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# Art Versus the Descent of the Iconoclasts: Cultural Memory in Ezra Pound's *Pisan Cantos*

Ronald Bush

Begun during the allied bombing of Italy, Ezra Pound's *Pisan Cantos* is a product of the defeat of Fascism and of Pound's own breakdown. Memory plays a central role in this wartime suite, an effort at resurrection of self-hood but also an attempt to create an earthly paradise inspired by Guido Calvacanti and purified of the commercial and abstract practices of Allied and Semitic "iconoclasm." But Pound's theorizing of a "resurgent EIKONEΣ" violates this vision by advocating potential readers not to seek images from the war, and by associating his paradise with the memory of Fascism's martyrs alongside that of figures from Antiquity.

## 1. Introduction

Even before their first publication it was apparent that Ezra Pound's greatest poetic achievement, *The Pisan Cantos*, were preoccupied with memory. When Pound's wife Dorothy received his first messy typescripts, she wrote back in surprise that the new Cantos, rather than treating historical concerns like the previous ones, "are your self, the memories that make up yr. person" (*Ezra and Dorothy* 131).<sup>1</sup> Her comment provides an essential entry into a poem that, produced in the aftermath of a breakdown, dramatizes the resurrection of self-hood – so much so one is tempted to approach *The Pisan Cantos* in the light of a heartbreaking outburst in Barry Levinson's 1999 film, "Liberty Heights" in which Levinson's alter ego – a younger brother and aspiring writer – concludes his account of adolescence in Baltimore with the remark that if he had realized so much of the world he grew up in would disappear, he would have tried harder to commit the whole of it to memory.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of 13 October 1945.

But Pound's wartime suite amounts to more than a private reminiscence, and the philosophical, historical, and ideological dimensions of memory in his meditation are only now coming into focus. As concerns philosophy, Pound for ten years and more before the war had been preparing himself to create in the last third of his projected hundred Cantos "un cielo sereno e filosofico" ("a serene philosophical heaven") – a Paradise based on the state of being implied by the highest flights of the mind (*I Cantos* 1566).<sup>2</sup> This project was to be based largely on the neoplatonic implications of Cavalcanti's canzone "Donna mi prega" ("Because a Lady Asks Me") – a poem that treats the way affection prepares a place in the memory for images of beauty to reside, and the ability of those images to conjure up the intellectual form of Love and so to join the soul to universal intellect.<sup>3</sup> (The special place of memory in the mind's quest for reunion with the forms of the divine had in Pound's view been provided by the neo-Aristotelian tradition of Avicenna, which Pound believed had supplied Cavalcanti the key intellectual premises of his poetic disquisition, and which assigned an even more important place in cognition to memory than had Aristotle himself.)<sup>4</sup>

In the late thirties and early forties Pound seized on a handful of key phrases in "Donna mi prega" and used them to explore similar philosophical notions in Scotus Erigena and elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Again and again in

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. also Ardizzone 18.

<sup>3</sup> A convenient summary of this material can be found in Makin, 186-95. Almost all of Pound's writings on Cavalcanti can be found in Anderson, and his most important statement appears in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, 149-200. (Henceforth *LE*). Close analogues to Pound's reading of Cavalcanti can be found in the reading which Pound facilitated by excavating Dino del Garbo's medieval commentary on "Donna mi prega": Bird, 150-203 and III (1941): 117-160. Cf. also Bird's successors: Shaw, *Guido Cavalcanti's Theory of Love*; and Corti, *La felicità mentale*, 1-27.

<sup>4</sup> On Pound on Cavalcanti and Avicenna, see *LE*, 158, 175. The place and importance of memory in Avicenna's epistemology is discussed by Davidson, 89-94. Avicenna like Aristotle holds that memory retains perceptions for the uses of cogitation. However, he also maintains that a second kind of memory consists of a "perfect disposition" to "re-establish conjunction with the active intellect vis a vis the given thought" (Davidson 89). In this sense, memory not only prepares a formed trace, it also functions as an essential bridge to the world of perfect form. In the words of Davidson, quoting Avicenna: "Images are transformed into universal concepts 'not in the sense that they are themselves transported from the imagination to the human intellect, [ . . . ] but in the sense that examining them prepares the soul for the abstract concept to emanate upon it from the active intellect'" (Davidson 93).

<sup>5</sup> For Pound's use of the concepts he identified in his reading of Cavalcanti, see the discussion of "the Cavalcanti function" in Ardizzone's "The Genesis and Structure of Pound's Paradise," esp. p.15. (Ardizzone's focus is the end of Pound's poem, but her

these notes he includes reference to Cavalcanti's "formato locho," which Pound translates in Canto 36 as the "forméd trace" of the beloved which Love carves "dove sta memoria" – "where memory liveth" (C36 / 178, 177).<sup>6</sup> And when he produced the first fragments of his *Paradiso* in the early 1940s he built them around citations from Cavalcanti, Erigena, and Confucius.<sup>7</sup> This constellation of material would have provided the core of the last section of the Cantos had Pound's situation not so deteriorated during the Second World War. As Pound said at the time "if it weren't for this tiresome war," he would be comparing whether Western thought had progressed or declined since the middle ages and asking questions such as, "Have we got better at thinkin'? Do we think with greater clarity? Or has the so-called program of science merely got us all cluttered up mentally and pitched us into greater confusion?" (EPS 373-4).<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Wartime Italy

Beginning in 1943, however, wartime conditions in Northern Italy not only interrupted Pound's philosophical endeavors but obliterated many of his cultural touchstones, leaving him dependent *only* on the forméd traces in his own memory for succor.<sup>9</sup> Particularly important for Pound were the shock of the 1943-44 Allied bombardment of Italy and the fierce battles of late 1944, when it seemed that the Italians and Germans

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insights also apply to his preparatory work for *The Pisan Cantos*.) Ardizzone points to Pound's use of "Donna mi prega" in the notes he took from Scotus Erigena, but his practice can be more conveniently found in the notes on Grosseteste that he incorporated at LE, 161.

