

“Eliot’s and Pound’s Declensions of the Past and Present: When Time Becomes Space”¹

Viorica Patea

The aim of this paper is to analyze the way in which Pound’s and Eliot’s Modernist poetics assume the task of what Longenbach calls the “existential” historian who endeavors in Bradley’s words “to breathe the life of the present into the death of the past.” It argues that stylistically, this approach of time does away with the temporal dimension inherent in a literary text and privileges instead spatiality, which is a characteristic feature of the figurative arts. In the first instance it analyzes the modernist conception of newness and the relationship between past and present, and in the second part it argues that the required technique to reflect the conception of time as a palimpsest together with the non-mimetic aesthetics of modernist poetics transform the modern epic into primarily a spatial poems.

Key words: Modernist poetry, Pound, Eliot, modern epic, spatiality

The past is not past because it happened to others but because it forms part of our present, of what we are in the form of having been... If then, *there* is a past, it must be something present, something active in us *now*.

José Ortega y Gasset. *History as System* 212

¹ I am indebted to Walter Baumann for his generous feedback, assistance and support. This study is part of a research project funded by the Regional Ministry of Culture of the Regional Autonomous Government of Castile & Leon (ref. number SA342U14).

The following abbreviations are used in this paper: ABC—Pound, *ABC Reading*; CEP—*Collected Early Poems of Ezra Pound*; CPP—*The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*; GB—Pound, *A Memoir of Gaudier Brzeska*; GK—Pound, *Guide to Kulchur*; KE—Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience*; LE—*Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*; SE—Eliot, *Selected Essays*; SR—Pound, *The Spirit of Romance*.

At the end of the nineteenth century, philosophical speculation questioned the very nature of historical knowledge. Quite a large number of philosophers such as F.H. Bradley, Wilhelm Dilthey, Benedetto Croce, Henri Bergson, José Ortega, Jacob Burkhardt or R.G. Collingwood challenged the prevailing positivist assumptions of their time and advanced theories that divested historic truth of pretensions of scientific objectivity. Their subjective presuppositions were to have a lasting influence on Pound's and Eliot's modernist poetics of history. Eroded by the relativism and solipsism inherent in romantic aesthetics, the premises of nineteenth-century historicism were foundering. Despite its claims to scientific objectivity, positivist historicism could not disengage itself from the interpreter's own historicity and contemporary prejudications. In *Presuppositions of Critical History* (1874), Bradley argued: "the past varies with the present, and can never do otherwise because it is always the present on which it rests" (32).

In the new hermeneutic, historical re-construction was envisaged as a process of aesthetic intuition during which the interpreter like the visionary artist tried to resurrect the "lived experience" of a particular time that was no longer there. Thus, historical inquiry was more a matter of aesthetic intuition similar to a poetic quest in which the historian, like the poet had to rely on personal insight and imaginative penetration. Historical investigation was a kind of existential encounter across time, based, as Longenbach persuasively remarks, on the rediscovery of a present "I in the Thou" of the past (16).

The aim of this paper is to analyze the way in which Pound's and Eliot's Modernist poetics assume the task of what Longenbach calls the "existential" historian who endeavors in Bradley's words "to breathe the life of the present into the death of the past" (32). I will argue that stylistically, this approach of time does away with the temporal dimension inherent in a literary text and privileges instead spatiality, which is a characteristic feature of the figurative arts. In the first instance it analyzes the modernist conception of newness and the relationship between past and present, and in the second part it argues that the required technique to reflect the conception of time as a palimpsest together with the non-mimetic aesthetics of modernist poetics transform the modern epic into primarily a spatial poems.

In *Laokoon* (1766), a study of aesthetic perception, Lessing defined plastic arts as spatial since the visible aspects of objects, form and color, are presented as juxtaposed in an instant of time; and poetry as temporal, since it is composed of sounds and words that unfold sequentially in time. Modernist poetry more than any other poetic movement increases the spatiality of the poetic word and brings it closer to the technique and principles of abstract art. Pound adopted the pictorial principle of the Chinese ideogram, which brings together a conglomerate of disparate elements, as the structural poetic composition. And consequently, his cantos became grounded in a succession of clusters of images that outline ideas, themes, and areas of meaning. Eliot's version of the Poundian "ply over ply" (C4/15) technique of accumulation of heterogeneous images, is the "mythical method", which together with his theory of impersonality and "the objective correlative"² contributes to the creation of a space-logic for modernist poetry.

Early on in his career, Eliot warned that the historical sense was not a form of "archaeological reconstruction" (SE 13). While Pound commended the German anthropologist Frobenius's historical understanding whose "archeology", "is not retrospective, it is immediate" (GK 57). He almost re-echoed the enthusiasm of Emerson who also wanted to behold "God and nature face to face" not "retrospectively" ("Nature" 7), see nature for the first time and talk to God directly as Christ and St. Paul did.³ Frobenius (1873-1938) believed that every culture has a shape, an essence, a soul, formed by its own ideas at a given time in history, which he called *paideuma*. Pound's own *paideuma*, a concept that translates into cultural instinct and active culture, draws on this energetic "tangle or complex of the inrooted ideas of any period" (GK 57).

