust," and, in part XII, Propertius refuses Lynceus his "bed":

Preferable, my dear boy, my dear Lynceus,
Comrade, comrade of my life, of my purse, of my person:
But in one bed, in one bed alone, my dear Lynceus
I deprecate your attendance;

This is Cynthia's bed, but there is a suggestion that Lynceus may "attend" Propertius at other times. The homosexuality is never explicit, but these lines are as sensual as the descriptions of Cynthia.

Propertius' love for Cynthia, like Bertrans' love for Maent, is complicated by his obsession with death. The first line of the poem, which is a reference to dead poets, to "Shades of Callimachus, Coan ghosts of Philetas," implies his preoccupation with the immortality of his art. Words like "funeral," "wreaths" and "tombs" are reiterated, sometimes in connection with art, sometimes in connection with Propertius or Cynthia. Propertius hopes that the poem will be "a boom after my funeral," and, contemplating his visit to Cynthia, he envisages the

physical details of his death:

> What if undertakers follow my track,
> such a death is worth dying.
> She would bring frankincense and wreaths to my tomb,
> She would sit like an ornament on my pyre.

The accumulation of detail is part of Propertius' ironical stance; he is laughing at his own paranoia. Part VIII, a meditation on Cynthia's death, is also a satire on morbid anecdotes:

> Ino in her young days fled pellmell out of Thebes,
> Andromeda was offered to a sea-serpent
> and respectably married to Perseus

But beyond the humour and irony of *Propertius,* there is fear and pathos:

> While our fates twine together, sate we our eyes with love;
> For long night comes upon you
> and a day when no day returns.

Lillian Feder melodramatically attributes the element of morbidity in *Propertius* to Pound himself: "The question this raises, and it is not meant facetiously, is which is the dead man, Propertius or Pound? . . . The *Homage* is but the first of many examples which indicate that it is from the world of the dead that Pound speaks most truly."[28] To suggest that Pound is a "dead man" ridiculously overreaches the function and etiquette of criticism. This may be the simplest "answer" to the death motif in *Propertius,* but the vigour and vitality of Pound's work contradicts Miss Feder's assumption. Pound is indeed "interested" in death, but then such an interest is hardly unique. The "death wish" in *Propertius* is always closely integrated with the development of the persona Propertius and with the other concerns of the poem. The interconnection between love and art, for example, is expressed through references to

death, for Propertius makes the traditional assertion that his poetry will outlive both himself and his mistress, that he will take "his stand" among the classical poets. There is some justification for this "eternalizing" conceit: Propertius and Cynthia live through Pound.

In the *Cantos* the dynamic historical figures are male, while the women are predominantly passive. The "Pull down thy vanity" passage in Canto LXXXI ends with Pound's "belief" in action:

> But to have done instead of not doing
> this is not vanity
> To have, with decency, knocked
> That a Blunt should open
> To have gathered from the air a live tradition
> (*Cantos*, pp. 521-22)

A friend of Pound and Yeats, Wilfred Scawen Blunt, actively opposed the British imperialism of the Victorian era. Like Mussolini or Jefferson, Blunt was a "man of action." The female "principle" is represented only by goddesses or by other figures from mythology; within the *historical* framework of the *Cantos* woman is only the source of inspiration or action. The "Malatesta" *Cantos* (Cantos VII to XI) are predominantly concerned with action, business, arrangements. Although Malatesta's third wife, Isotta degli Atti, inspired the Tempio Malatestiano,[29] she is passive, quiescent and, like Penelope, a symbol of fidelity. The only description of Isotta is in Italian, and even in this passage she is seen only in relation to her husband: "and he loved Isotta degli ATTI to distraction/ and 'she was worthy of him'/ 'constant in purpose/ 'she was pleasing to the eyes of the prince/ 'beautiful to look at'/ 'she was liked by the people (and the honour of Italy)."[30]

The opposition between passivity and activity in the *Cantos* can be illustrated by a passage in Canto VIII:

> Lyra:
> 'Ye spirits who of olde were in this land
> Each under Love, and shaken,
> Go with your lutes, awaken
> The summer within her mind,
> Who hath not Helen for peer
> Yseut nor Batsabe.'
> With the interruption:
> *Magnifico, compater et carissime*
> (Johanni di Cosimo)
> Venice has taken me on again
> At 7,000 a month, *fiorini di Camera*.
> (*Cantos*, p. 30)

The "Lyra" is a translation from a poem by Sigismundo;[31] it is a traditional eulogy, with archaic language and a lyric tranquillity. But after the phrase "With the interruption," the passage reverts to the world of action, of men, and the lyricism becomes the hardened, "pragmatic" poetry which characterizes the Malatesta *Cantos* and the American history *Cantos*. The "'Go with your lutes'" is superseded by "At 7,000 a month." The *Cantos* are an interplay between short lyric lines, which, as Kenner says, are "records of emotional absolutes,"[32] and lengthened, "prosaic" lines; the lyricism of Canto XXX, for example, is set beside the prose-poetry of Canto XXXI and Canto XXXIV.

In spite of Maent's opposition to Bertrans' demands and in spite of Cynthia's irony, the mistresses of Pound's earlier poems are safely incarcerated in either the castle or the bedroom. The Isotta of the *Cantos* may be beautiful, but she is faceless and inert. The more positive, dynamic aspects of "the female" are granted only to the goddesses and women of mythology.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Pound translates this poem as "Planh for the Young English King." See *Collected Shorter Poems*, pp. 50-52.

[2]Pound's interest in Provençal literature and Bertrans originated in the academic circles at the University of Pennsylvania and Hamilton College, which he attended from 1903-1906. Working under the distinguished Provençal scholars Dr. William Shepard and Dr. Felix Schelling, he completed an M.A. in Romance Literature. See Charles Norman, *Ezra Pound* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1969), pp. 7-21.

[3]"'Dompna Pois de me No'us Cal'," "Planh for the Young English King," "Na Audiart," "Sestina: Altaforte" and "Near Perigord." All five poems are included in *Collected Shorter Poems*.

[4]Ezra Pound, *Pavannes and Divisions* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1918), pp. 166-67.

[5]Ibid., p. 176.

[6]Dante, *The Divine Comedy: I. Hell* (London: Penguin Classics,1973), pp. 249-50.

[7]*Collected Shorter Poems*, pp. 115-17.

[8]*The Spirit of Romance*, p. 45.

[9]Ibid., p. 47.

[10]Hugh Witemeyer, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound: Forms and Renewal, 1908-1920* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1969), p. 75.

[11]See K. K. Ruthven, pp. 176-77.

[12]Ib id., p. 218.

[13]This poem first appeared in the December 1915 issue of *Poetry*. See Davie, p. 63.

[14]Ruthven, p. 179.

[15]Dante, pp. 249-50.

[16]"What interest have all men in common? What forces play upon them all? Money and sex and tomorrow." See *Selected Prose 1909-1965*, p. 32.

[17]Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1952), p. 288.

[18]*The Spirit of Romance,* p. 31.

[19]Lewis Leary, ed., *Motive and Method in the* Cantos *of Ezra Pound* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1961), p. 9.

[20]Davie, p. 64.

[21]J. P. Sullivan, *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1964), pp. 28-29.

[22]According to one of his letters, Pound saw post-war, imperialistic Britain as analogous to Propertius' Rome: "'. . . it presents certain emotions as vital to me in 1917, faced with the infinite and ineffable imbecility of the British Empire, as they were to Propertius some centuries earlier, when faced with the infinite and ineffable imbecility of the Roman Empire!.'" See Noel Stock, *Poet in Exile: Ezra Pound* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1964), p. 96.

[23]The Muse of Epic poetry.

[24]Ruthven, pp. 88-89.

[25]*Selected Letters 1907-1941,* p. 150.

[26]Ruthven, pp. 88-89.

[27]*Selected Letters 1907-1941,* p. 149.

[28]Lillian Feder, "The Voice from Hades in the Poetry of Ezra Pound," *The Michigan Quarterly Review,* 10, No. 3 (Summer 1971), 168.

[29]Pound described the Tempio Malatestiano as "both an apex and in a verbal sense a monumental failure. It is perhaps the apex of what man has embodied in the last 1000 years of the occident. A cultural 'high' is marked." See *Guide to Kulchur,* p. 159.

[30]Edwards and Vasse, p. 63.

[31]Ibid., p. 250.

[32]Hugh Kenner, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 229.