<sup>6</sup> The standard published editions of the *Cantos* are now the 13th Printing of the New Directions 1970 edition (New York: New Directions, 1995) and Mary de Rachewiltz's edition of *I Cantos*. Unless otherwise noted, citations from the Cantos below will be from the New Directions text and will take the form of Canto / Page Number. The following texts of Ezra Pound are also indicated by abbreviation: EPS: *Ezra Pound Speaking*. GK: *Guide to Kulchur*. IF: *Idee fondamentali Meridiano di Roma* 1939-1943. LE: *Literary Essays*. MA: *Machine Art & Other Writings*. OS: *Opere Scelte*. SP: *Selected Prose 1908-1965*.

<sup>7</sup> In *I Cantos*, Pound gives as the provisional beginning of the first of his new Cantos ("un ulteriore canto"): "Fire causeth not beauty, nor the earth, but nous / knowing the handwork; closer than fire, more subtle than air" (1566). These lines from a longer draft dated August 1942 and can be found in the Beinecke Library Yale, YCAL MSS 43 Box 76, Folder 3380.

<sup>8</sup> Speech of 24 July 1943.

<sup>9</sup> For this period of his life, see especially Redman.



might have reversed the Allied progress. In the midst of these developments, Mussolini's Ministry of Popular Culture launched a campaign to win back ordinary Italians to Fascism by reminding them of how much of Italy's cultural patrimony was being damaged by apparently senseless Allied bombing. That part of the Italian press still under Fascist sway took up the regime's cause enthusiastically. Mario Rivoire, for example, was appointed editor of *Il Secolo XIX* of Genoa just after September 1943 as part of what Lawrence Rainey has called "the [Salò] government's effort to control the press by placing trusted supporters in key positions" – an effort that relentlessly stressed the destruction of cultural monuments "wrought by the 'terrorist bombers' of the English and Americans" (*Ezra Pound* 212). One of *Il Secolo's* recurrent features carried a headline variation on the rubric "I monumenti che il nemico ci distrugge" (The Monuments the Enemy is Destroying).

Nor did *Il Secolo* act alone. The *Corriere della Sera* of Milan, the most important newspaper still under Fascist sway, in late 1944 echoed *Il Secolo's* "Monumenti" articles with its own series about the destruction of Italy's artistic patrimony under the general rubric "L'Italia Artistica Mutilata."<sup>10</sup> A prime specimen appeared on Monday 4 September 1944, when the *Corriere* announced the destruction of one of Pound's sacred places, the brilliant mosaic chamber outside Ravenna commonly known as the mausoleum of the Empress Aelia Galla Placidia. The *Corriere* said Ravenna had suffered multiple attacks, and that almost all the great public buildings of the city that had once been capitol of the Byzantine Exarchate had been badly damaged – the Cathedral and the churches of San Francesco, San Domenico, San Giovanni Battista, San Vittore and San Simeon (1).

In these months, the *Corriere* also offered a second running feature, entitled "Sangue Italiano" (Italian Blood), whose aim was to praise Italy's citizen heroes. On 1 October, for example, under the headline "Sangue Italiano: L'eroina di Rimini" (The Heroine of Rimini), the paper told the stirring but apparently fabricated story of an "anonymous, radiant heroine from Rimini," who, having been "raped by two Austrians," deliberately led a group of Canadian soldiers into a mine-field

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<sup>10</sup> The *Corriere's* pliant position in regard to Fascism can be noted in the good relations between its editor, Ermanno Amicucci, and Fernando Mezzasoma, the RSI's Minister of Popular Culture and a correspondent of Pound's. See Redman, who notes that Mezzasoma had recommended Pound to Amicucci for work in late 1943, but the latter "thought Pound's Italian was incomprehensible and unusable" (240).

and, dying, announced, “Ho vendicato il mio onore” – I have vindicated my honor (Rainey, *Ezra Pound* 244-5). And on Monday 20 November 1944, under the same rubric another account of patriotic sacrifice recounted battles around the city of Forlì (not far from Rimini in the direction of Bologna). Below headline stories that triumphed Mussolini’s “fede nella riscossa della Patria” (faith in the resurgence of the Fatherland) and quoted the promise of one of Mussolini’s officials that “ritorneremo” – we Italians shall return – the paper’s third lead for that day told the story of “Sangue Romagnolo” (Blood of the Romagna) in the form of a story (possibly also fabricated and certainly intended to remind its readers of “Il libro cuore” of Edmondo De Amicis) of anonymous women who put their lives on the line at Forlì’s gate by shielding Fascist snipers and obstructing the entrance of allied troops, thus becoming “voluntarie della morte” (volunteers for death) in Mussolini’s cause (1).

