

EZRA POUND AND THE MASK OF MEMORY¹

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The material of memory, then, cannot be a concrete image of plenitude, but only an image of loss.

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1. “*I? I? I?*”

Included in the “Poems of 1908-1911,” which Baechler and Litz remind us were rigorously edited by Pound to eliminate the “soft stuff” (271-272), one short verse reflects illuminatingly on the complex process of personality as poetics – or should that be on the process of poesis as performance of personality?

On His Own Face in a Glass

O strange face there in the glass!
 O ribald company, O saintly host,
 O sorrow-swept my fool,
 What answer? O ye myriad
 That strive and play and pass,
 Jest, challenge, counterlie!
 I? I? I?

And ye?

(33)

The poem would seem to enact a version of Lacan's mirror phase (or "stade" – which Bowie reminds us is close to English "stadium") in infant development; that moment when the child sees itself in the mirror and conceptualizes itself as a distinct, bounded entity. Yet, at the same time as it recognizes itself it loses a sense of wholeness, since the sense of self involves a perception of the self as other, or a projection of the idea of the self into an image of the self. So identity comes at the cost of alienation from the self, an ongoing sense of the self as the double of the self, and of human identity as a condition of fragmentation.² As well as introducing into psychoanalysis the concepts of alienation and fragmentation, Lacan refers to the incipience of this gap between the self and the reflection of the self as "lack."³

I prefer in this context to speak of a sense of "loss," since it anticipates the crisis of Pisa, where the poet is defined through loss. This early poem captures the moment of seeing the reflection of one's own visage as a wave of disappointment – or deception⁴ – in the line: "O sorrow-swept my fool." In the response that follows E.P. seeks an answer to this sensation. The sense of alienation from the self, the sense of self-definition being incumbent upon a splitting of the self into the perceiving "I" and the reflected self image, leads to a gesture of (over) compensation.⁵ To counterbalance that moment of stark existential strangeness, that sense of personality being constructed upon a gap and a lack, Pound conjures up a "myriad," a multiple sense of the perceived and performed self. The connotations of his language suggest both a religious and a theatrical context for this drama of the self/selves, but the histrionic seems to prevail towards the end of this poem. Pound's early poems are curiously caught in archaic "poetic" linguistic forms, which also accentuate the gap between a desired authenticity and a questing role-play. In particular, the young "E.P." tends to employ the singular and plural second person mode.

So the poem ends with the multiplication of the "I" – for emphasis perhaps, but surely also to split the perceiving self

into a trinity of selves. Then the selves' doubles are addressed as "ye," indicating that in fact the poetic personality being constructed here is multiple in its estranged perception of its reflected images. The process of compensation for the sense of loss enacted in this poem counterproductively engenders a myriad of masks but no originary center. In this respect Pound differs from the subsequently formulated Lacanian model that posits an iconic, unified, specular image of the self in contrast to the perceiving self caught in a site of fragmentation. E.P.'s specular image is itself multiple and fragmented from the second line onwards. I would surmise that the poem is thus both Romantic in its provenance and in fundamental ways profoundly anti-romantic in its processes, despite its archaic diction.

What I find most striking in considering these early shorter poems in my own late middle age is that the process of projection from the strangely unresolved, perceiving self-in-process onto the myriad, borrowed images for the self reflection is a pattern that is enacted variously throughout the "Poems of 1908-1911." A recurring variant on the pattern is the introduction of a doubled sense of time. The young poet as acolyte re-imagines past cultures, conjuring up the voices of the "fair dead"; and concurrently conceives himself as always already old, or one of the fair dead, or beyond mortal humanity. This enactment of old age by youth simultaneously projects him into a distant, impersonal past and sadly loops forward towards his own senility and demise. The paradigmatic utterance of this is to be found in Ronsard, or for our purposes in Yeats's version of Ronsard's *Quand vous serez bien vieille...*⁶ However there are several uncanny recurrences of it in the early personae, and I shall take a moment to recall some of them.

2. "Call not that mirror me"

I am fascinated by the way the young "E.P." revises the "Gather ye rosebuds" trope, complicating its dynamic and emphasizing the *memento mori* motif. A rereading of "Poems

of 1908-1911” indicates that the patterns that are foregrounded by frequent recurrence form a complex articulation of the trope and its associated motifs. In its most recognizable version of the convention, the poet/lover addresses the beloved/lady, urging her to grant him amatory favors, by reminding her that she will grow “old and gray.” Pound works this Ronsardian/Yeatsian motif into “Na Audiart.” In this poem he extends the trope by imagining Audiart as having died and, being reincarnated, still remembering that she was once the Lady Audiart who “would that ill come unto him.” Thus the poem also conveys the edge of malevolence that is imbricated in the Lady’s refusal of her favors and in the poet’s prowess in his description of her aging and demise:

And being bent and wrinkled, in a form
 That hath no perfect limning, when the warm
 Youth dew is cold
 Upon thy hands, and thy old soul
 Scorning a new, wry’d casement,
 Churlish at seemed misplacement,
 Finds the earth as bitter
 As now seems it sweet,
 Being so young and fair
 As then only in dreams,
 Being then young and wry’d,
 Broken of ancient pride,
 Thou shalt then soften,
 Knowing, I know not how,
 Thou wert once she

Audiart, Audiart

For whose fairness one forgave

Audiart,

Audiart

Que be-m vols mal.