Eliot's equivalent correlative to Pound's *paideuma* was his exploration of the depths of "the mind of Europe". His historical sense rests on Bradley's sense of experience as an originally unified whole and presents certain similarities to Jung's notion of the

² Eliot elaborated his theories in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) and "Hamlet" (1919) in SE.

³ "Why should we not have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us and not the history of theirs? [...] why should we gripe among the dry bones of the past [?]" (Nature, 7)

unconscious with its blend of individual psychological history and mythic time. Eliot conceived tradition in philosophically idealistic terms as a universal unifying reality “a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written” (SE 17). He referred to the existence of an “unconscious community” cutting across ages “between the true artists of any time” (SE 24).

Eliot’s saw the past as a living integrative part of the present involving “a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence” (SE 14). Along the same lines, Pound had affirmed in *The Spirit of Romance*:

All ages are contemporaneous ... This is especially true of literature, where the real time is independent of the apparent, and where many dead men are our grandchildren’s contemporaries, while many of our contemporaries have been already gathered into Abraham’s bosom. (SR 6)

Twenty-eight years later, Pound added: “[W]e do NOT know the past in chronological sequence [...] but what we know we know by ripples and spirals eddying out from us and from our own time“ (GK 60). “The past,” Eliot was to write much later in “Dry Salvages,” “has another pattern and ceases to be a mere sequence / Or even development” (CPP 132). No longer based on patterns of linear progress, history was a palimpsest in which the different layers of time laden with the voices of the dead were kept alive. The real structure of history amounted to “a pattern of timeless moments” (“Little Gidding”, CPP 144), that is, an underlying structure that by being always valid becomes timeless.

By 1918, Eliot had outlined in “The Hawthorne Aspect” the doctrine of modernist aesthetics and predicated modernity on an immersion in the past (47-53). Eliot’s historical sense is best explained in his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), yet his earlier formulations are related to an analysis of the art of Ezra Pound who had adumbrated the modernist poetics of history and revealed to him how to “proceed by acquiring the entire past”. For Eliot recognized in Pound the “individual talent”, the figure of the ideal poet in his seminal essay. His analysis of Pound, is in fact an indirect description of his own approach to the past:

The historical method ... is also a conscious and consistent application of a procedure suggested by Browning, which Mr. Pound applies more consistently than Browning did. Most poets grasp their own time, the life of the world it stirs before their own eyes, at one convulsion or not at all. But they have no method for closing in upon it. Mr. Pound's method is indirect and one of extremely difficult to pursue. As the present is no more than present existence, the present significance of the entire past, Mr. Pound proceeds by acquiring the entire past; and when the entire past is acquired the constituents fall into place and the present is revealed. (Eliot 1919, 1065).

Pound's translations are forms of creative writing meant to revitalize a tradition in "acts of remembrance" (Schwartz 133). In "A Note on Ezra Pound" in the pages of the short lived periodical *To-Day* (1918), Eliot extolled Pound's exemplary translations by which the past was now reborn in the mind of the modern translator (Eliot 1918a, 5). In Pound's poetic translations or re-creations, artistic and historical realities became contemporary. Eliot hailed Pound as the "inventor of Chinese poetry for our time" (Eliot 1928, xvi). In the very act of translation, the poet became the midwife to a past. In "Euripides and Professor Murray," Eliot commended Pound's translations and called for "an eye which can see the past in its place with its definite differences from the present, and yet so lively that it shall be as present to us as the present" (SE 64). An eloquent example of this strategy of "calling the past to life" (Eliot 1918a, 5) is Pound's early poem "Francesca" (1908):

You came in out of the night
And there were flowers in your hands,
Now you will come out of a confusion of people,
Out of a turmoil of speech about you.

I who have seen you amid the primal things
Was angry when they spoke your name
In ordinary places.
I would that the cool waves might flow over my mind,
And that the world should dry as a dead leaf,
Or as a dandelion seed-pod and be swept away,

So that I might find you again,
Alone. (CEP 121)

Pound's evocation of Francesca is in fact a love poem. He recalls Dante's heroine, Francesca da Rimini who was condemned to the second Circle of Hell for having fallen in love with Paolo while reading a book about Lancelot falling in love (Inferno V: 127-38). While she emerges out of the night, a symbol of the many centuries which have elapsed since her death, with flowers in her hands, the poet is jealous of the other people who dare speak about her casually and thus, defile her. He is angry when in their "turmoil of speech" they mention her name and drag her into "ordinary places," thus marring her intangible nature and not realizing her miraculous nature nor the portentous nature of her sudden apparition, which only a lover pained by his beloved's absence can rightly appreciate. The poet resents the "confusion of people" who treat the extraordinary as if it were a banal encounter, and yearns for an intimate encounter with her. He is jealous of everybody who approaches her even in speech and wishes the world to be swept away "like a dandelion seed-pod" so that he can have her only for and to himself in a solitary and loving encounter in the "cool waves" of his imagination. There he might find her again, but "alone".