The sadness and resolve of these articles, and the events that provoked them, intensified the wavering of Pound’s wartime equanimity. The same day the *Corriere* carried its news of the bombing of Ravenna, for example, Genoa and Rapallo were bombed, weakening Renaissance arches in Rapallo and degrading the city’s supply of drinking water. Ten days later Pound, who had been displaced by the Axis military in May from his apartment on the water in Rapallo and forced with his wife to move into the residence of his mistress, Olga Rudge, situated on a hill path above the city in San Ambrogio, wrote to Fernando Mezzasoma, the Salò Republic’s Minister of Popular Culture, to advise on the situation. In the letter he refers to himself as a “sfollata,” an “evacuee” – an epithet he was soon to attach to the wandering waif of one of his wartime drafts who surfaces in *The Pisan Cantos* as “la scalza” – she who moans “they have broken my house” (C76 / 472-3).<sup>11</sup>

But what finally seems to have shattered Pound’s silence were three articles that appeared in the *Corriere*’s Sunday editions of 3 December and 17 December 1944. On 3 December, the *Corriere* brought together all the damage it had rehearsed in its “L’Italia Artistica Mutilata” series under the sub-head, “La calata degli iconoclasti” (The Descent of the Iconoclasts). This article proffered shocking pictures of how much damage Allied bombing had inflicted on the Basilica of Sant’Ambrogio in Milan and the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini. (The latter picture was

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<sup>11</sup> Letter of 14 September 1944 at the Beinecke, Library, Yale. (YCAL MSS 43 Box 34 Folder 1429.) An English translation of this letter can be found in Redman, 260-1.

captioned: "Solo uomini che odiano l'arte potevano ridurre in questo stato un capolavoro come il tempio malatestiano di Rimini" (Only those who hate art could have reduced to such a state a masterpiece like the Tempio Malatestiano of Rimini).

"La Calata degli iconoclasti" begins with the leader, "Dai monumenti sacri e profani ai capolavori della pittura, della scultura e dell'arte decorativa, il catalogo delle distruzioni è interminabile: ancora una volta il nembo della barbarie si è abbattuto sulla terra che custodisce le vestigia e il fuoco delle più nobili civiltà" (From sacred and profane monuments to masterpieces of painting, sculpture and the decorative arts, the catalogue of destruction is endless: once more the barbarian storm has descended on ground that tends the traces and the spirit of the highest civilizations). Then, noting the recent rebombing of Genoa, it relates ruin in Turin, Milan (where the church of Santa Maria della Grazie was severely damaged and the Last Supper of Leonardo was almost lost), Bologna, Cagliari, and Naples; also in smaller cities, such as Ancona, Parma, Treviso, Vicenza, Modena, Mantua, Brescia, Pistoia, Pisa, Rimini ("con i suoi trenta edifici monumentali infranti, segnatamente con il rovinatissimo tempio Malatestiano, fulgida espressione del nostro Rinascimento . . . nel quale sono andati distrutti un affresco del Battaglini, l'Assunta del Frangipane, il San Carlo del Pomarancio, ecc.;" – with its thirty shattered monumental buildings, most significantly the utterly ruined Tempio Malatestiano, the shining expression of our Renaissance . . . and in which were lost a fresco of Battaglini, the Assumption of Frangipane, the Saint Charles of Pomarancio, etc.); other bombed cities named were Bolzano, Trento, Arezzo, Prato, Ferrara, Foligno, Siena (where the losses included "i Della Robbia dell'Osservanza, tra cui la bellissima incoronazione della Vergine in maiolica vetrificata attribuita ad Andrea" – the Della Robbias of the Osservanze, among which were the most beautiful Coronation of the Virgin in vetrificata maiolica attributed to Andrea"), Padova, La Spezia, Terni, Savona, Pavia, Pola, Prato, Cremona, Alessandria, Faenza Grosseto, Livorno, Viterbo, Brindisi, Catania, Siracusa, Messina, and Trapani. The article also lamented the most recent losses in the Emilia and Romagna, where the cities of Forlì and Ravenna "have not had peace for months," dwelling at length on the losses in the Romagna and noting that the great churches of Ravenna had been reduced to a pile of ruins, including the cloister of San Vitale and "all of the famous churches of the Exarcate" – "l'Esarcato."

Yet, the *Corriere* consoled its readers, some things had been spared and the battle of Ravenna was not yet lost: "La battaglia rugge sulla soglia della dolce pineta aromatica, il suo rambo incessante ha troncato da tempo il silenzio reverenziale creato intorno alla tomba di Dante. E mai come in questi giorni alla tomba di Dante si rivolge il pensiero degli Italiani, non tanto per il pericolo che sovrasta alle ossa del divino annunciatore medievale della resurrezione della Patria . . . quanto per trarne la fede e l'auspicio che 'l'aiuola che ci fa tanto feroci'<sup>12</sup> pacificata riprenda nel mondo il posto che il nostro tempo le aveva conquistato." (The battle rages around the edge of the soft fragrant pine wood; its incessant roaring has broken the reverential silence around the tomb of Dante. And never as in these last days has the thought of all Italians turned to the tomb of Dante, not only because of the danger that continues to hang over the remains of the divine prophet of the resurrection of the nation . . . but also so that we may receive faith and good omen that "the little threshing floor that makes us so fierce" will, pacified, again take up the place in the world that our time [meaning the age of Fascism] has won back for it.)