(9-10)

The trick of this poem is the ambivalence of emotional tone, projected onto the metonym of the reincarnate Audiart, who

is imagined as old beyond death and concomitantly reincarnate as young but “wry’d,” while being addressed when still young and fair. Which is to say a multiple *dédoublement* of personality is imaged here, spanning decades and the boundary between life and death. Read in the light of the paradigm of “On His Own Face in a Glass,” I would say that the persona of *En Bertrans* presents the lady with a specular image that is simultaneously flattering and devastating.

The other poem that notably envisages the death of female beauty and addresses the lady directly is also a version: “Her Monument, the Image Cut Thereon: From the Italian of Leopardi.” However, here the perspective is reversed. The point of view is located at her tomb and focuses on imagining her dead body, before recalling her lost, ardent youth:

Such wast thou,
Who art now
But buried dust and rusted skeleton.
Above the bones and mire,
Motionless, placed in vain,
Mute mirror of the flight of speeding years,
Sole guard of grief
Sole guard of memory
Standeth this image of the beauty sped. (39-40)

Here the memorial of youth and beauty serves to emphasize the inevitability and ubiquity of death; memory prompts a questioning of human significance, rather than functioning as a bestower of significant selfhood.

A further variation that “E.P.” effects in the “old and gray” trope is to include the poet persona in the projection forward to old age, death and beyond. It occurs in a relatively benevolent form in “*Horae Beatae Inscriptio*”:

How will these hours, when we twain are gray,
Turned in their sapphire tide, come flooding o’er us! (49)

In a Browningsque enactment of frustration in “Marvoil” the persona goes one step further to imagine himself as dead:

And if when I am dead
 They take the trouble to tear out this wall here,
 They’ll know more of Arnaut of Marvoil
 Than half his canzoni say of him. (22)

I believe even a cursory glance should remind my reader how prevalent this trope is, and moreover, how striking – given that these are the personae of a young poet. “E.P.” complicates the trope by summoning up a complex that connects an ardent but unique erotic encounter with the transcendent vision of an ecstatic state beyond youth, beyond life, beyond death. Examples of this turn would include “Threnos,” “De Aegypto,” “Paracelsus in Excelsis,” “Blandulla, Tenulla, Vagula,” “Satiemus,” and “The Flame.” I believe that this complex of eroticism and transcendentalism is “E.P.’s” version of Provençal trobar clus; but the provenance of this is not what concerns me here, so much as the prevalence of its expression. So I shall continue my catalogue of the numerous ways in which the young “E.P.” elects personae that complicate not just “the lady’s” senility and death, but the poet/speaker’s old age and/or death also.

“And Thus in Ninevah” explicitly connects the role of poet with a cult of death:

“Aye! I am a poet and upon my tomb
 Shall maidens scatter rose leaves
 And men myrtles, ere the night
 Slays day with her dark sword.[...]
 Yet am I poet, and upon my tomb
 Shall all men scatter rose leaves
 Ere the night slay light
 With her blue sword... (23)

The role of poet bestows a type of immortality after death, as the entombed poetic corpse becomes the focus of the ritual scattering of rose leaves by both genders. Here again “E.P.” summons up an ancient culture that is bound together not by the amatory gathering of rose buds, but by the erotics of transience and death connoted by the sterile leaves. One might compare this poem with “Famam Librosque Cano,” which has an altogether more ironic rendering of the theme of poetic immortality. In a Browningsque mode, reminiscent of the start of *The Ring and the Book*, this poem imagines not only the always previous death of the poet, but also the reader as already aging:

And lost mid-page
 Such age
 As his pardons the habit,
 He analyses form and thought to see
 How I ’scaped immortality. (15)

The rhyme scheme of this coda interestingly connects the “page” with “age,” thus reinforcing the turning of the poet into a spectacle viewed by the erudite reader. So, another permutation of the perceiving self and the mirrored self is to split the function between reader and poet.