The motif of the journey to the dead is central to Pound's oeuvre and to his particular method of "making it new." He starts his great epic poem of modernity, *The Cantos*, with Ulysses, who following Circe's instructions, descends to the underworld in order to consult Tiresias about his journey home, the *nostos*. He offers propitiatory blood sacrifice to the ghosts so as to activate their diaphragm", where the mind was once thought to lie and enable them to communicate with him. As Longenbach aptly remarks, Odysseus pouring blood for the ghosts in Canto I is the metaphor for Pound's historical reconstruction (17). Just as the Greek hero gives life to the ghosts so as to penetrate the mysteries of the past with which to shape his future, Pound will give voice to the ghosts of the dead that will resonate throughout *The Cantos* in the space of modernity. Similarly, in his last great poetic oeuvre, the *Four Quartets*, Eliot will also search for and converse with the shades, and in his quest for wisdom and of ways of shaping a new poetic language, will summon the "compound ghost". The encounter with it brings him the awareness that: "what the dead had no speech for, when living, / they can tell you being dead: the

communication/ Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.” (CPP 139)

A good illustration of Pound’s program of “calling the past to life” which entails an identification of an I of the present with a “Thou” of the past is his early poem, “Histrion” (1908):

No man has dared to write this thing as yet,
And yet I know, how the souls of all men great
At times pass through us,
And we are melted into them, and are not
Save reflexions of their souls.
Thus I am Dante for a space and am
One Francois Villon, ballad-lord and thief
Or am such holy ones I may not write,
Lest blasphemy be writ against my name;
This for an instant and the name is gone.

‘Tis in the midmost us there glows a sphere
Translucent, molten gold, that is the “I”
And into this form projects itself:
Christus, or John, or eke Florentine;
And as the clear space is not if a form’s
Imposed thereon,
So cease we all being for the time,
And these, the Masters of the Soul, live on” (CEP 71)

Pound identifies with the dead, breathes new life into them and finally resurrects them. The poet becomes a Platonic vortex, a center towards whom, from whom and through whom, the “souls of all great men” live on. They are ghosts, presences, ideal forms that dwell in the individual consciousness of the artist whose poetry becomes, in turn, the medium of their perseverance. The poet discovers that “in the midmost of us there glows a sphere / Translucent, molten gold”, where “the Masters of the Soul, live on”. He brings them back to life, his mind becomes the center in which they live on. Although his identification with

these glorious shades of the past might be an outrageous act, “Lest blasphemy be writ against my name”, he nevertheless dares take on the personality of “such holy ones”, “Christus, or John”, the Evangelist, or Dante, “eke Florentine”, or François Villon, “ballad lord and thief”. And “They at time pass through” him or us, while he and with him, us “are melted into them”. The fusion becomes complete, we “are not / Save reflexions of their souls.” These legendary literary figures serve, like most of Pound’s dramatic speakers, as identifying projections of a modern *Zeitgeist*.

For Pound, newness did not imply a rupture with the past, but an undulant movement. His exhorting imperative “Make it new” implied a way of recovering lost experience and reconstituting it new for a new age. The past was not to be abolished as the other avant-garde artists such as the Futurists or the Dadaists advocated. But it was to be re-grounded in the sensibility of the present and modified by the filter of a modern interpretative consciousness.

Pound defined the epic as “a poem including history” (LE 86) and *The Cantos* narrate “the tale of the tribe” while representing at the same time a “record of personal struggle”. They attest to Pound’s unique form of life-writing and to his ideal and personal involvement with history. His formal provocation is “to build up a circle of reference — taking the modern mind to be the medieval mind with wash after wash of classical culture poured over it since the Renaissance” (Hall 39). The Poundian quest is a voyage across the dark seas of history that unfolds in a characteristically non-sequential, intermittent fashion and encompasses ancient China, Renaissance Italy, the America of Adams and Jefferson, the Second World War, and contemporary Europe. Occasionally, “luminous details”, moments of enlightenment, glimpses of light, divine energies or ecstatic states of mind break the chains of time and disclose enduring revelations.

The Cantos are written in the Romantic belief that by the act of writing history by translating documents, visualizing ghosts, etc., the poet helps to build a better culture. By reawakening the voices of the dead he reenacts the essential mystery of a forgotten past needed for the foundation of a new civilization. Pound explained that he was writing “to resist the view that Europe and civilization are going to Hell” (Hall 57).

The Waste Land like *The Cantos* sets up correspondences, analogies and equivalences between different cultures belonging to various time periods. Eliot's epic establishes links between different sets of beliefs that lie at the foundations of "the mind of Europe", a mind that "abandons nothing en route" (SE 16), conceived as a repository for the individual and the collective memory. It reaches back into time going past Dante and the Troubadours, the Judeo-Christian tradition, the teachings of the biblical prophets, to the tradition of ancient Greek and Roman literature, to Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, and even further back to the ancient Upanishads in the same manner in which Pound relied on Confucius, and reached back towards prehistoric fertility and vegetation rites.