Finally, and especially suited to get under the skin of readers like Pound, who had been persuaded by the Fascists that the war was a result of betrayal by European Jewish finance, the article lamented that Italy's losses were as much the fault of international finance as Allied bombing. As the *Corriere's* writer, Gino Damerini, asserted, even if Italy's remaining treasures were to escape the chaos of battle, "al seguito dell'invasione agisce una folla di intressi che mira ad impossessarsi delle nostre ricchezze artistiche (in the wake of the invasion a crowd of special interests has taken aim at our artistic heritage). Financial speculation and inflation, he averred, have put into place an art market that will spirit away what has not been destroyed unless Italians respond to "il dovere di resistere, almeno di reagir, agli allettamenti della moneta rapinatrice, rifiutandosi ad un commercio vietato dalle leggi, di cui proprio essi, soltanto essi, porteranno la responsabilità e, diciamolo pure, il disonore" (the duty to resist, or at least to react to the allurements of plundering finance, refusing a commerce forbidden by law and of which they, and they alone, will carry the responsibility and, we must say it, the dishonor). In any case, he lamented, "le distruzioni dei segni della nostra secolare supremazia civile saranno ricordate, sempre, come prove

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<sup>12</sup> From Dante's *Paradiso* XXII.



della barbarie altrui: la storia di tutte le epoche insegna” (the destruction of the traces of our secular civic supremacy will be remembered, always, as proof of the barbarism of others: the history of every epoch teaches the same lesson).

If that were not enough bad news for one day, the same issue of the *Corriere* announced the death of the Futurist, Tomasso Marinetti, who had been a volunteer in Mussolini’s Imperial campaign in Africa and had more recently served on the Russian front, where he conducted himself like a professional soldier, careless of the by now precarious condition of his health. This was consistent, the managing editor of the *Corriere* noted, with his behavior after 8 September 1943, when he was among the first to draw around Mussolini, “a cui rimase fedele in ogni circostanza” (to whom he remained faithful in every circumstance) (3).

Two weeks after these horrific stories, the news took a dramatic turn for the better from the Fascist perspective. At 11 o’clock on 16 December, Pound listened on the radio as Mussolini, making what was to be his last major public speech from the teatro Lirico in Milan, called on Italians to take heart from the Allied difficulties in the Marches and farther north in Belgium and mount a counteroffensive (“riscossa”) to take back their native land.<sup>13</sup> The next day the Sunday *Corriere della Sera* provided a full text of the speech under the headline “Da Milano E’ Squillata La Diana della Riscossa” (from Milan sounds the reveille for a counterattack) (1).

### 3. A First Suite in Italian

These stories in the *Corriere della Sera* of November and December 1944, combined with the unexpected hope for the Mussolini government fomented by the hiatus in the Allies’ advances in winter 1944, kick-started Pound’s work on his new Cantos and triggered four months of almost continuous composition in Italian, beginning on or soon after 3 December 1944 and continuing until April 1945. The Italian propaganda

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<sup>13</sup> Pound recorded the time and the day he heard the speech on page seven of the Calligrafia notebook in which he drafted Cantos 72 and 73. (Manuscript in the Beinecke Library Yale, YCAL MSS 53 Box 29, Folder 624). All previously unpublished material by Ezra Pound, Copyright © 2005 by the Trustees of the Ezra Pound Literary Property Trust; used by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp., agents for the Trustees. All published material by Ezra Pound used by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

campaign could not help but play on the shame Pound felt as a countryman of the bombardiers who were destroying so much of Italy's cultural heritage, and seems to have solidified his conclusion that the war was being fought between two different mentalities – a civilized culture of religion and art and a destructive culture of iconoclasm.

Within a month of the *Corriere's* "Calata dei iconoclasti" article and two weeks after the newspaper's reporting of Mussolini's call for a "ris-cossa," Pound had finished two poems recalling Marinetti and echoing Mussolini's call to action that were eventually to take their place as Cantos 72 and 73 of the published *Cantos*.<sup>14</sup> Buoyed with his progress, Pound then extended his composition in Italian to an expansive suite that, like the "Sangue Italiano" articles on heroic Italian citizens in the *Corriere*, furnished patriotic readers with avatars of love and courage. The deepest subject of the new Italian Cantos, however, affirms art's power to preserve in a Paradise of memory the ruined monuments of Italy that the *Corriere*, with specific reference to the Fascist revival, had called "[i] segni della nostra secolare supremazia civile [che] saranno ricordate, sempre, come prove della barbarie altrui: la storia di tutte le epoche insegna" (traces of our secular civic supremacy [that] will be remembered, always, as proof of the barbarism of others: the history of every epoch teaches the same lesson).

There is not space here to rehearse the development of these Cantos, which I have described elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> Suffice it to say that they culminate in a double climax in tableaux entitled "Assunta" (the risen Virgin of the "Assumption") and "Eliseo" (Elysium), both of which anticipate a passage in Canto 74 that testifies to the resurgent power of such "signs." Their purity functions ("funge la purezza"), we are there told, because:

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<sup>14</sup> For preliminary commentary on Cantos 72 and 73, see Bacigalupo, "The Poet at War"; Eastman; and Carpenter, 637-640. Riper comment can be found in Rainey's *Ezra Pound and the Monument of Culture*; Hesse; and Casillo. Annotated English translations of Cantos 72 and 73 have now been published (followed by annotated English translations of the typescripts of the Italian Cantos 74 and 75) by Massimo Bacigalupo. See "Ezra Pound's Cantos 72 and 73", 11-41. Cantos 72 and 73 now appear in the *Cantos* as C72-3 / 423-442 and in *I Cantos*, 825-835.