CHAPTER IV

THE AMBIVALENT FEMALE FIGURE IN THE *CANTOS*

Whereas Pound's view of the historical "men of action" is characterized by a polarization which produces, for example, the dismissal of Churchill and the adulation of Mussolini, his attitude to the female mythological figures of the earlier *Cantos* is more ambivalent. Helen, Diana and Circe are neither unequivocally benevolent, nor unequivocally malevolent. Partly because of this balance, this intentional, controlled ambivalence, Pound's interpretation of myth in the *Cantos* is more convincing than the historical information or perspective he presents.

In Canto IV several female figures from different mythologies form a composite pattern of good and evil. Even the first passage is an oblique indication of the ambivalence between creation and destruction which will be more explicity stated through the Provençal legend and the Actaeon myth. The canto begins with the archetypal image of destruction, Troy, and its association with Helen, who is a symbol of both irresistible beauty and futile devastation. Troy is a "Palace," imbued with the attractive mystery of the "smoky light," but it is nevertheless reduced to "a heap of smouldering boundary stones." The third line is also an obscure indication of the duality between negation and affirmation: "ANAXIFORMINGES," meaning "Lords of the Lyre,"[1] is the epithet of Pindar's second Olympian Ode and "Aurunculeia" is a reference to Vinia Aurunculeia, a bride who is praised in Catullus' Carmen LXI.[2] Although the sentiment

of these lines is not immediately accessible, the typography may imply the opposing values signified by the two words.[3] For the capitalized letters indicate the bombast of Pindaric heroism and the lower case letters represent the more stable value of the bride, of the creative union.

The following lines are apparently a piece of idyllic pastoralism, a remote world of "green cool light" and "Choros nympharum."[4] The invocation "Hear me. Cadmus of Golden Prows!" is presumably addressed to Pentheus, Cadmus' grandson, who had denied the cult of Dionysus, and who is here encouraged to renounce his asceticism. The remaining lines of the passage are enticing, rhythmically sensual:

> The silver mirrors catch the bright stones and flare,
> Dawn, to our waking, drifts in the green cool light;
> Dew-haze blurs, in the grass, pale ankles moving.
> Beat, beat, whirr, thud, in the soft turf
> under the apple trees,
> Choros nympharum goat-foot, with the pale fool alternate;
> Crescent of blue-shot waters, green-gold in the shallows,
> A black cock crows in the sea-foam;

But Pound is more critical of Dionysiac lyricism in Canto IV than in, for example, *Mauberley*. The passage appears to be an evocation of an ideal, Arcadian scene, and of a ritualized dance, yet there is a destructive, sinister element amid this lyrical bliss. For the dance is not a fluid movement, it is hurried, tense: "Beat, beat, whirr, thud. . . ." As Walter Baumann says, ". . . it is the rather coarse and promiscuous goat-footed companions of Zagreus Dionysus who tread out the dance with the delicate and chaste pale-footed companions of Artemis."[5] Not simply a beautiful goddess emerges from the "sea-foam," but the "black cock," a symbol of the destructive aspects of Aphrodite's beauty. As with all

the lyrical passages of this canto, a negative, destructive quality penetrates the idealistic scene. According to one critic, the lyrical passages in the *Cantos* are "bright *loci* placed in the poem to coerce in us the perception of what darkness is darkness."[6] But these passages have their own darkness; the "Choros nympharum," these apparent abstractions of female sensuality, are not altogether innocent.

The sense of foreboding initiated by the reference to the "black cock" is augmented by the next passage, which is a compound of the Itys myth and a rather obscure Provençal legend. Both myths involve sacrilege and adultery. Procne murdered her son Itys and served his flesh to her husband Tereus, as vengeance for Tereus' rape of Philomena. As they fled from Tereus, Procne was transformed into a swallow and Philomena into a nightingale. In the Provençal legend, Lady Soremonda committed suicide by jumping from a window after her jealous husband had served her the flesh of her troubadour lover, Cabestan.[7] At this point the ambivalence is presented through two women. For although the final atrocity of the Itys myth is committed by a woman, in the Provençal legend the victim is a woman.

The negative forces of the passage are introduced by the description of "the curved, carved foot of the couch,/ claw-foot and lion head" and by the old man who narrates the two myths. The passage is a brilliant interweaving of the two myths and of spatial and temporal perspectives. "Ityn" becomes a universal cry of grief, a part of Pound's own statement of destruction and mourning.[8] Yet the suicide is a positive, if tragic, act. The swallow's chant is a choric setting for the understated, restrained description of Soremonda's suicide. The passage is like her

fall from the window, a moment when all aspects of time and place rush into consciousness. In one downward movement, while the swallows cry, Soremonda sees the details of the "window," of "the slim white stone bar" and "the firm pale stone,"[9] and feels the tactile sensations produced by the stone and by the wind. Simultaneously she experiences the taste which necessitated her death and envisages her lover's flesh on the dish. Death is a refusal to accept the atrocity, to compromise. Regardless of our comprehension of the intricacies of the myth, the lines recreate an atmosphere of candid, restrained dignity. This dignity is itself "creative," an answer to the preceding atrocity:

> And she went toward the window,
> the slim white stone bar
> Making a double arch;
> Firm even fingers held to the firm pale stone;
> Swung for a moment,
> and the wind out of Rhodez
> Caught in the full of her sleeve.

The metamorphosis of Procne is paralleled by the myth of Diana and Actaeon, which is related in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[10] Throughout the *Cantos* Diana signifies the ambivalence between beauty and destruction, for her virginal purity is capable of acts of unjustified aggression. She is the "Merciles Beaute"[11] of Chaucer and of *The Pisan Cantos:*

> Your eyen two wol sleye me sodenly
> I may the beauté of hem nat susteyne
> (*Cantos*, p. 520)

In the later *Cantos*, and especially in *Thrones*, she embodies the conjunction of "mind" and "beauty":

> And in thy mind beauty, O Artemis,
> as of mountain lakes in the dawn,
> Foam and silk are thy fingers,
> (*Cantos*, p. 778)

But even in his final poetry Pound is critical of the force Diana represents:

> And in thy mind beauty,
> O Artemis.
> As to sin, they invented it--eh?
> (*Cantos*, p. 789)

Paralleled to the description of Troy and to the scene "under the apple trees," place indicates the ambivalent nature of Diana. The valley where Diana and her nymphs are bathing again appears to be an ideal, pastoral scene:

> The valley is thick with leaves, with leaves, the trees,
> The sunlight glitters, glitters a-top,
> Like a fish-scale roof,
> Like the church roof in Poictiers
> If it were gold.

But there is a suggestion that there may be a less idyllic force beyond the lyricism, that there is a sense of darkness amid the extreme illumination of the scene: beneath the leaves the water is "black," the nymphs are "fanning their hair in the dark" and there is "not a lost shatter of sunlight." The darkness is an omen of the aggression which suddenly manifests itself through the startling elimination of Actaeon:

> Stumbling, stumbling along in the wood,
> Muttering, muttering Ovid:
> "Pergusa... pool... pool... Gargaphia,
> "Pool... pool of Salmacis."
> The empty armour shakes as the cygnet moves.

The pool of Gargaphia, where Actaeon was metamorphosed, and the pool of Salmacis, where Salmacis and Hermaphrodite became one creature, are linked to Pergusa, the scene of the abduction of Persephone into the underworld. The apparently tranquil scene has now acquired some of the characteristics of Hades.[12]

The pattern of light and darkness, which represents the ambivalence between creative and destructive impulses, is elaborated in the following two passages of Canto IV. In contrast to Persephone's dark world and the "empty armour," there is a sense of overflowing light:

> Thus the light rains, thus pours, *e lo soleills plovil*
> The liquid and rushing crystal
> beneath the knees of the gods.
> Ply over ply, thin glitter of water;
> Brook film bearing white petals.

After Actaeon's unmerited metamorphosis and Diana's aggression, these passages return to a more positive note. The setting is now oriental, and predominantly Japanese: "The pine at Takasago" refers to two pine trees at Takasago in Japan, which symbolize conjugal fidelity, Isé is a Japanese shrine and the "Tree of Visages" may be an allusion to a Japanese shrub.[13] The petals are white, innocent. The Japanese motifs are paralleled by the references to the wedding celebrations of Hymen, the god of marriage, and by the implications of "Aurunculeia!":

> Saffron sandal so petals the narrow foot: Hymenaeus Io!
> Hymen, Io Hymenaee! Aurunculeia!
> One scarlet flower is cast on the blanch-white stone.