The Waste Land is the poetical illustration of Eliot's historical sense which "compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, ... with a feeling that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer ... has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order" (SE 14). Eliot's historical sense culminated in an anthropological quest for origins. He contended that the poet "should be aware of the stratifications of history that cover savagery" and reach into the primitive, the unconscious foundations of our psyche (1919a, 1036).

But how can one render this extra-temporal conception of time? How can the contiguity of past and present be rendered? How can the past and the present be apprehended in a timeless unity? The interpenetration of past and present points towards the Bergsonian *durée*. If time is no longer objective, causal progressions have to be annulled, its clear-cut boundaries are dissolved and differences wiped out in favor of different sets of realities that coexist in time despite their differences. As Joseph Frank aptly remarks *The Cantos* and *The Waste Land* are like Mallarmé's *Coup de dés*, hybrid pictographic poems in which linear stories are dissolved and in which synchronic relations prevail over diachronic ones. They dislocate the temporality of language. It is this extra-temporal sense of time that makes *The Cantos* and *The Waste Land* primarily spatial poems. Pound's method was ideogrammatic and Eliot's mythical. Moreover, the instances of visionary apprehension, the non-temporary quality of revelatory moments that abound in Eliot and Pound make the text crystallize in spatial formations. Time is no longer an objective and causal progression, but a continuum in which past and present coexist and form a timeless unity. Pound's and Eliot's method is similar to that of Proust who in

Ramón Fernández's words "gives time the value and characteristics of space ... in affirming that different parts of time reciprocally exclude and remain external to each other" (qtd. Frank 27). The spatial form of Pound's and Eliot's modern epic arises from the attempt to convey this non-temporary dimension of time.

Both *The Cantos* and *The Waste Land* produce a radical transformation of the aesthetic structure, which goes against the laws of language while temporality, and or narrative sequence disappear. Like nonfigurative plastic arts, modern poetry adopts a space-logic. As Charles Altieri convincingly argues, Eliot's notion of impersonality and that of the objective correlative helped develop an abstract poetic imaginative space inseparable from contemporary experiments in the abstract visual arts. While the objective correlative unites subjectivity with its objects, impersonality allows for a perspectival embodiment of psychic forces and tensions that undermine the ego's effort to impose a single interpretive strategy onto the flux of reality. By means of this strategy, Eliot rescued art from its mimetic representations and invented a new means of the dramatization of psychic forces and inner conflicts (189-209).

Pound argued that the modern epic would have to have "a form that would not exclude something merely because it didn't fit" (Hall 38). It expressed the modern consciousness of fragmentation as well as the modernist yearning for universality. Its new polyphonic structure presented a texture of discontinuities, open endings, and disruption of linear sequences.

The new epic rests on the collage-like technique, Pound's "ideogrammic method", which explores the pictorial possibilities of language. In 1913, Pound received Ernest Fenollosa's notebooks, an American Orientalist, former curator of the Asian collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts who studied in Japan, which contained his investigations and translations of Chinese and Japanese literature and culture. His essay "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry" (written in 1903 shortly before his death and published by installments in the *Little Review* from September to December 1919 thanks to Pound's efforts), appealed directly to Pound's notions of Imagism. Already in 1918, Pound recognized it as "a study of the fundamentals of all aesthetics" (Fenollosa 41). Throughout

his life he was to refer to it as the “ars poetica” par excellence.⁴ It became a manifesto of the new poetics that captured *avant la lettre* the new revolution in modernist aesthetics. For Pound it contained the basis of a new universal language underlying all arts, the foundation of a non-mimetic aesthetics, since it constituted a language that went beyond sound and operated through pictures. According to Fenollosa, Chinese ideograms represent “shorthand pictures of actions and processes” that take place in nature. (Fenollosa 45-46). They consist primarily of a direct juxtaposition of images, cultivate concision and precision, and rely on the suggestive power of images. He believed that, and Pound subscribed fully his view, unlike Western script, Chinese written characters are not arbitrary symbols, but go beyond “sheer convention” and “narrow grammatical categories.” Ideograms were a form of “picture writing” (53). One imperative of Modernist aesthetics was to “go in fear of abstraction”, and Chinese picture writing proved that “art and poetry” like nature dealt with the “concrete... not the general and the abstract” (54). Ideograms used “material images to suggest immaterial relations” (53), and established a bridge between “the seen to the unseen” (54). Their “pictorial visibility” was the fountain of poetic creativity and “accumulation of meaning” that “a phonetic tongue can hardly hope to attain” (55, 56). Ideograms are “built upon substrata of metaphor” (54) and unlike the Western alphabet they present the advantage of tracing the word’s etymology while working “by suggestion, crowding maximum meaning into a single phrase pregnant, charged and luminous from within.” (58).