<sup>15</sup> See Bush. "Quiet, Not Scornful?"; and "Towards Pisa". The provenance of all of Pound's typescripts referred to below unless otherwise indicated is Beinecke Library Yale, YCAL MSS 53 Box 29, Folder 627.



certain images be formed in the mind  
to remain there

*formato locho*

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to remain there, resurgent EIKONEΣ (C74/ 466)

Pound's Italian "Assunta" and "Eliseo" drafts anticipate this passage by making not only negative reference to "la calata dei iconoclasti" but positive reference to the mnemonic value of iconic images in Western philosophy. In Aristotle's *De Anima* ("On the Soul," which Pound studied in the 1940s<sup>16</sup>) and its related text, *On Memory and Recollection*, all human thought and imagination are said to depend on the memory of the sensible image ("phantasma"), which becomes the soul's source of intelligible form (εἶδος or eidos). Thus the soul receives "the form (εἶδος) of sensible objects without the matter (ὕλης), just as the wax receives the impression of the signet-ring without the iron or the gold;" and subsequently "all things which are imaginable are necessarily objects of memory" (Aristotle, *De Anima* 424a.17-19, *On Memory and Recollection* 450a.24-5). However, as Aristotle adds in *On Memory and Recollection*, in recollection a mental object is not merely "phantasma" but also, "insofar as we consider it in relation to something else, a 'likeness' (εἰκὼν or icon) that serves as an 'aid to memory,'" and that it is "the affection (πάθος) which is produced by sensation in the soul" that corresponds to the "lasting state [. . .] we call memory" (Aristotle, *On Memory and Recollection* 450b.26-7, 450a.27-30). In this way "EIKONEΣ" serve to recharge our affection for the source, and motivate us to reanimate it.

Adapting this definition of mental process, Pound's Italian drafts also translate it into cultural terms. As Pound puts it in a 1944 essay, "A Visiting Card," "Tradition *inheres* [. . .] in the images of the gods [elsewhere in the essay he calls these images "mnemonic and commemorative symbols"], and gets lost in dogmatic definitions. History is recorded in monuments, and *that* is why they get destroyed" (SP 322, 320). In other words, the cultural memory embodied in European monuments works hand in hand with individual memory to resist the course of social disintegration.

Especially in "Assunta," moreover, Pound insists that insofar as the "mnemonic" power of EIKONEΣ depends on their status as images,

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<sup>16</sup> For the text of *De Anima* that Pound read – *De anima: passi scelti e commentati a cura di Vito Fazio Allmayer* (Bari: 1924) – see Ardizzone, 31 and 47, fn 66.

image-centered art resists iconoclasm's tendency toward abstraction and meretriciousness – an impulse that Pound tendentiously associates during the war with the West's Semitic heritage and with Jews. So "Assunta" begins by asserting, "mai coi codini sarà l'arte monda" (there will never be clean art among the fanatics), where "monda" signifies not "of the world" but the adjective pure (from "mondare," to remove impurity<sup>17</sup>), and where "i codini" (the fanatics) invokes Pound's hostility to Semitic and Protestant resistance to religious images and to their creation of a disembodied and intellectualized religion that to him signified only fanaticism and repression. The "abstracter superstitions" (*MA* 143) of this fanaticism, he maintains elsewhere, are consistent with the way Jewish, Protestant and Puritan traditions involve the "destruction of symbols" through the "prohibition of 'graven images,'" whereas only concrete images, in his view, can provide a bulwark against an "abstract and generic" mode of thought (*IF* 102).<sup>18</sup>

In what can only be called the anti-Semitic extremity of these views (which ignore on the one hand age-old Jewish traditions of Kabalistic iconography and on the other hand the danger of idolatry, in which images are allowed unqualified hegemony in intellectual discourse), clean art is everywhere threatened by the forces of usury and abstract analysis in a world dominated by the bombardier's destructiveness and by the invidious "iconoclasm" of what the *Corriere* called "plundering finance." And so, in his explicitly Fascist history of Western culture, Pound frames the struggle of Mussolini's Italy during the war as a contest not only against Allied barbarism but also against those cultural inclinations of the modern West that, in alliance with Jewish finance, would (in the words of another line in the Italian drafts) "distruggere i simboli del bel pensiero" – destroy the "symbols" of authentically creative thought.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> For "Assunta," see Bush, "Towards Pisa."

<sup>18</sup> The citation in the original in Italian explicitly attacks "gli iconoclasti": "Parlerò in un altro articolo della distruzione dei simboli; cioè di ogni forma di comunicazione che induce lo studioso all'indagine deliberata e contemplativa dei fatti che non si può comunicare con una frase astratta e generica. Questa battaglia data non solamente dal tempo degli iconoclasti, data dal divieto di fare 'immagini scolpite.'" (On the connection between the icon and Pound's wartime anti-Semitism, see also Ricciardi, 306).