But the final, beautiful line is perhaps a renewal of the ambivalence embodied by Helen, Procne and Diana. At one level it alludes to the consummation of the marriage, the initiation of the virgin. But the image of the dark flower on the white stone is also a continuation of the light and darkness patterns, and the "blanch-white stone" is an echo of the scene of Soremonda's suicide, "the slim white stone bar."

The element of doubt which has entered the epithalamium is elaborated in the narrative by Sō-Gyoka, the Chinese poet. The "wind of the palace" parallels the "wind of Rhodez" and the allusions to the "'water-

jets'" and "'water with rushes'" relate the passage of the scene of Actaeon's metamorphosis. Although wind and rain are seen as "part of the process" in *The Pisan Cantos*, in Canto IV the wind signifies destruction and the disruption of nature:

> No wind is the king's wind.
> Let every cow keep her calf.
> "This wind is held in gauze curtains..."
> No wind is the king's...

The line "Let every cow keep her calf" is related to the murder of Itys by his mother and the reference to the "gauze curtains" is a further echo of Soremonda's suicidal fall from the window. No king has control over the forces represented by these two women.

The final passage is an orchestration of the ambivalent forces presented in the canto. The "camel drivers" are passive onlookers who, as a later canto indicates, may represent the "wisdom" of mere survival:

> . . . "I said 'let us speak of religion.'
> "Camel driver said: I must milk my camel.
> "So when he had milked his camel I said 'let us speak of religion.'
> And the camel driver said: It is time to drink milk.
> (*Cantos*, p. 232)

Ecbatan, the capital of Media Magna which was surrounded by seven perfectly concentric walls, was adopted by Pound as an archetype of physical, aesthetic and spiritual perfection.[14] For Pound, Ecbatan is the antithesis of Troy. But the ideal symbolized by Ecbatan and the "wisdom" of the camel drivers are counterbalanced by the reference to Danae, who was imprisoned by her father, and by the line "Smoke hangs on the stream," which parallels the description of the "Palace in smoky light." The idyllic "peach-trees," "evening haze" and "Gilt rafters" are modified by the word "scrapes" and by the further references to darkness, the "black

water" and "Gray stone-posts." The posts do not quite lead to Ecbatan.

As Pound explains in one of his letters, "Sennin are the Chinese spirits of nature or of the air" and "Rokku is a mountain."[15] Both are thus related to a sacred mountain in China, Mount Taishan, which is a pervasive symbol of spiritual awareness in *The Pisan Cantos*. But the value of Sennin and Rokku is immediately undermined by the references to Polhonac, Gyges, Cabestan and Tereus, who all signify some form of perverse activity: Cabestan and Tereus have already appeared in the canto, Polhonac encouraged his wife's adultery and Gyges murdered his king. The Church, "god's bride," is only "waiting," for the "Procession" is a secular ritual and "Regina" is Elizabeth, the virgin, barren queen. In contrast to the River Adige, which is associated with the Madonna and the poetry of Cavalcanti, the river Garonne[16] is "thick like paint."

Like the centaur, which is neither horse nor man, Canto IV is a compound. It encompasses both Troy and Ecbatan, the beauty and the aggression of Diana, the violence signified by Procne and the dignity signified by Soremonda. Pound does not attempt to resolve this ambivalence, he simply presents it. Canto IV is a plea to recognize and to watch "there in the arena."

The Helen of the *Cantos* is beautiful and sensual, yet she simultaneously represents destruction, perversity and flux. She is an aesthetic ideal, yet an instigator of the most futile act of aggression in history. This duality is introduced in Canto II, in which she is first likened to various sea nymphs and goddesses: "daughter of Lir,"[17] "lithe daughter of Ocean," "the voice of Schoeney's daughters"[18] and "Tyro."[19] Her beauty is related to the sea, "the blue-gray glass of the

wave," and thus to her champion, Aphrodite, who was born from the sea foam. But Helen, or Eleanor[20] is "ἐλέναυς and ἐλέπτολις"--"ship-destroying and city-destroying." The Homer of Canto II recognizes the divine beauty of her movements and of her face, but also realizes that an aesthetic ideal instigated the self-perpetuating destruction of the Trojan War:

> "Let her go back to the ships,
> Back among Grecian faces, lest evil come on our own,
> Evil and further evil, and a curse cursed on our children,
> Moves, yes she moves like a goddess
> And has the face of a god

Under the synonym "Tyndarida," the Helen of Canto V is linked with the disruption of natural order, with the vines that "lie untended," with the infertility of Atthis and with the murder of Giovanni Borgia. The lines from Sappho, beginning "'Fades light from the sea-crest'," imply the ideal world which has been lost. The destructive consequences of Helen's beauty is paralleled by the reference to Savairic Mauleon, an opportunist in Provençal politics, who, according to Pound, "wed the woman" for "land and knight's fee." Poicebot, a monk who was "converted" to the more frivolous aspects of troubadour life, lived in the court where the "air was full of woman":

> Found a woman, changed and familiar face;
> Hard night, and parting at morning.

But in spite of these lascivious implications, the legend in Canto V which most resembles the Trojan story is that involving Pieire de Maensac's abduction of Bernart de Tierci's wife. The relation between Helen and Provence[21] is finally stated:

> And had De Tierci's wife and with the war they made
> Troy in Auvergnat
> While Menelaus piled up the church at port
> He kept Tyndarida. Dauphin stood with de Maensac.

Canto V is partly concerned with the destructive elements of female beauty typified by Helen; but the "lust" is in man, in Poicebot, de Maensac and Menelaus.

Canto VII adds a further dimension to Helen's paradoxical beauty. It opens with a reference to Eleanor of Acquitaine and a repetition of the Greek pun of Canto II, which translates as "man-destroying" and "city-destroying." The pun is taken from line 689 of the *Agamemnon*, from the Chorus' speech about the history of the Trojan War.[22] It is repeated at about the mid-point of Canto VII:

> But *is* she dead as Tyro? In seven years?
> Ελέναυς, ἔλανδρος, ἐλέπτολις
> The sea runs in the beach-groove, shaking the floated pebbles,
> Eleanor!
> The scarlet curtain throws a less scarlet shadow;

The lines indicate the ambivalent nature of Helen. As in Canto II her beauty is implied through the references to the sea, but the direct quotation from the *Agamemnon* and the final line present the destructive consequences of this beauty. According to George Dekker, the source of the line "The scarlet curtain throws a less scarlet shadow" was Ovid,[23] but it is also possible that it is a further reference to the *Agamemnon*. The adjectives scarlet, crimson and purple pervade the play, usually in connection with the murder of Agamemnon by Clytaemestra. A richly coloured tapestry entices Agamemnon into the palace:

> Why this delay? Your task has been appointed you,
> to strew the ground before his feet with tapestries.
> Let there spring up into the house he never hoped
> to see, where Justice leads him in, a crimson path.[24]

> Now since my will was bent to listen to you in this
> my feet crush purple as I pass within the hall.[25]

Pound's interest in the *Oresteia* seems confined to the *Agamemnon*,[26] to the immediate consequences of Helen's beauty and the Trojan War; he ignores the attempted resolution presented in *Choephoroi* and *The Eumenides*.[27] There are several references to the murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra[28] by Clytaemestra, a murder which is linked to the other examples of violent death in the *Cantos*. Like Giovanni Borgia, Agamemnon was murdered in his bath. In Canto V, a line from the *Agamemnon* which is spoken by the Chorus as Agamemnon is murdered,[29] follows an allusion to the murder of Alessandro de Medici:

> Whether for love of Florence ... but
> "O se morisse, credesse caduto da sè"
> Σιγα, οιγα
>
> (*Cantos*, p. 19)

The final line of Canto LVIII, translated as "And that is that," is the last phrase of Clytaemestra's emotionless and pragmatic speech about her dead husband.[30] There is a further reference to this speech in Canto LXXXII.[31]

In Canto VII Pound thus seems to emphasize the destructive aspects of Helen by isolating lines and allusions from the *Agamemnon*. Yet his attitude to Helen in this canto is not one of unqualified condemnation. For he presents a world devoid of the beauty and sensuality she embodies:

> The old men's voices, beneath the columns of false marble,
> The modish and darkish walls,
> Discreeter gilding, and the panelled wood

It is the world of Henry James,[32] a world of artificial ornaments, of manners, of furniture.[33] The passage attempts a satire of late Victorian England, but lacks the compact stanzaic structure, the ironic rhymes and

the vivacity of *Mauberley*. It is an overstatement which lacks the compensation of humour. But this section of the canto is significant in its relation to Helen, for here, in James's England, beauty is buried:

> We also made ghostly visits, and the stair
> That knew us, found us again on the turn of it,
> Knocking at empty rooms, seeking for buried beauty;
> And the sun-tanned, gracious and well-formed fingers
> Lift no latch of bent bronze ...