In his imagist manifesto of 1912, Pound defined the image as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (LE 4). The image which is “not an idea” led to the vortex “a radiant node or a cluster [...] from which, and through which, and into which images are constantly rushing” (GB 92). Thus, the image was far from being a pictorial representation of a reality, but it composes a spatial complex of disparate ideas and emotions, that went against ordinary discourse and mimetic representations, as it does not depict a real space in a real moment in time. Pound said the

⁴ See Pound’s letter to Hubert Creekmore in 1939, *Letters*, 322. In his study *Articulate Energy*, Donald Davie believed Fenollosa’s essay was the only modern document “fit to rank” with Sidney’s *Apologie*, Wordsworth’s *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* and Shelley’s *In Defense of Poetry* (33).

image had to produce a “sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits [...] a sense of sudden growth” (LE 4). The image then no longer unfolds in time as a succession of words, but takes on the attributes characteristic of plastic arts whose visible aspects have a spatial dimension and are perceived in an instant of time. It presents no longer a naturalistic photography of the real, but a lens through which to look at reality and reconstruct it anew: “the image is the word beyond formulated language (“Vorticism”, GB 88).

Pound’s vortex is rooted in the Chinese ideogram which “does not try to be the picture of a sound, or to be a written sign recalling a sound, but is still the picture of a thing; of a thing in a given position or relation, or of a combination of things” (ABC 21). Pound’s ideogrammic method operates spatially by juxtaposing different images and consists of using “abbreviated pictures As pictures” (ABC 21). Pound explains in the *ABC of Reading*, that “red” in a Chinese ideogram is embodied by a set of images: “rose, iron rust, cherry, flamingo” (ABC 22), thus the abstract concept is anchored in concrete elements and immediate experience. The ideogram synthesizes identity in difference, and reconciles conceptual unity with sensory multiplicity.

Akin to the principle of the ideogram that holds together heterogeneous elements, is Eliot’s conception of the poet’s mind which “form[s] new wholes” out of equally disparate elements:

[A] poet’s mind is [...] constantly amalgamating disparate experience: the ordinary man’s experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes. (SE 287)

Pound made the ideogram the structuring principle of *The Cantos*. In fact one could view his epic as a series of ideograms that are piled up together. The discontinuous, open-ended nature of these collages is an invitation to constant interpretations on behalf of the reader which become integral to the meaning and compositional structure of the text. The new aesthetic of the fragmentary is part of the cognitive process itself.

A typical example can be found in the first four lines at the beginning of Canto IV and which, as Walter Baumann magisterially argues, “contain in a nutshell all the major themes of the Canto.” (Baumann 1967, 23)

Palace in smoky light,
Troy but a heap of smouldering boundary stones,
ANAXIFORMINGES! Aurunculeia!
Hear me. Cadmus of Golden Prows! (4/13)

I have chosen this example, because Canto IV is perhaps the most widely studied canto, and the first four lines are a perfect version of a Poundian ideogram illustrating how an abstract notion is deduced from its diverse concrete constituent elements exemplifying the Chinese example of redness emerging from “rose, iron rust, cherry, flamingo”. Furthermore, Canto IV contains, to adapt Baumann’s words, most of “the major themes of the Canto[s]”.

Pound’s lines are not very different from *The Waste Land*’s discontinuous syntax in which words also lose their prescribed, predictive relations. I have chosen the last lines of *The Waste Land*, but I could have chosen any other passage, since coherent sequences are maintained only in small chunks of verse:

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli
Quando fiam uti chelidon—O swallow swallow
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih (CPP 50)

But what is the underlying relation between the Troy in ruins, Pindar's Anaxiforminges ('Lords of the Lyre') and Catullus's praise of Aurunculeia (the bride for whom he writes an epithalamion) summed up in an invocation of Cadmus of Golden Prows in Pound's canto? And what have a king who is fishing and ordering lands to do with falling bridges, purifying flames, swallows, a troubadour prince, a mad father and a formal blessing? In both cases, word groups lose their logical coherence, they follow one another disconnectedly, with no causal meaning or sense of sequence. Pound accumulates an eclectic mix of Greek and Latin injunctions, mostly names that refer to women and gods, art and cities, literary allusions to Homer and Pindar. Eliot proceeds in similar fashion, brings together a series of quotations in Italian, Latin, French, Middle English, whose teachings are summed up, for more clarity and authority, in the Sanskrit of the Upanishads. Hence, meaning is lost on the linguistic level. In Eliot's text, this erratic ragbag of references is composed by a cryptic question, "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" and an answer which is an apparently nonsensical enumeration of a series of quotations: a nursery rhyme about London's falling towers, somebody's desire to dive into the purifying flames of fire, two invocations of a swallow, in Latin and English, a reference to an unknown prince of Aquitaine, the region of the troubadour poets, depicted as if in an old tableau near ruined towers. This inventory of motley items that goes against semantic coherence also effects a disruption of the syntactic order: punctuation disappears, and we are told that the listed quotations configure "fragments I have shored against my ruins", a conclusion which ushers in an even less unexpected statement in Middle English "Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe." At this point, punctuation is reintroduced for three unintelligible commands uttered in a dead language and sanctioned in a solemn religious tone.