<sup>19</sup> Compare the Italian original ("Carta da visita" 1942) of "A Visiting Card": "Nella storia troviamo due forze: una che divide, spezza ed ammazza, l'altra che contempla l'unità del mistero [. . .] Una forza distrugge ogni simbolo figurato, e trascina l'uomo nelle discussioni astratte: così distruggendo non una, ma ogni religione" (*OS* 1367). Cf. also *IF*, p. 102, where Pound contends that the Semitic elements of Christianity associated with the Church's turn toward usury in the age of the Medici have caused a "dis-

The climax of Pound's Fascist Paradise occurs in the draft of an "Eliseo" ("Elysium") that invokes figures of deceased lovers who are said, after "Donna mi prega," to be "formati" – that is, to have produced a "formato locho" – a "forméd trace" – in the memory. Pound's language here is exceedingly odd, not just in its Italian expression, but in its account of the relations between life and death. I quote from near the end of the poem:

[Il] sangue li apporta a migl[i]aia  
 che cadon fra nebbia e neve, a migl[i]aia  
 e i fiocchi giac[ci]on e fondon  
sotto l'Aprile  
 quando vostro Volturmo spira  
 vento che i greci chiamano Euro /

i canti lieti e ragionar d'amore (ved/ C[u]nizza.)  
 Quinti[l]ia mi chiamai, quest' è L[y]coris  
 ^di^ Calvo e Gallo  
 er[a]vamo amate/ amiche  
 fra nubi e neve/ falda  
 //

il sangue sparso fa il conducente  
 non cercate qui i nuovi ([i] vostri) morti  
 non son formati ancora, cadon a migliaia e migl[i]aia  
 in falda in falda  
 che fra nubi e nebbia vengon  
 sul Voltunno.

Qui Hylas; qui sono Ione e Flora ed Alcmene  
 Dione, Hylase e Clymene  
 più profondo ancora, Dirce/

pur del passato vostro son le ombre/ ma non i nuovi  
le nuove/

.....  
 né sepp[i] il tempo / né se il passato fu né se 'l domani  
 ma gran pace ebbi nel cuor, in dormivegli[a] così sereno  
 dove la mente veglia/ né l'intelletto agogna  
 né corpo sente il freddo / Aliscans senza urto /

Sappiamo i vostri fatti, O gran Ulisse  
 e quel che a Troia f[a]cesti

---

truzione dei simboli" because of a faith and a way of speaking that is "astratta e generica" (abstract and generic) rather than concrete.



Here, in the midst of an advancing host of the dead falling in April 1945 like snowflakes, newly spilt blood takes the lead – “il sangue sparso fa il conducente” – but Pound counsels his readers: “non cercate qui i nuovi ([i] vostri) morti / non son formati ancora” – “don’t seek here for your own recently dead; they are not formed yet” – with the implication that only when the kiln of memory has shaped the dead into resonant images can they take their place with the muses of antiquity and inspire our faith in the future. Note also that the beloved dead call out here: “Qui sono” – here we are, with the sense of “we are still here, the best parts of yourself, remaining to help you rebuild your life.” And though in a belated afterthought the poem worries that their voices may be only siren songs, tempting Odysseus to return to the good old days, the draft ends on the note of “serenity” amid “slaughter” with an allusion to a line of Pound’s “Homage to Sextus Propertius,” which holds out hope for a living immortality, an “at[t]imo del gran respiro” (moment of the great breath).<sup>20</sup>

Not surprisingly, then, in the formal opening that Pound appended to his “Eliseo,” the “morti formati” are named as true muses. Their private histories remain (as in Cavalcanti) accidentals, but the love they inspire has become a site of illumination and the song they sing is strong enough to attract the sun and his fleet of planets to the plains of Italy. The following passage seems to be the last that Pound worked on before the war ended:

Come è ch’io sento le vetuste voci  
 più che mai prima chiare e più sovente  
 pur se ’l desio era prima in non mi[n]ore misura?  
 forte già prima  
 ma forte, e fuor del posse  
 [E]geria: (Pol[inn]nia) Erato

Il periplo che fa il gran vostro sole  
 porta la flotta sotto i nostri scogli  
 or che la nave Gea s’avvicina

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<sup>20</sup> See “Homage to Sextus Propertius. VII”: “To-day we talke the great breath of lovers, / to-morrow fate shuts us in.” It is worth noting that the translation presents a very Poundian textual crux. As K.K. Ruthven notes, it comes from the problematic Latin of Propertius II.15, which Pound takes as “magnum spiramus amantes” but which others read as “magnum speramus amantes,” changing the sense altogether (Loeb: “so that we that love and whose hopes are high”). It is out of this textual knot that Pound derives a formula for epiphany of the highest order (Ruthven, *A Guide to Ezra Pound’s Personae* 110-11).

[translation]

How come I hear the ancient voices  
 clearer than ever before and more frequently  
 even though I desired them before in no small measure?  
 strong already before  
 but stronger now, and beyond all my powers  
 [E]geria: (Polyhymnia) Erato<sup>21</sup>

The periplum that your great sun makes  
 brings the fleet under our cliffs  
 now the ship approaches Earth

#### 4. Memory and *The Pisan Cantos*

With his long-meditated “Eliseo” still unfinished, on 1 May 1945, Pound found himself abducted without warning in Sant’ Ambrogio by Italian partisans aware of his Fascist connections. Unexpectedly released, he then surrendered himself to the custody of the American army, whereupon the FBI interrogated him for several weeks in Genoa. Finally he was dispatched to solitary confinement in a small wire pen with a cement base (he called it “the gorilla cage”) in the US Army Disciplinary Training Center outside Pisa, to be held there until the US government saw fit to proceed with a trial for treason. The Center harbored some soldiers turned real criminals, among them rapists and murderers. But the camp was also a rehabilitation center for soldiers convicted of lesser crimes, who were later to be returned to combat (Kutler, “This Notorious Patient,” 133). Pound remained there, just short of age sixty, for three weeks under a relentless sun alternating with the pelting rain and evening dampness of an Italian summer, eventually suffering symptoms that included “violent and hysterical terror,” “claustrophobia,” “confusion,” and a temporary but “complete loss of memory” – signs that the camp doctors feared might be “premonitory” of a

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<sup>21</sup> Egeria is a mortal become fountain nymph in Ovid. The others are the muses of sacred hymn and of love poetry. These like many other of Pound’s classical references can be traced to *Lempriere’s Classical Dictionary*, which he owned and quoted in wartime letters.



mental breakdown (Kutler, "This Notorious Patient" 133-34; Cornel, *The Trial of Ezra Pound* 21, 14). (Later he told a psychiatrist that he felt "as though the upper third of [his] brain were missing" and again that "[my] mainspring [had been] busted" (Gillman, "Ezra Pound's Rorschach Diagnosis," 317-8)).