Amid this sterile scene Helen's beauty, her "well-formed fingers," reappears. The lines "Ione, dead the long year/ My lintel, and Liu Ch'e's lintel" refers to two of Pound's early poems, which signify the "lintel" or threshold to new creation. But both poems were concerned with past, lost love and are thus related to the plea for the "buried beauty." The passage is a rather simplistic comparison of past with present:

> "Beer-bottle on the statue's pediment!
> "That, Fritz, is the era, to-day against the past,
> "Contemporary." And the passion endures.
> Against their action, aromas. Rooms, against chronicles.
> Smaragdos, chrysolithos; De Gama wore striped pants in Africa
> And "Mountains of the sea gave birth to troops";

The passion represented by Helen "endures" through the sensual "aromas" which modify "action," through the personalized history of a room rather than systemized "chronicles,"[34] and through the jewels "Smaragdos, chrysolithos," which highlight the vulgarity of the "striped pants."

In spite of the devastation caused by her, Helen[35] represents light, "naked beauty" and timeless love:

> Lamplight at Buovilla, e quel remir
> And all that day
> Nicea moved before me
> And the cold grey air troubled her not
> For all her naked beauty, bit not the tropic skin,
> And her long slender feet lit on the curb's marge

And her moving height went before me,
We alone having being.

Pound often presents Helen in motion, but usually her movements signify destruction. In Canto II the line "And doom goes with her walking" connects movement to the fate of Troy and at the end of Canto VII itself "her moving height" has become "the tall indifference":

All the tall indifference moves,
a more living shell,
Drift in the air of fate, dry phantom, but intact.

But the static scene at Buovilla is suddenly transformed into a world of "Dry casques" and "A dryness calling for death." In a world without an ideal "Art" is the artifice of "'Toc' sphinxes" and beauty is lost, a "stillness,/ Shell of the older house." Music is "ill beat" and there is a "petrefaction of air." The land is dry, but there is still the thirst, a thirst for "Passion to breed a form in shimmer of rain-blur." Canto VII is concerned with the paradox of Helen's beauty, with a supremely destructive, but simultaneously indispensable, force. Helen's beauty is "man-destroying," but a world without the idealism of beauty is intolerable.

Perhaps because of her utter passivity, the importance of Helen diminishes in the later *Cantos*. Whereas Helen is merely a pawn in the Trojan War, Circe[36] actually seduces Odysseus and leads him towards a new awareness. In his treatment of the Odysseus myth, Pound emphasizes Circe's role at the expense of both Penelope and Nausikaa. For Circe's "destructive beauty" has a further dimension: she is also a guide to Tiresias, to spiritual renewal.

Canto I is a translation of a translation, a translation of Divus' Latin version of the *Odyssey*, Book XI. Odysseus and his companions leave Circe's island and embark on the journey to Hades:

> And then went down to the ship,
> Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and

The word "And" indicates the previous episodes of the *Odyssey*, including the effect of Circe's spells and her seduction of Odysseus. The line "Bore sheep aboard her, and our bodies also," however, illuminates the more benevolent aspects of Circe. For the "sheep" will be sacrificed to Tiresias. Through Circe's help, the bodies which are merely an inert cargo may be reunited with the "We," the spirits of the men. For Odysseus reaches "the place/ Aforesaid by Circe," evokes the dead[37] and first encounters the seer Tiresias. Circe is another ambivalent figure, an enchantress and a spiritual guide. For although Circe instigates Odysseus' spiritual regeneration, Canto I describes the consequences of her previous actions:

> But first Elpenor came, our friend Elpenor,
> Unburied, cast on the wide earth,
> Limbs that we left in the house of Circe,
> Unwept, wrapped in sepulchre, since toils urged each other.

The duality Circe signifies is most vividly presented in Canto XXXIX, in which even the opening scene is ambivalent:

> Desolate is the roof where the cat sat,
> Desolate is the iron rail that he walked
> And the corner post whence he greeted the sunrise.

The scene is primarily described as "Desolate": in this context the cat is a sinister animal and the "roof" is an echo of "'the Atreides' roof'" of Canto LXXXII.[38] The "he" is presumably Odysseus. But in the third line the "sunrise" and the "corner post" imply an element of light and

direction which is elaborated by the productivity associated with the "loom," the creativity associated with the song, and the wisdom associated with the olive. Even before the introduction of Circe into the canto, Pound has presented an ambivalent scene of light and darkness.

It is quite apparent from the description of Circe's "ingle" that Pound was not abashed at sexuality:[39]

> Fat leopard 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

On one hand Circe is a sorceress, a symbol of the disruption of natural order:

> Spring overborne into summer
> late spring in the leafy autumn

This disruption of seasonal patterns is a continual concern in the *Cantos,* as in the Chinese History *Cantos:*

> Snow fell in mid summer
> Apricots were in December ...
> (*Cantos,* p. 274)

Amid the references to the "dreadful drugs" and the "fucked girls," there is an indication of the positive aspects of Circe and even an implication of fertility. She has a "Venter venustus," a "beautiful belly," she sings of the spring: "ver novum, canorum, ver novum"[40] and she is linked with symbols of sustenance and growth:

> First honey and cheese
> honey at first and then acorns
> Honey at the start and then acorns

Although Circe's song is "sharp at the edge," her "crotch" is "like a young sapling." The line in Latin, which translates as "she hushed with

grief, and her voice likewise," implies that Circe has a capacity for grief, that she is no longer merely a seductive enchantress.

The next lines are a more explicit statement of Circe's function as a spiritual guide. Like the Greek quotations in the first passage, these lines are from Book X of the *Odyssey,* from the episode in which Circe instructs Odysseus to journey to Hades, where he will meet Tiresias. Throughout the *Cantos* this meeting is only seen as a *future* event and from the viewpoint of Circe rather than from that of Tiresias. Circe is now linked with the benevolent spirit of Mava, a sea deity, with Hathor, an Egyptian goddess of fertility, and with Flora, an Italian deity of flowers and fertility. The line "Euné kai philoteti ephata Kirkh," which translates "Making love in bed said Circe," now seems to represent the positive aspects of physical love rather than promiscuity.

The central motif of the final passage is spring, the traditional symbol of new life, of seasonal continuity. Pound borrows a stanza from the fourteenth century lyric "Alysoun":

> Betuene Aprile and Merche
> with sap new in the bough
> With plum flowers above them
> with almond on the black bough

The "Ver novum" of the first passage is repeated, and the seduction by Circe is related to procreation, the "god in my belly," and to marriage, "Sic loquitur nupta/ Cantat sic nupta."[41] Corresponding to the evocation of the spring is the dance,[42] the celebration of ritual and fertility:

> To beat of the measure
> From star up to the half-dark
> From half-dark to half-dark
> Unceasing the measure

The figure of Circe seems to merge with the sea, with the goddesses of

fertility and with the dance, which now acquires divine proportions:

> With one measure, unceasing:
> "Fac deum!" "Est factus."[43]

The last line is spoken by Odysseus: "I have eaten the flame." The flame is Circe, who is the flame of physical desire and potential destruction, but who also represents the flame of sacrifice. In spite of the linguistic difficulties it presents, Canto XXXIX is crucial to the structure of the *Cantos*. For Circe represents the "destructive beauty" embodied by Helen and Diana in the earlier *Cantos*, yet is linked to the permanent, cyclical fertility of Demeter, Aphrodite and Gea Tella in *The Pisan Cantos*. As such she is the most central female figure in the *Cantos*.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Edwards and Vasse, p. 6.

[2]Baumann, p. 22.

[3]But the degree to which sound or typography can convey meaning will remain a subject for speculation.

[4]In Canto XVII this connection between "Choros nympharum" and Dionysus, or Zagreus, is more explicitly stated:

> Zagreus, feeding his panthers,
> the turf clear as on hills under light,
> And under the almond-trees, gods,
> with them, *choros nympharum*, Gods,

See *Cantos*, p. 77.

[5]Baumann, p. 25.

[6]Watts, p. 62.

[7]These sacrilegious acts, and the adultery which accompanied them, parallel the myth of the House of Atreus.