However, at the end of “The Flame,” “E.P.” resists this positioning of the self, and in a Whitmanesque mo(ve)ment⁷ disappears into the psychic space created by the lack/gap between the self and its double:

If thou hast seen my shade sans character,
 If thou hast seen that mirror of all moments,
 That glass to all things that o’ershadowed it,
 Call not that mirror me, for I have slipped
 Your grasp, I have eluded. (49)

If the poetic persona uses death as an elusion, an illusive trick with mirrors, he is also preparing himself for the her-

metic transformations of “The Alchemist.” This persona, retrospectively placed at the end of *Ripostes*, establishes a poetic paradigm that will last Pound a life time; and yet its elements – the encounter with death, the trobar clus erotics of desire turned into poetic chant, the transmutation of identity formation into myriad, transient impersonalities, the transcendentalist elusiveness of the poetic personality – all these elements are traceable to those early “Poems of 1908-1911” that Pound tried so hard to edit rigorously for the 1926 edition of *Personae*.⁸

There are at least as many poems lamenting the death of a male companion as there are envisaging the old age or death of a female beloved. For example: “For E. McC.: That was my counter-blade under Leonardo Terrone, Master of Fence,” “Planh for the Young English King,” and notably the three “Villonauds,” all of which treat death graphically, including the death of Christ. Pound described his personae as a series of masks of the self. In order to fully understand the dynamic of poetic mask, I have argued that we need to conceptualize the poet as located both in the position of the perceiving self and the gazed-upon mirror image of the self. Here we need to change the metaphor to the appropriate dramatic scenario. The poetic self is essentially hesitant, lacking definition and bounded shape; thus the personality that I have referred to as “E.P.” – but common sense dictates is also Pound – is precariously constituted by the transactions between a spectator/audience position and a dramatis personae position. Pound is forever split between say the persona of Villon and the twentieth-century reader and reanimator of Villon. The strategy to determine self-identity leads to a constant deferral of individuation.

To recapitulate: paradoxically the poem (“On His Face in a Glass”) enacting the construction of individuated personality opens up a paradigm of lack of individual identity, predicated upon a sense of estrangement from the self, leading to

a *dédoublement* of the self in the reflected images of the self, and resulting in a complex Vortograph-like multiplicity of images of personality that by their serial reduplication refute a singular, unified self. The poem's paradox is that these myriad versions are predicated upon lack or loss of plenitude. As the young "E.P." performs his personae, and regards his own performance, the sense of estrangement, of gap/lack and loss is translated / transformed / transmuted into a recurrent poetic working on the themes of old age and death, and the complex of related tropes that have accumulated in an extensive Classical and Renaissance tradition.

3. "*I do not like to remember things any more*"

The key term in this reading of "Poems of 1908-1911" might thus appear to be death. However, having demonstrated how insistent aging and death are I would argue that the significant term here is memory. If these personae constitute an over-elaborate response to the crisis of identity construction, a complex statement about the impossibility of achieving a stable, congruent personality, memory functions as the process that might secure this in time. It is perhaps a commonplace to say that memory and a sense of personal identity are inextricably imbricated, yet it is worth reminding ourselves of its importance nevertheless.⁹ In certain early personae, and I tend to think in those that are the best in terms of aesthetic achievement, the young "E.P." sloughs off the dead skin, i.e. performs the consciousness of old men articulating a sense of their aging. One should not forget in this context the importance of the Noh tradition, its transmission through Fenollosa and its influence on Yeats, who shared his interest in it with Pound. In particular the instruction to a Noh actor to capture the spirit of old age and not to caricature the external features of it is recounted by Pound in order to emphasize the importance of representing true emotion, rather than undertaking mere imitation.¹⁰

In these *dramatis personae* memory is the key component. Thus, “Piere Vidal Old” addresses his audience:

Aye ye are fools, if ye think time can blot
From Piere Vidal’s remembrance that blue night. (29)

More often, these masks of aging dramatize a loss of memory, or more accurately a gap that indicates a memory of traumatic loss. “E.P.” enacts in semantic fragmentation the elders’ suppression of episodic memory, implying from behind the mask to the knowing reader, that memory signifies trauma and loss not fulfillment and plenitude. No wonder the poetic articulation of ecstasis elsewhere in the collection sounds mannered; since the transcendental position is sought in the gap between the youthful erotic flame and the projection of the remembrance of it from the site of the burnt-out embers. Cino’s memory is indicated by synthesis and ellipsis:

I have sung women in three cities.
But it is all one.
I will sing of the sun.
...eh? ... they mostly had grey eyes,
But it is all one, I will sing of the sun. (7)

This erasure of the memory of individual women suggests a *via negativa* approach to *la donna ideale*.

Most explicit in its dramatization of a type of – is it willed? – forgetfulness is “La Fraisne”:

Once when I was among the young men ...
And they said I was quite strong, among the young men.
Once there was a woman ...
... but I forget ...she was ...
... I hope she will not come again.

...I do not remember.....