Because of his distress, around 1 July Pound was transferred to a tent in the camp's medical compound, where he was technically still forbidden to speak to fellow inmates but where he was allowed writing implements. At that point, the recent Italian drafts in his head, but his identity wavering, he began once more to compose, this time in English. In Peter Makin's words, the substance "of the Pisan Cantos is, first, a simple cry of pain and, second, a naming-over of what has been known, sorrowing over the lost, and trying to find, in what is left, some hope-worthy meaning and reason to go on" (Makin, *Pound's Cantos* 239). And so at the end of the first of the new poems, Canto 74, though Pound continues to draw on the technical account of memory in Aristotle and in "Donna mi prega" his utterance has taken on the urgency of a man saved at the last moment from drowning. Attributing his salvation to the power of memory, he depicts himself as suddenly aware of memory's true nature:

How soft the wind under Taishan  
     where the sea is remembered  
 out of hell, the pit  
 out of the dust and glare evil  
     Zephyrus / Apeliota  
 This liquid is certainly a  
     property of the mind

nec accidens est   but an element  
                             In the mind's make-up  
 est agens and functions   dust to a fountain pan otherwise

In this passage, "liquid" signifies a *form* associated first with the perception and the memory of the inexhaustible sea, then with the image of Aphrodite who rises out of it (in, for example, Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus"), and finally with an intelligible concept of Love itself – a neo-Platonic vision of the unity of things in which we are "suddenly conscious of the reality of the *nous*, of mind, apart from any man's individual mind, of the sea crystalline and enduring, of the bright as it were



Here, the sight of butterflies and the smell of mint sharpen Pound's imagination, causing his memory to associate the sparrows he notices with "Lesbia's sparrows" in Catullus IV and by implication with the goddess of love, Venus. In the scene in front of him, though, these small beauties are nearly overwhelmed by the stark reality of the camp, in which prisoners forbidden to speak occupy themselves with the sound of drumming and see only banners and guard towers (the latter just softened because Pound can perceive in them the shape of Chinese ideograms). The oppressiveness of all this drives Pound (shifting now to his adopted Italian) back into the past, where he remembers a rainy trip in Southern France, to Ussel and Ventadour. When, however, Pound recognizes that even his memory has been obstructed, the bleakness of his present situation begins to overshadow his recollection, and emblematically the gracious figure of a French salesman whose name Pound is unable to recall answers a simple request with words of portentous sadness: "No that is impossible." Frighteningly, Pound realizes that he has also forgotten the name of the city where this took place, and where he saw the primitive cave paintings; and the pain of his loss echoes in his disappointed statement that the paintings were less striking to his youthful incomprehension than postcards of them – a deficiency whose melancholy mirrors Pound's present confusion and seems as irremediable as his confinement. Apparently, neither in the future nor in memory is he likely to revisit "those old roads" again.

Then, inexplicably and magically, he recollects the precious name of the keeper of the inn he was then staying in, and the force of this recovery (caught in a syntax that simultaneously and deliberately deploys her name both as something remembered and a call to her presence – "Mme Pujol"! – enters the inspiring "smell of mint under the tent flaps / especially after the rain." It is in such quotidian scenes that Pound stages the renewal of his will to survive. Recently terrified that his breakdown-induced amnesia might mean the loss of what his wife would call "your self, the memories that make up yr. person," his recovery drives him to relive his life – as a boy in the suburbs of Philadelphia and on the streets of New York; as a young man travelling with a beloved aunt on the grand tour of Europe; as a fledgling poet in the salons of Venice and London and Paris, and backpacking on the roads of Provence; as a mature husband and lover in Venice and Rapallo; and as an aging man on the winding path up from Rapallo to its surrounding cliffs.

As emphatic as it is, though, the brio Pound conveys in these passages does not mean that *The Pisan Cantos* have moved beyond the ideological and political concerns of his Italian drafts. In the opening of Canto 76, for example, we find carried over from Pound's Italian "Elyseo" that "the sun in his great periplum" still "leads in his fleet here . . . under our craggy cliffs." The suite, that is, continues to inhabit a world in which "the barbarian storm [let loose by the iconoclasts] descended on [sacred] ground" and in which that storm must be constantly opposed by reconstructing the icons of Italian culture, in our faithful memory of which the "history" of the culture has been "recorded." It is only through such "resurgent EIKONEΣ," Pound implies, that we can apprehend the *form* through whose shaping power these monuments were created and thus attain "Elysium."