[8]It is difficult to understand why Pound reduced this cry to the cheap pun "'Tis. 'Tis. Ytis!"

[9]Both signify Soremonda's innocence.

[10]The Actaeon myth seems to have been of lasting interest to Pound, as in the earlier poem "The Coming of War: Actaeon." See *Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 117.

[11]Chaucer, *Complete Works* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p. 121.

[12]The reference to Piere Vidal is another example of metamorphosis, and is thus linked both to the stag hunt and to the Actaeon myth. Because his Lady's name was "Loba" ("she-wolf"), Vidal disguised himself as a wolf, was chased, but finally gained favour with the lady and her husband. But the lines are unnecessary and diverting.

[13]Edwards and Vasse, p. 227.

[14]Ecbatan reappears in Canto V and later in *The Pisan Cantos:* "To build the city of Dioce whose terraces are the colour of stars," see *Cantos*, p. 425.

[15]*Selected Letters 1907-1941*, p. 180.

[16]The river Garonne is also mentioned in Canto LXXXIV. See *Cantos*, p. 538.

[17]Lir was a Celtic sea god. See Edwards and Vasse, p. 126.

[18]Schoeneus' daughter, Atalanta. See Edwards and Vasse, p. 194.

[19]The daughter of Salmoneus, who was also loved by Poseidon. See Edwards and Vasse, p. 230.

[20]This is also a reference to Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122-1204). See Edwards and Vasse, p. 58.

[21]Auvergnat is an area in Provence.

[22]David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, eds., *Greek Tragedies: Volume I* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 26.

[23]Dekker, p. 23.

[24]*Agamemnon*, II, 908-11. See Grene and Lattimore, p. 32.

[25]*Agamemnon*, II, 955-57. See Grene and Lattimore, p. 34.

[26]Pound says of the *Agamemnon:* "I then took over. If one Greek play can claim pre-eminence over the best dozen others (which it probably can not) that play wd. be the *Agamemnon*." See *Guide to Kulchur*, p. 92.

[27]Athene, the arbitrator at the trial of Orestes and the goddess of Athens, has relatively little significance in the *Cantos*. Unlike Helen, "Athene cd/ have done with more sex appeal." See *Cantos*, p. 486.

[28]In Canto LXXVII and Canto LXXVIII the emphasis is on Cassandra, Clytaemestra's other victim: "the wind as mad as Cassandra/ who was as sane as the lot of 'em." See *Cantos*, p. 475.

[29]*Agamemnon*, I.1344. See Grene and Lattimore, p. 48. The line is translated as: "Silence: who cried out that he was stabbed to death within the house?"

[30]*Agamemnon*, II.1404-06. See Grene and Lattimore, p. 48.

[31]*Cantos*, p. 523.

[32]The phrase "con gli occhi onesti e tardi" is repeated in the poem "I Vecchi" (*Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 200), and in his essay on James (*Literary Essays*, p. 295).

[33]*Literary Essays*, p. 308.

[34]"Rooms may betray the spirit of a civilization, but chronicles can reveal only the unanalysed 'march of events'." See Daniel D. Pearlman, *The Barb of Time* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), p. 83.

[35]"Nicea" is a possible reference to the "Nicean barks" of Poe's poem "To Helen." See Edwards and Vasse, p. 154.

[36]According to A. Alvarez, ". . . nearly all the women of the *Cantos,* for example, turn out in time to be Circe." See Noel Stock, *Ezra Pound: Perspectives* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1965), p. 54.

[37]The "nekuia."

[38]*Cantos,* p. 523.

[39]In his essay on Cavalcanti, Pound says: "They are opposed to a form of stupidity not limited to Europe, that is, idiotic asceticism and a belief that the body is evil. . . . For after asceticism, that is anti-flesh, we get the asceticism that is anti-intelligence." See *Literary Essays,* pp. 150-54.

[40]"Fresh spring, melodious, fresh spring." See Edwards and Vasse, p. 237.

[41]"so the bride speaks, so she sings." See Edwards and Vasse, p. 198.

[42]The emphasis on dance was probably influenced by Pound's study and translation of the Japanese Noh plays, a study which eventually produced *The Classic Noh Theatre of Japan* (New York: New Directions, 1959). Fenollosa says in his notes on the plays: "We can now see why, even in the full lyric drama, the god dance remains the central feature. All the slow and beautiful postures of the early dramatic portion invariably lead up to the climax of the hero's dance." See *The Classic Noh Theatre of Japan,* p. 69.

[43]"Make God!" "He is made." See Edwards and Vasse, p. 66.

CHAPTER V

THE "VORTEX OF FECUNDITY"

Speaking of historical Chinese dynasties and of the "races inhabiting Africa and the Ocean islands," the sculptor Gaudier-Brzeska wrote in *Blast:* "THE VORTEX WAS INTENSE MATURITY. Maturity is fecundity--they grew numerous and it lasted for six thousand years. . . . They pulled the sphere lengthways and made the cylinder, this is the VORTEX OF FECUNDITY, and it has left us the masterpieces that are known as love charms."[1] This statement is an apt introduction to one aspect of Pound's "philosophy," his belief in continuing fertility and in universal, organic interrelationships. The energy, or "vortex," of fecundity lies beyond many of his poems.

Although this "philosophy" is partly the result of his own idealism and belief in human perfectability, Pound's interpretation of the connection between humanity and natural, procreative patterns was influenced by several diverse theories. Two early influences were De Gourmont, who constantly asserts the relation between man and his environment,[2] and Fenollosa, whose study of the etymology of the Chinese ideogram may explain Pound's view of the "organic" relation between phenomena. Fenollosa often describes language as a "natural process": "It seems to me that the normal and typical sentence in English as well as in Chinese expresses just this unit of natural process."[3] Pound's interest in sinology soon blossomed into Confucianism,[4] a philosophy in which social

order complements agricultural fertility: "Ethics are born from agriculture; the nomad gets no further than the concept of my sheep and thy sheep."[5] The Confucian belief in natural cycles is the basis of Pound's economic theories, for usury is ". . . a charge for the use of purchasing power, levied without regard to production, sometimes without regard even to the possibilities of production."[6] When financial systems lose their relation to natural fertility, usury,[7] the sin "CONTRA NATURAM,"[8] ensues:

> Usury brings age into youth; it lies between the bride
> and the bridegroom
> Usury is against Nature's increase.
> Whores for Eleusis;
>
> (*Cantos*, p. 250)

The banks which Pound esteems give credit which "rests *in ultimate* on the ABUNDANCE OF NATURE, on the growing grass that can nourish the living sheep";[9] the examination of the economic basis of society eventually leads back to an examination of nature.

Although it prefigures his interpretation of the fertility goddesses in the *Cantos*, Pound's treatment of the relation between nature and the ethereal, abstracted women in his earliest poems is a convention rather than a conviction:

> Lady of rich allure,
> Queen of the spring's embrace,
> Your arms are long like boughs of ash,[10]

In "Surgit Fama"[11] Korè, or Persephone, is related to the "corn" and to human fertility, and in "Coitus," Dione, is part of the phallic metaphor for the celebration of spring:

> The gilded phaloi of the crocuses
> are thrusting at the spring air
> (*Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 120)

This self-conscious eroticism was supplanted by the celebration of

Aphrodite, and of the cyclical patterns she represents, in the *Cantos*.

Like Canto I and Canto XXXIX, Canto XLVII begins with Odysseus' journey into hell and his meeting with Tiresias, who "even dead, yet hath his mind entire." Again the meeting is only anticipated.[12] Instead the emphasis is on Circe, for the first passage, the sound "in the dark," is her speech to Odysseus prior to his departure. But whereas Canto XXXIX is concerned with the ambivalent aspects of Circe, in Canto XLVII she is related only to spiritual regeneration, to fertility and to the "knowledge" which Odysseus gained from his encounter with her. This "knowledge" is now elevated to the awareness of "the shade of a shade"; Eros and "knowledge" are integrated through Circe. She is also indirectly linked with Ceres,[13] the goddess of the harvest, and with Persephone, who is a symbol for cyclical rebirth throughout the *Cantos*. The association with the fertility rituals of Demeter, Persephone and Aphrodite, who is not only the traditional goddess of love but also the goddess of fertility, is elaborated in the passages which follow the initial narrative. At this point the figure of Circe merges into that of Aphrodite. For instead of the "black cock crows in the sea foam" of Canto IV, Aphrodite and the sea are symbols of fertility and continuity.