The Cantos like *The Waste Land* is a poem of "fragments shored against ruins", a phrase which Pound quotes twice in his long poem. Eliot's own version of Pound's "ideogrammic method" was the "mythical method" with which he hoped to establish a "continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" so as to make "the modern world possible for art" (Eliot 1923, 483). The mythical method allows for a realistic portrayal of modern history while it operates a quest for the anthropological roots of the modern psyche and a recovery of its archetypal realities. Besides the principle of

impersonality and the objective correlative, the mythical method was Eliot's experimental form with which to counter mimetic naturalism and build the new non-linear geometry of the inner life charged with the simultaneities and synchronicities of consciousness.

Both Eliot and Pound bring together different cultures and historical time periods by an identification of modern characters with mythical, legendary and historical prototypes. Thus, history goes beyond its historical limits and dissolves into timelessness. Past and present are apprehended spatially forming a timeless unity in a juxtaposition in which progression and sequence disappear. When historical imagination is transformed into myth, the characters, actions and events that took place at a particular time exist only in so far as they reveal their prototypical, ideal, archetypal reality (Langbaum 1973). Thus history exists only if assimilated in a mythical world, striving towards a timeless complex of significance, a tendency analogous to most modernist texts.

The modern epic does away with plot, action, development towards a climax or a denouement. Instead the text is held together by a string of recurrent phrases, quotations, autobiographical threads, symbols, images that compose an "interlocking large-scale rhythms of recurrence" (Kenner 260), which draw on cinematic technique of a succession of close-ups and photo-montages,⁵ and reverberate throughout the text like fugues that pull it together "in a timeless bas relief" (Kenner 276). All elements of the epic are done away with, and instead "the reader must remember all things contemplate all things in a simultaneous present" (Kenner 277). The lines are linked by "echo-patterns" (Baumann 21) with other Cantos as well as Pound's prose. A full understanding of this "phalanx of particulars" (74/461) must account for this web of references that bear on each other.

Eliot and Pound's poetics privilege a complex mode of ever-shifting temporal dislocations, narrative and rhetorical discontinuities and unexplained alternations of past and present, reality and myth. Within the framework of these montages, dramatic action loses its linear progression and ceases to compose narrative and chronological sequences (Levenson 201). Stories have no beginning, middle and end. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is a strange poem based on a legend, the Grail legend, whose main symbols and protagonists

⁵ Kenner compares Pound's ideogrammic method with Eisenstein's technique as described in his essays collected in *Potemkin, and Film Form* (261).

are absent or appear briefly and go almost unnoticed. There is no lance, no grail in the poem and the presence of the Fisher king and the grail quester is so fleeting that the poet has to write a note to his own poem. Other characters appear and disappear with the same ease. We do not know what happens to the grail quester or to the lovers in the hyacinth garden. The young man carbuncular fades, like his counterparts, the silent interlocutor in "The Game of Chess", or Albert, Lil's husband who, back from the war, enjoys a Sunday dinner in a *ménage à trois*: "They had a hot gammon, / And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot" (CPP 42). And so do, like so many others, the cosmopolitan tourists in the Hofgarten, or the Antarctic explorers who have encountered "the third" in their pilgrimage. Narrative strategy is supplanted by an allusive strategy of textual suggestiveness that does not advance the narrative thread but creates instead a continuous web of new associations in which one moment of a legendary past is translated into new contexts, different time periods or geographical latitudes and cultures. The modern poetic persona who confesses "By the waters of Lemman I sat down and wept" (CPP 42) is another instantiation of the Biblical exile in bondage by the waters of Babylon, and so is also "Stetson!" the modern soldier who encounters across time his companion who fought together with him, "at the ships at Mylae!" (CPP 39) in the Punic war; he illustrates the identical fate of all those who have participated in all kinds of wars, past and present. Biblical exiles become "the hooded hordes swarming / Over endless plains ... Ringed by the flat horizon only" (CPP 48). The disciples on their way to Emmaus who do not recognize the risen Christ merge with the members of Shackleton's Antarctic expedition in section V. The ghosts and ghouls that haunt the Chapel Perilous turn into the nightmares of modern civilization "voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells" (CPP 48). Furthermore, the "unreal city" is the Ideal City "Jerusalem Athens Alexandria", birthplaces of ancient religions, but also the modern citadel, "Vienna London", as well as Baudelaire's 19thc Paris covered by "a brown fog of a winter dawn", or Dante's fourteenth-century Florence. The wastelanders undergo unconscious identifications with literary and legendary characters such as Grail questers, Fisher Kings, tarot card figures, hanged men, buried gods whose experiences they relive in time as if following the script of a lost play. The unhappy couples coexist in the same space with other legendary lovers of the great Western tradition of romantic love such as Dido and Aeneas, Anthony and Cleopatra, Tristan and Isolde,