The culmination of this association of memory, form, and intuition in *The Pisan Cantos* can be found in the justly famous epiphany at the center of Canto 81, where Pound encounters a vision of Aphrodite within his tent. Suddenly able to extract the intelligible form of Love itself from the remembered presence of the eyes of a number of beloved women in Carneval masks, Pound, with the same sense of discovery he displayed in Canto 74 when he emphatically declared that "This liquid is certainly a / property of the mind," encounters the full form of Love and finds himself transported to first "the seen" and "then thus the palpable / Elysium, though it were in the halls of hell":

there came new subtlety of eyes into my tent,  
 whether of spirit or hypostasis,  
     but what the blindfold hides  
 or at carneval

nor any pair showed anger

Saw but the eyes and stance between the eyes,  
 colour, diastasis,  
     careless or unaware it had not the  
     whole tent's room

nor was place for the full Εἶδος  
 interpass, penetrate  
     casting but shade beyond the other lights  
         sky's clear  
         night's sea  
         green of the mountain pool  
         shone from the unmasked eyes in half-mask's space.

What thou lovest well remains,  
     the rest is dross

What thou lov'st well shall not be reft from thee  
 What thou lovst well is thy true heritage

\*\*\*\*\*

First came the seen, then thus the palpable  
     Elysium, though it were in the halls of hell,  
 What thou lovest well is thy true heritage  
 What thou lov'st well shall not be reft from thee (C81 / 540-41)

Pound's delight here is clear even if his terminology is obscured by the New Directions text, which altered Pound's typescript by changing the Greek word at the center of the passage into *Εἶδος*, a participial form which Carroll Terrell glosses as a kind of presocratic "knowing" or "seeing."<sup>23</sup> Pound's typescript, however, indicates simply "EIDOS" – a transliteration of the standard Aristotelian word for form (*εἶδος*) that we have already encountered. Pound's sense is signaled by the way that he contrasts "what thou lovest well" to "dross" (Aristotelian *ἄληθς*, or unformed matter) and his celebration of the power of form was reinforced on his typescript, where, in subsequently excised lines, he specifies that what is intended by "the full EIDOS" is "the *form* to / pass and intercross / each space full of its *formal life* / that moves and keeps defined / its clarity, demarcations" (emphasis mine).<sup>24</sup>

Pound's epiphany, in other words, corresponds to an apprehension of a formal pattern that reveals the shaping power of "*nous*, of mind, apart from any man's individual mind." Because memory is central to apprehension, Pound insists, the recollection of that which we have loved and understood gives us access to such light no matter what horrors have overtaken us. The rest is truly dross, as it is unrelated to the EIDOS of Love which grounds all meaning and whose presence Pound has newly apprehended in the most wretched of prisons.<sup>25</sup>

Canto 81 goes on to hold that this "Elysium" is one that sustains the courage, order and grace of "scaled invention or true artistry" (C81 / 541) and so links with Paradise the two senses of icon that Pound had implied in the phrase "resurgent EIKONEΣ" – the sense of a remembered likeness and the sense of a formed image in which history inheres. As Pound had intended since he started to think about writing a Para-

<sup>23</sup> Terrell alludes to Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy* (1892), page 52.

<sup>24</sup> Pound made three copies of his typescript at Pisa. I quote here p. 248/78 of the one given to Dudley Fitts and donated by Fitts to the Beinecke Library Yale. (Beinecke, ZA Pound.)

<sup>25</sup> For a reading that stresses the way Pound eliminates the dross in his poetic recollections, see North, 145-65.



dise in the early thirties, this "Elysium" exists "dove sta memoria" – "where memory liveth," for it arises, in Peter Makin's words, only when "the original passion was strong" that is, only by loving well can we contemplate the essential shapes of the world (*Pound's Cantos* 186). But from the above account of the origins of the suite in wartime Italy, it should be clear that *The Pisan Cantos'* grand synthesis of memory and love implies more than that. Canto 81's "Elysium," after all, grew directly out of an Italian "Eliseo" draft in which icons of memory include not only lost loves but also "morti" amid "il sangue sparso" – the dead associated with the spilt blood of Fascism. No less than in Canto 73, where the voice of Guido Cavalcanti himself trumpets faith in the Fascist movement, the Cavalcanti-like understanding of memory in *The Pisan Cantos* is inextricably linked with the imperatives announced in the *Corriere della Sera* in the last days of Mussolini to remember "il sangue Italiano" and to condemn the Allied and Jewish "iconoclasts" who have descended upon the sacred ground of Italy.

*The Pisan Cantos*, that is to say, present us with a celebration of the process of recollection that is both dazzling and irredeemably compromised. On the one hand, the techniques Pound devised to articulate recollective immediacy were so successful that they were taken up by several generations of American poets, beginning with Robert Lowell and Charles Olson and culminating in the vogue for confessional poetry of the following decades. On the other, Pound clearly intended, beginning in the Italian drafts of 1944-45, to present an "arte monda" – a "clean" art deliberately purified of the commercial and abstract practices of Semitic "iconoclasm." The Fascist orientation of this desire continues to pervade *The Pisan Cantos* and remains firmly rooted in the ideological passions of the last year of the Second World War. It is the final irony of this story that in the way he theorized his "resurgent EIKONEΣ" Pound may have violated the deepest truth of his own vision. After all, based on the proposition that contemporary history is not visible to its contestants under the aspect of eternity, he had admonished the potential readers of "Eliseo" not to seek in Elysium images from the just-spilled blood of the war ("il sangue sparso fa il conducente / non cercate qui i nuovi ([i] vostri) morti"), because the significance of the dead will not have been formed yet ("non son formati ancora"). Yet in *The Pisan Cantos* he himself continued to allude to "years of culture at the mercy of a tack hammer / thrown thru the roof" (C74 / 448) and to associate his earthly paradise as much with the memory of Fascism's



recent martyrs as with the muse-like figures once loved by the gods and heroes of antiquity and by Pound himself in his youth.

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