The passage beginning "The small lamps . . ." introduces the myth of Aphrodite and Adonis. After he had been attacked by a boar, Adonis was metamorphosed into an anenome by his forlorn lover Aphrodite. This metamorphosis, or rebirth, explains Adonis' significance in several fertility rites. In Canto XLVII he is associated with Tamuz, a Babylonian fertility god whose blood was supposed to stain the waters of the river Byblos each year; the blood of Tamuz and Adonis and the red of the

anenome[14] permeate the imagery of the canto:

> The sea is streaked red with Adonis,
> The lights flicker red in small jars.

The Greek "TU DIONE"[15] and "Kai MOIRAI'ADONIN" originate from Bion's "Lament for Adonis,"[16] but whereas Bion's poem is predominantly concerned with Aphrodite's grief, Canto XLVII emphasizes Adonis' metamorphosis and survival. For Canto XLVII is a celebration of the "wheat" and the "altar," of both physical and spiritual renewal:

> Wheat shoots rise new by the altar,
> flower from the swift seed.

The metamorphosis coalesces with the sense of natural unity. Light, the "small lamps" and the "red flame," connects humanity, the "long boats," with the elements of the sea and of the "pale night":

> From the long boats they have set lights in the water,
> The sea's claw gathers them outward.
> Scilla's dogs snarl at the cliff's base,
> The white teeth gnaw in under the crag,
> But in the pale night the small lamps float seaward

The image of the "sea's claw" describes the darkened inlet, the sea seeming to grasp the land, the unity of landscape and of nature; towards the end of the canto the image recurs, but more explicitly associated with fecundity, the "Fruit" and the "plowing":

> Fruit cometh after. The small lights drift out with the tide,
> sea's claw has gathered them outward,
> Four banners to every flower
> The sea's claw draws the lamps outward.
> Think thus of thy plowing

The reason for Odysseus' journey on "the road/ to hell" is his quest for a place in this natural "unity," for humanity is "measured" as part of the entire environment:

When the cranes fly high
think of plowing.
By this gate art thou measured

Aphrodite becomes a more cosmic "she," a figure who is closely integrated with fertility, with the "Wheat shoots." Beyond natural processes "she believes not," for, just as the sap is "in the shoot" and the "Moth is called over the mountain," so this archetypal female has a subjective, personal relationship with environment:

The stars are not in her counting,
To her they are but wandering holes.

Complementing this subjectivity is the sheer, male will which forces the bull to run "blind on the sword" and which instigates the visit to Circe's cave. The "Molü," the herb which counteracted Circe's spells, is only a "respite" from instinct, for the male instinct is dynamic, while the female instinct is passive, a subjective commitment. But both are part of the same process, a process which encompasses man's agricultural activities. The plough is a traditional symbol for seasonal rebirth, temporal progression and continuing fertility:

Begin thy plowing
When the Pleiades go down to their rest,
Begin thy plowing
40 days are they under seabord,
Thus do in fields by seabord
And in valleys winding down towards the sea.

Just as the valleys eventually merge with the sea, the Pleiades move in the cosmos, or the cranes migrate, so man must conform to a cyclical process.

The antithesis to this seasonal order is the disruption signified by the stars which "fall from the olive branch and by the shadow which "falls dark on the terrace." Like the martin's "wing-print," which

disappears "with his cry," man's position on earth, on "Tellus," is reduced to a "notch":[16]

> Thy notch no deeper indented
> Thy weight less than the shadow
> Yet hast thou gnawed through the mountain,
> Scylla's white teeth less sharp.

Humanity can either become a vehement Scylla, a disruptive force which has "gnawed through the mountain," or it can find a "nest," a "deeper planting" in the mountain.

The final invocation is "narrated" by Adonis, who becomes the epitome of a full integration with nature, with light, the hills and the grass. It is a lyrical celebration of metamorphosis and regeneration:

> 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

Rebirth, the fertility of the fruit and the flower, is celebrated by a choric pattern of images from preceding passages, the "seven stars," "the valleys that wind down toward the sea" and "the new shoots brought to the altar." Finally, after Aphrodite's cry is repeated, Adonis and Aphrodite become a force "that hath the gift of healing,/ that hath the power over wild beasts."

Whereas the idealism of Canto XLVII is distanced through the mythological figures of Circe, Aphrodite and Adonis, the interpretation of mythology in *The Pisan Cantos* has a new, personal dimension. As mythology becomes an immediate equivalent for an emotional experience, the experience at the prison camp, the celebration of fertility and of the fertility goddesses, becomes taut, ennervated.

The objective, didactic "Begin thy plowing" of Canto XLVII has become the tense, protracted line "plowed in the sacred field and unwound the silk worms early in tensile."[17] The line has its own "Imagist" autonomy, for, although there is no subject and no grammatical or rational structure, it creates its own perspective: the silent, mystical field is the macrocosmic scene; the thread of the delicate silk is the microcosm. It approximates the effect of the Chinese ideogram. The silk worm is one manifestation of the sense of natural order and fertility, but the phrase "in tensile"[18] has a more complex connotation. It describes the silk thread, which has the precise tension of a string on a musical instrument,[19] but it also carries implications of extreme light, of light intensity stretched to its limit. The plough and the silk worms, which both signify fertility, are part of the "total light"[20] ideogram, the expression of supreme physical and spiritual light.

The affirmation of fertility is more usually embodied in the female deities, in Aphrodite or in the earth goddesses Demeter, Persephone and Gea Tella. The passage in Canto LXXIV, which begins with "as by Terracina . . ."[21] is a celebration of Aphrodite's power both as the goddess of love and as the goddess of fertility. Initially her beauty and her birth from the sea is suggested:

> as by Terracina rose from the sea Zephyr behind her
> and from her manner of walking
> as had Anchises
> (*Cantos*, p. 435)

Aphrodite's sensuality, which is indicated by "her manner of walking" and by the reference to Anchises,[22] is also associated with the spiritual "shrine," with the natural "process" and with the seasonal movement of

the Pleiades:

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

As in Canto XLVII, Aphrodite becomes a more general "female principle," merging with Kuanon, the Chinese goddess of Mercy, and with the reference in Greek to "nether earth, Mother." In the natural harmony of the "Mother" earth, wine is plentiful, "the stone bringeth sleep,"[23] grass is "nowhere out of place" and the medicinal herbs grow "from" her and eventually return "to" her. The line "will never be more now than at present" is crucial: the "belief" in the continuing fertility of this "Mother" and in the fundamental benevolence of natural processes, can never be more real, "more now," than in the immediate situation. For the "shrine" is now the tent and the sensuality of Aphrodite has become a personal "knowledge," "in coitu inluminatio,"[24] a knowledge which may, as the reference to "ΤΙΘΩΝΩΙ"[25] suggests, lead to immortality. The tent gives Aphrodite a new proximity and validity.

Throughout *The Pisan Cantos* Aphrodite's metaphysical significance is paralleled by a physical, sensual dynamism. Although she is linked with the three ideals of "ΧΑΡΙΤΕΣ,"[26] Kuanon and Cunizza[27] in a later passage of Canto LXXIV, her virtue is never static:

ΧΑΡΙΤΕΣ possibly in the soft air
with the mast held by the left hand
in this air as of Kuanon
enigma forgetting the times and seasons
but this air brought her ashore a la marina
with the great shell borne on the seawaves
nautilis biancastra
By no means an orderly Dantescan rising
but as the winds veer

(*Cantos*, p. 443)

The irony of "By no means an orderly Dantescan rising" is not a refutation of the idealism of Botticelli's "Birth of Venus" or of Dante's *Commedia,* but more of an affirmation of Aphrodite's physical presence. She is not a distant abstraction, but a natural, dynamic force which moves "as the winds veer." Similarly, in Canto LXXVI she is the "live wind" and the "strong air," a vital energy amid the traditional symbol of death, the "cypress." The antithesis to Aphrodite is Persephone, who, in this context, is a figure "to whom passion is unknown"[28] and whose asceticism results only in "Death, insanity/ suicide degeneration." Aphrodite's crystalline, yet tangible, presence is repeatedly described, as in the passage beginning "The rain has fallen, the wind coming down." She is again related to female fertility deities, to Thetis, the mother of Achilles, and to Maya, the mother of Buddha.[29] The goddesses embody the ethereality of the "colour rose-blue before sunset/ and carmine and amber," but also a "tangibility by no means *atasal*."[30] Aphrodite, Maya and Thetis are not merely "spiriti," but "personae,"[31] and the principle they represent "can be weighed," can be confined to a crystalline sphere:

> but the crystal can be weighed in the hand
> formal and passing within the sphere . . .
> (*Cantos,* p. 459)

In *The Pisan Cantos* the "man-destroying" Helen of Canto II and Canto VII is synthesized with Tellus, the Roman goddess of the Earth, and thus signifies fertility rather than the ambivalent "destructive beauty" of the earlier cantos:

> Mist covers the breasts of Tellus-Helena and drifts up the Arno
> (*Cantos,* p. 473)

as from the breasts of Helen, a cup of white gold
2 cups for three altars, Tellus γέα feconda
"each one in the name of its god"
mint, thyme and basilicum,
(*Cantos*, p. 487)

In Canto LXXXIII the figure of Tellus gives a sense of perspective to the immediate fear and loneliness of the prison camp:

The infant has descended,
from mud on the tent roof to Tellus,
like to like colour he goes amid grass-blades
greeting them that dwell under XTHONOS . . .
(*Cantos*, p. 533)

The passage begins with a detailed description of the movement of the ant, "The infant," from the "tent roof" to "Tellus." Tellus signifies both the earthen floor of the tent and a mythological archetype. Similarly the minutiae of the ant and of the "grass blades" expand into a contemplation of the whole of the nether world, the "XTHONOS." A small patch of land gives the perspective of an archetypal "earth" figure, and the concentration on a single detail of experience unfolds into the whole spectrum of mythology.

At the end of Canto LXXXII, anticipating his possible execution, Pound initially sees the Earth, here called "GEA TERRA," as a symbol of inescapable mortality:

How drawn, O GEA TERRA,
what draws as thou drawest
till one sink into thee by an arm's width
embracing thee, Drawest,
truly thou drawest.
(*Cantos*, p. 526)

Yet he immediately realizes that it is the Earth which can simultaneously give the only "wisdom," a wisdom beyond language, "past metaphor." "Wisdom" is not the "knowing" of humanity, but the wisdom gained from a

realization of the "mystery beneath the earth," "ΧΘΟΝΙΟΣ mysterium":

> but I will come out of this knowing no one
> neither they me
> connubium terrae ἔφατα ποσις ἐμός
> ΧΘΟΝΙΟΣ, mysterium

This passage alternates between the consolation given by the "GEA TERRA" and "the loneliness of death," a loneliness which could never be dissociated from the experience at Pisa:

> but that a man should live in that further terror, and live
> the loneliness of death came upon me
> (at 3 P.M., for an instant)

Partly through the perspective gained through mythology and through "GEA TERRA," the sense of loneliness is restrained, even objectified. The sudden, terse parenthesis, the ironical abbreviation and colloquialism make the experience more distant and therefore more tolerable; there is no lapse into sentimentality or morbidity. The canto ends with objective description of the visual and oral presence of the birds, for the individual "periplum"[32] can now be viewed with some detachment:

> three solemn half notes
> their white downy chests black-rimmed
> on the middle wire
> periplum

Pound's interest in the Eleusinian mysteries and in their presiding deity, Demeter, the goddess of the earth and harvest, is particularly relevant to the "lynx" passages of Canto LXXIX. The ancient Eleusinian tradition, which was first described in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter of about 600 B.C., originated in the mythological legend of Pluto's abduction of Persephone, the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, into the underworld. When Demeter learned that Zeus, who was also Pluto's brother, had given his consent to this act, she left Olympus and eventually came

to Eleusis, near Athens, where a great temple was built to honour her. She isolated herself in this temple and vowed that the earth would be infertile until the Olympian deities returned her daughter to her. Zeus submitted and recalled Persephone, but Pluto gave her some pomegranate seeds which, if eaten, would retain her in the underworld for part of the year. Persephone ate the seeds and was forced to live a third of each year in the lower world, but for the remainder of the year she lived with her mother on Olympus. Before Demeter left Eleusis she restored the land's fertility and taught the city's leaders her mysteries,[33] which were "'. . . awful mysteries which no one may pry into or utter, for deep awe of the Gods checks the voice'."[34]

Pound mentioned the "mysteries" in one of his letters[35] and in several of his articles, which indicate his "belief" in "festivals of fecundity" and "sun festivals":

> Paganism included a certain attitude toward; a certain understanding of, coitus, which is the mysterium.
>
> The other rites are the festivals of fecundity of the grain and the sun festivals, without revival of which religion can not return to the hearts of the people.[36]

> I believe that a light from Eleusis persisted throughout the middle ages and set beauty in the song of Provence, and of Italy.[37]

> On the other hand the cult of Eleusis will explain not only general phenomena but particular beauties in Arnaut Daniel or in Guido Cavalcanti.[38]

The lynx, which is the central symbol in the latter part of Canto LXXIX,[39] has no exact equivalent in the Eleusinian mysteries, but it is immediately related to the produce of the earth, to the "wine pot," to "our corn" and to "Manitou," which is "the Algonquian Indian name for the natural power which permeates all things."[40] But the lynx is

neither merely a symbol of "natural power" nor of piercing insight,[41] for it is initially addressed as "my love" and thus seems to represent the bacchic, sensual aspects of paganism. Also the lynx "guards" or "keeps watch" throughout these passages; it preserves the mysteries and regulates natural order and cycles. It is a complex, irreducible symbol.

Through the diurnal cycle, Pound's predicament in the camp coalesces with mystical experience:

> The moon has a swollen cheek
> and when the morning sun lit up the shelves and battalions
> of the West, cloud over cloud
> Old Ez folded his blankets
> Neither Eos not Hesperus has suffered wrong at my hands
> O lynx, wake Silenus and Casey
> shake the castagnettes of the bassarids,
> the mountain forest is full of light
> the tree-comb red-gilded
> Who sleeps in the field of lynxes
> in the orchard of Maelids?
>
> (*Cantos*, pp. 488-89)

The simple, ironical "Old Ez folded his blankets" is paralleled by the awakening of both Casey, a corporal at the DTC, and of the mythological figure Silenus.[42] Mythological deities and mystical rituals are fused into the evocation of the lynx, for Priapus, Dionysus and Cythera[43] are within the "field" or "garden" of the lynx, and the sacrificial "fire," the "grape vines" and the dance[44] are attended by him. Again the confined present has expanded into the eternal.

At this point there are specific allusions to the subjects of the Eleusinian mysteries, Persephone,[45] Demeter and Dionysus.[46] This passage may be concerned with "a young girl's fascination with sex,"[47] but the "six seeds of an error" are also a reference to the pomegranate seeds eaten by Persephone. In the Eleusinian legend the pomegranate seeds

signify Pluto's lust and vindictiveness, but in this context the seeds have more traditional connotations, for they are symbols of continuing fertility and seasonal regeneration.[48] The pomegranate is linked with the fertility of the "orchard," of "Demeter's furrow," of "Pomona" and the forest "named Melagrana."[49] But it also represents the "fire" or "flame" of sacrifice:

> This fruit has a fire within it,
> Pomona, Pomona
> No glass is clearer than are the globes of this flame
> what sea is clearer than the pomegranate body
> holding the flame?
> Pomona, Pomona,

It seems possible that the pomegranate "orchard" is implicitly related to the Garden of Genesis and the question of Good and Evil. But although the pomegranate seems to represent the choice between the idyllic "bassarid"[50] and the "crotale," or rattlesnake, its colour has neither the full sensuality of red nor the absolute purity of white. Like nature, it is a compound of colours and shades:

> There is a rose vine in this underbrush
> Red? white? No, but a colour between them
> When the pomegranate is open and the light falls
> half thru it

This orchard may be superficially like that of the Old Testament, but the polarization between Good and Evil, between red and white, is superseded by the emphasis on fertility and natural cycles.

The "juice of the gods," "ιχώρ," can only be attained through the realization and the celebration of the instinctive patterns embodied by Aphrodite, who appears here under the name "Kuthera."[51] The antithesis of Aphrodite and the "acorn" is the more rational, intellectual "wisdom" represented by Athene, or "γλανκῶπις." Once the power of Aphrodite has

been asserted the incantation becomes a fluid, mystical celebration of fertility:

> and the vines are thick in their branches
> no vine lacking flower,
> no lynx lacking a flower rope
> no Maelid minus a wine jar
> this forest is named Melagrana

The lyrical "dance of the bassarids" is performed for Aphrodite, the goddess "born of the sea foam," whose beauty, sensuality and fertility are continually affirmed in *The Pisan Cantos*. But here she also embodies the hope for a new sacrificial altar, "aram/ nemus/ vult."[52] Although Aphrodite had little significance in the Eleusinian mysteries, in Pound's interpretation she seems to merge with the lynx and the other goddesses of fertility. For Canto LXXIX is not merely an imitation or an enactment of the Mysteries, it is Pound's own complex, esoteric arrangement of fertility rituals and symbols.