Hamlet and Ophelia... Thus, past and present, myth and reality coexist in a strange synchronicity that annuls time. The movement is not a forward progression but a lateral multiplication into new contexts. The Christian story, and the Grail legend belong to the same pattern of archaic religions, dying and reviving gods of ancient fertility and vegetation rites, or Hindu Thunder Gods. Similarly, the redeeming Word is not only the Christian Logos but also the Sanskrit DA of the Vedanta philosophy and that of Buddha's teachings. Eliot tries to bring together the common language of spirituality of East and Western traditions. The meaning of these episodes becomes evident only in juxtapositions that crystallize past and present in a reality that goes beyond time barriers. St. Augustine and Buddha's sermon are united in the same prayer and Eliot articulates the spiritual values that underlie three religions, Christianity, Buddhism and the Vedanta. And it is worth noting, that despite the criticism directed against Eliot's elitist Euro-centrism, the fact is that at the beginning and at the end of his career, the resolution of both *The Waste Land* (1922) and the *Four Quartets* (1942), comes from a culture that is non-European. Thus, "Datta, Dayadhvam. Damyata. / Shanti shanti shanti" as well as Eliot's later quotations of the Baghavad-Gita in his *Quartets*, "Fare forward travellers" "on whatever sphere of being/ The mind of man may be intent/ At the time of death" (CPP 134) an echo of Krishna's reply to Arjuna, on the battlefield of Kurusheta, are cardinal turning points of his poems that provide a resolution to the dramatic moments of the poems by drawing on values coming from non-European cultures. Like Eliot, but with more fervor and passion, Pound was obsessed with Chinese history in *The Cantos* and especially with Confucian philosophy which, he sincerely believed, could, if put into action, provide a remedy for all the world's inequities and injustices.

Thus, the modern poem with its polyphonic structure and shifting points of view articulates an increasingly non-naturalistic aesthetic, which resembles abstract art, and translates into a poetics of increased spatiality. The syntactical structure dissolves into word groups that seem disconnected and illogical. Meaning does not derive from the logic of language which draws on a causal, consecutive, temporal order and it can be completed only when all the scattered references and cross references can be grasped comprehensively in relation to one another. Meaning is attained only when the poem is grasped in its unity as

a whole. It is only when we finally understand Pound's cluster of allusions in Canto IV that these disparate elements cohere into a whole. They start making sense once we realize that they all relate to the fall, Troy reduced to "a heap of smouldering boundary stones", and rise of cities and civilizations, Thebes founded by Cadmus of the Golden Prows. Pound's ideogram also based on a question and answer technique. The ideogram inquires into the forces needed for the building of a new civilization: Anaxiforminges! ('the Lords of the Lyre'), reminds us of Pindar's second Olympic Ode which contains a question "Hymns that are Lords of the lords of the lyre, what god, what hero, what man shall we sing of?", a question which Pound also posed in *Mauberley* (1920). The answer is "Aurunculeia", that is, Love, as embodied by Vinia Aurunculeia, Catullus's celebrated bride in *Carmen LXI*. Pound finds the solution in Art and Love. As Walter Baumann persuasively demonstrates, these dissimilar elements suggest a concern with "the metamorphoses in different strata of love *and* civilization", they constitute Pound's chronicle of the "march of civilization from the passion which destroys men and cities to the affection that is in harmony the great mysteries of this world and leads men to the Ideal City" (Baumann 19-20). The ideogram is also about boundaries and transgression, the *hybris* of trespassing, present in the "smouldering boundar[ies]", which were ruled by gods in antiquity. It addresses also human limitations and passion, for the fall of Troy's is caused by the beauty of Helen and the violation of the divine commands, in contrast to the Cadmus, the hero who follows the instructions of the gods and becomes the founder of a new city, Cadmeia, the acropolis of Thebes. The theme is as Flory suggests "about danger, and specifically the danger that results from the beauty of women" (112) and the "dangers of love" of passion that is faithful (Aurunculeia) or adulterous (Helen) and so irresistible that it goes beyond all boundaries. The canto portrays women alternately as victims and destroyers, as brides of men and gods.

Similarly, Eliot's references at the end of *The Waste Land* encompass the ailing Fisher King of the Grail legend, a nursery rhyme that introduces the motif of falling of towers, the collapse of a civilization and disintegration of the psyche; Dante's encounter with the Provençal poet Arnaut Daniel who willingly undergoes the purifying flames of Purgatory so as to be purged of his sins "dived he back into the fire that refines him" (*Purgatorio* xxvi: 145-48); the anonymous of 2AD Latin text *Pervigilium veneris* ('The