FOOTNOTES

[1]*Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir*, p. 23.

[2]". . . man is an animal, submitted to the essential instincts which govern all animality; there being everywhere the same matter animate with the same desire: to live, to perpetuate life." See *The Natural Philosophy of Love*, p. 4.

[3]*Instigations*, p. 367.

[4]See his translations of *The Great Digest and Unwobbling Pivot* (New York: New Directions, 1951) and of *The Confucian Odes* (New York: New Directions, 1954).

[5]*The Great Digest and Unwobbling Pivot*, p. 149.

[6]*Selected Prose 1909-1965*, p. 325.

[7]Donald Davie gives a lucid explanation of Pound's "Usura":

> If the only reliable symbol of true wealth is the grain which the earth may be made to yield, a national currency can be a true register of wealth only when the amount of money in circulation corresponds to the wealth of the natural resources known to exist in that nation's lands and in the known aptitudes of its citizens. To create money out of nothing, in excess of natural wealth, to buy and sell money, to set money chasing after money--this is the way of the moulder and the brickmaker, not the way of stonemason and ploughman. And this is what Pound means by "usura."

See Davie, pp. 158-59.

[8]*Cantos*, pp. 229-30.

[9]*Selected Prose 1909-1965*, p. 240.

[10]*A Lume Spento*, p. 74.

[11]*Collected Shorter Poems*, p. 99.

[12]There is even a suggestion of ridicule in the line "So full of knowing that the beefy men know less than he."

[13]Demeter.

[14]According to the *OED*, "Scarlet and white anenomes are there, some born of Adonis' blood, some of Aphrodite's tears."

[15]Dione was Aphrodite's mother, but here the name is a synonym for Aphrodite herself.

[16]Bion, *The Lament for Adonis* (London: A. L. Humphreys, 1918), pp. 14-15.

[17]The syntax of the line is difficult, but it seems fair to assume that it is not the worms themselves which are "unwound," but the silk thread *from* the worm.

[18]Pound uses the same adjective in *The Great Digest and Unwobbling Pivot*, p. 187:

> This unmixed is the tensile light, the
> Immaculata. There is no end
> to its action.

[19]"Tensile" means "capable of being stretched." See *OED*.

[20]The "light" images which pervade the later *Cantos* were strongly influenced by Confucius: "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." See *The Great Digest and Unwobbling Pivot*, p. 183.

[21]The sea, "Terracina" and "the stone eyes" synthesize this image of Aphrodite with that of Circe in Canto XXXIX:

> By Circeo, by Terracina, with the stone eyes
> white toward the sea

See *Cantos*, p. 195.

[22]Aphrodite's husband and the father of Aeneas.

[23]This image recurs in the following passage of Canto LXXIV and in Canto LXXVI:

> Her bed-posts are of sapphire
> for this stone giveth sleep.

See *Cantos*, p. 459.

[24]"coition maketh the light to shine." See Edwards and Vasse, p. 99.

[25]Tithonus, who was granted immortal life by Zeus, but not immortal youth. See Edwards and Vasse, p. 267.

[26]The Graces. See Edwards and Vasse, p. 268.

[27]Sordello's lover. See Edwards and Vasse, p. 186.

[28]"et libidinis expers."

[29]Maya could also be a reference to Hermes' mother.

[30]"union with God." See Edwards and Vasse, p. 12.

[31]In this context the word "personae" means "people."

[32]"Periplum," as distinct from "map" or "chart," is geography as viewed by the individual:

> periplum, not as land looks on a map
> but as sea bord seen by men sailing.

See *Cantos*, p. 324.

[33]The Eleusinian Mysteries continued to be an esoteric cult which involved a complex initiation ceremony and strict vows of secrecy. It began as a local cult, but soon became a Hellenic institution and finally was adopted by the Romans. See George E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961), p. 7.

[34]Mylonas, p. 6.

[35]"The mysteries are *not* revealed, and no guide book to them has been or will be written." See *Selected Letters 1907-1941*, p. 327.

[36]*Selected Prose 1909-1965*, p. 70.

[37]Ibid, p. 53.

[38]Ibid., p. 59.

[39]*Cantos*, pp. 487-492.

[40]Edwards and Vasse, p. 137.

[41]*OED* description.

[42]A satyr and a companion of Dionysus. See Edwards and Vasse, p. 199.

[43]Aphrodite.

[44]Astafieva was a Russian dancer and teacher. See Edwards and Vasse, p. 12.

[45]"κορη."

[46]"Ιακχε."

[47]Dekker, p. 72.

[48]Pound thus emphasizes the consequences of the pomegranate seeds, the initiation of the seasons.

[49]Italian for pomegranate.

[50]Tracian maenads. See Edwards and Vasse, p. 17.

[51]Like "Cythera," "Kuthera" is one of Pound"s synonyms for Aphrodite in the *Cantos*.

[52]"the grove needs an altar." See Edwards and Vasse, p. 10.

CONCLUSION

The female figures of Pound's poetry can be seen as individual "vortices," or points of focus, which embody both his most sensational, temporary enthusiasms and his more lasting beliefs. But there is also a sense of progression between these apparently separate "nodes." For the sexuality represented by woman in *Mauberley* or the bizarre metaphors written under the influence of De Gourmont become the conviction beyond Demeter, Circe or Aphrodite. Woman, who initially represents an abstraction or a theory of aesthetics, is given a limited, but sometimes incisive, portrayal in Pound's historical poems, symbolizes an ambivalence between positive and negative forces in the earlier *Cantos* and finally becomes an essential part of a belief.

For Pound "believed" in mythological gods and goddesses. Allen Tate's criticism of Pound's inability to "believe in myths, much less in his own power of imagining them out to a conclusion"[1] seems unfounded, for Pound continually asserts that "A god is an eternal state of mind."[2] Although Pound states this belief several times in his prose, the goddesses and gods of the *Cantos* are more convincing than any prose statements:

> The Gods have not returned. "They have never left us."
> They have not returned.
> Cloud's processional and the air moves with their living.
> (*Cantos*, p. 787)

Examining Pound's belief through his poetry, and especially through the *Cantos*, the spiritual value of mythology is usually expressed by refer-

ence to goddesses rather than gods. Adonis' significance, for example, seems relatively limited beside that of Circe or Aphrodite. In "Religio," Diana, Aphrodite,[3] Persephone[4] and Demeter are specifically mentioned as recipients of "this rite":

> What are the gods of this rite?
> Apollo, and in some sense Helios, Diana in some of her phases, also the Cytherean goddess.
> To what other gods is it fitting, in harmony or in adjunction with these rites, to give incense?
> To Koré and to Demeter, also to lares and to oreiads and to certain elemental creatures.[5]

But Pound's belief is most forcibly expressed through the Eleusinian mysteries and through the goddesses he associates with these cults, Demeter, Persephone, Gea Tella and, above all, Aphrodite. In *Guide to Kulchur,* speaking of these "mysteries," Pound states his belief in the "emotional colours" signified by mythological figures: "No apter metaphor having been found for certain emotional colours. I assert that the Gods exist."[6]

At the beginning of *The Pisan Cantos,* and later in Canto LXXVI,[7] the Italian for "woman" is repeated, echoing down "the stillness outlasting all wars":

> in the stillness outlasting all wars
> "La Donna" said Nicoletti
> "la donna,
> la donna!"
> (*Cantos,* p. 427)

"La Donna," the woman, herself becomes an assertion of continuity, regeneration and hope. The "emotional colours" represented by the goddesses of the *Cantos* eventually merge into a principle of the earth and of nature, a female principle.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Epifanio San Juan, ed., *Critics on Ezra Pound* (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1972), p. 24.

[2]Ezra Pound, *Pavannes and Divagations* (New York: New Directions, 1974), p. 96

[3]"the Cytherean goddess."

[4]"Koré."

[5]*Pavannes and Divagations*, p. 97.

[6]*Guide to Kulchur*, p. 299.

[7] was still as is never in Sirmio
with Fujiyama above it: "La donna ..."
said the Prefect, in the silence
See *Cantos*, p. 458.

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