Eve of St. Venus'), a celebration of love and spring, whose leitmotif "When shall I become like a swallow? And be free from dumb distress?" is re-echoed by Tennyson's invocation to the swallow – "O Swallow, Swallow, if I could follow ..." in *The Princess* (iv) by a lover who cannot see his beloved and asks the bird to act as his messenger; Gerard de Nerval's sonnet "El Desdichado" in which the Prince of Aquitaine, the poet's persona, laments the deterioration of his culture by alluding to the poetry of courtly love, which flourished from the late eleventh to the thirteenth centuries in Southern France; *Hieronymo is Mad Again*, is the subtitle of Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, in which a distressed father summoned to write a play for the entertainment of the court, vows to take revenge on the murderers of his son – "Why then Ile fit you" – who are invited to play different parts in a play spoken in different languages staging the real story of the intrigue in which they had participated in real life. Like the Nerval quote it refers to cultural disintegration and the poet's or persona's mental unbalance. This long series of references culminates quite surprisingly within the ultimate revelation of the Thunder in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* on the ultimate nature of truth : "Give. Sympathize. Control", the declensions of the Thunder God, Prajapati, who reveals the ultimate meaning of the Word, DA, "dharma", the ultimate law of the universe, and the imperatives that make life meaningful and deliver the self from the revolutions of the wheel. "Shanti shanti shanti" is the formal ending of the Upanishad which Eliot translates as "Peace which passeth understanding" in his note. What these strange quotations have in common is that they all point to something that has been lost, be it one's own life, falling towers of a civilization, a beloved, a son, an inheritance, while announcing hope of and possibility of a new beginning. This bizarre conglomerate configures the "fragments" the poet has "shored against" his "ruins." Despite their apparent dissimilarity they all refer to an end, a loss, a fall and announce the promise of recovery and redemption, a new beginning or a will to act.

Like Pound and Eliot, Joyce and Proust also pushed the epic in the direction of spatiality. Joyce's *Ulysses* like Pound's *Cantos* draw on a vast number of references and cross references and which create a meaningful pattern only when they are grasped by the reader as a whole. Yet comprehending the unity means placing an unsurpassable challenge as well as burden on the reader who has to piece together the fragments of the text. This is easy in the 434 lines of *The Waste Land*, but especially difficult in the case of the 824 pages

long *Cantos*. The ideogrammic method requires attentive repeated reading and a good memory to discover existing connections.

References

Altieri, Charles. "Eliot's Impact on Twentieth-Century Anglo-American Poetry," *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*. Ed., A. David Moody, 1994. 189-209.

Baumann, Walter. *The Rose in the Steel Dust. An Examination of the Cantos of Ezra Pound*. Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1970.

Bradley, F. H. *Presuppositions of Critical History*. Oxford: James Parker & Co, 1874.

Eliot, T. S. *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1962.

Eliot, T. S. "The Hawthorne Aspect." *Little Review* 5 August (1918): 47-53.

—. "A Note on Ezra Pound." *To-Day* 4 September (1918a): 3-9.

—. "The Method of Mr. Pound." *Athenaeum* 4669 (24 October 1919): 1065-6.

—. "War-Paint and Feathers." *The Athenaeum* 4668 (October 17, 1919a): 1036.

—. "Ulysses, Order and Myth." *Dial* LXXV/5 (November 1923): 483; rpt. *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*. Ed. Frank Kermode. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1975. 175-78.

—. "Introduction", *Ezra Pound: Selected Poems*. Ed. T.S Eliot, London: Faber and Gwyer, 1928. vii-xxv.

—. *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964.

—. *Selected Essays*. London: Faber and Faber. 1972.

Eliot, T. S. *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*. Ed. Valerie Eliot. Vol. I. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1988.

Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy: Inferno I, Purgatorio I*. Tr. Charles Singleton. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977.

Davie, Davie. *Articulate Energy: An Inquiry into the Syntax of English Poetry*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Nature," *Essays and Poems*. New York: The Library of America, 1983.

Flory, Stallard Wendy. *Ezra Pound and The Cantos: A Record of Struggle*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1980.

Frank, Joseph. *The Idea of Spatial Form*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991.

Hall, Donald. "Ezra Pound". *Paris Review Interviews. Writers at Work. Second Series*. New York:

Viking Press (1962) 1963, 37-59.

Hall, Donald. "Ezra Pound. The Art of Poetry, V," *The Paris Review* 28 (Summer –Fall 1962).

Kenner, Hugh, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*. Lincoln: U Nebraska P, (1951) 1985.

Langbaum, Robert. "New Modes of Characterization." *Eliot in His Time*. Ed. Walton Litz. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973. 95-128.

Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Laokoon*. Tr. Dorothy Reich. London: Oxford UP, (1766) 1965.

Levenson, Michael. *A Genealogy of Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Longenbach, James. *Modernist Poetics of History: Pound, Eliot and the Sense of the Past*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987.

Ortega y Gasset, José. *History as System*. Tr. Helene Weyl. New York: Norton, 1961.

Pound, Ezra. *ABC Reading*. New York: New Directions, (1934) 1960.

—. *The Classic Noh Theatre of Japan*. New York: New Directions, 1959.

—. *Collected Early Poems*. Ed. Michael John King. New York: New Directions, 1976.

—. *Guide to Kulchur*. New York: New Directions, (1938) 1970.

—. *Literary Essays*. Ed. T. S. Eliot. New York: New Directions, 1954.

—. *The Spirit of Romance*. New York: New Directions, (1910) 1968.

—. *The Cantos*. New York: A New Directions Book, 1995.

—. *A Memoir of Gaudier Brzeska*. New York: New Directions, (1916) 1970.

—. *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941*. Ed. D. D. Paige. New York: New Directions, (1950) 1971.

Schwartz, Sanford. *The Matrix of Modernism: Pound, Eliot & Early 20th-Century Thought*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985.