I think she hurt me once, but ..

That was very long ago.

I do not like to remember things any more. (5-6)

As the youthful acolyte assumes the guise of the master, the elder statesman's pronouncements anticipate a complex loss of memory. This may be a version of "The Madness of King Goll," but it also a poignant if displaced expression of a painful detachment, or non-attachment, of human emotion. Death of the self through senile reintegration into natural process and habitat seems strangely desirable in so young a poet.

4. "*at my time of life when / All good things go vanishing*"

I want to complicate further the doubling of the self that "On His Own Face in a Glass" predicated, by suggesting that when Pound reached his own late middle age, he undertook an extensive poetic project of summoning up his own memories, whether personal or cultural. In the personal and historical crisis that was Pisa he undertook epic memory-work to reassess and reconstruct a sense of himself from the gathered fragments of the/his past. In late middle age the perceiving self looks back upon the succession of reflected images of the younger, past self, refabricating a sense of identity out of memory as loss / memories of loss.¹¹ Recent scientific findings about memory might shed some light on how memory functions in the poetic text of *The Pisan Cantos*.

In the last twenty-five to thirty years scientists have learnt much about the way memory functions in the brain. Memories are not preserved as "snapshots," filed away intact to be retrieved later, provided we can find the right cue to retrieve them. Rather they exist as complex engrams, connecting different bits and types of information in different parts of the brain. Retrieval involves the pulling together of

these fragments from different sources and locations into a “convergence zone” where the engrams are reconstructed.¹² So every vivid, episodic memory is actually a constellation of information, some of which may be event-specific, some of which might be supplied to fill in the gaps in the picture from more general event knowledge. Not all memories survive; some just fade away with time. On the other hand some are reinforced through long-term consolidation. However, in this process of consolidation through rehearsal and elaboration, we may lay down erroneous connections that distort the reality of the original memory. Our strongest, most vivid memories are not necessarily the most accurate recollections. The cues retrieve fragments and we fill these out with general or generic information stored elsewhere in the brain. The memories that endure are likely to be those that we rehearse and elaborate most often; yet these are the very memories that are likely to be most subject to distortion and layers of fabrication. Each recollection or retelling will be influenced by the context of recall, including our emotional state at the time of recall. Those accompanied by vivid emotions that seem to validate the memory might be the most elaborate reconstructions or fictions.

Memories are closely allied to the emotions and to the perceptive or visual faculties. Autobiographical memories are of three types: global, general events, and event-specific. As I’ve already suggested, in reconstruction often an event-specific, or episodic memory, is filled in with knowledge and information from these other areas. (See Schacter 90.) A further point of interest is that memories can be recalled from two different points of view, either as field memories, in which one recalls oneself in the scene, seeing it from the same perspective as one experienced, or as observer memories, where one reconstructs the scene one was participant in from an objective, third person point of view. Interestingly, the older the memory the more likely it is to be recalled as an observer

memory, and one can to a certain extent alter the memory from field to observer by trying to recall the event less emotionally and more objectively. (See Schacter 21-22.)¹³

Despite all this, as Schacter affirms, our memories serve most of us pretty well most of the time. He attests to the complexity of memory's fragile power (a phrase he uses repeatedly *passim*). However in cases of amnesia, or senile dementia, or Alzheimer's, as Schacter comments: "when the past vanishes as a result of amnesia and dementia, so does much of the person. Appreciating the present and anticipating the future hinge on an ability to communicate with the past. When we lose the capacity to travel in time, we are cut loose from much of what anchors our sense of who we are and where we are headed" (160). Which is to say that our sense of personal identity hinges on our autobiographical memories. Even if we tend not to consciously, strategically invoke them in normal circumstances, they are there as explicit memories we can retrieve because we have done so repeatedly.¹⁴

It seems reasonable to conjecture that under the stress and trauma of the first three weeks at the DTC Pisa, Pound's sense of personal identity was threatened and even compromised.¹⁵ The turn that *The Cantos* takes at this juncture seems to be a response to an event he could neither predict nor have any control over. In this traumatic situation the poetry enacts a strategic seeking and summoning of memories of his autobiographical past, the events, moments, movements, people, places, texts he was associated with. However, considering current knowledge of how memory functions, it might be fair to say that what is at stake here is not the historical or scholarly accuracy of his memories. Rather it is the vision he elaborates from his engrams of memory, as he dramatizes the process of recollection in order to hold onto a sense of personal and historical identity. Given that the Pisan sequence is constructed largely from memory work it is qualitatively dif-

ferent from the preceding sequence of cantos. How does our current knowledge of how “memory’s fragile power” work help us to identify qualities of personification and of the language in the poetic text?

Pound to an unusual degree seems to be able to isolate the fragments of memory that more usually we tend to elaborate in our minds without knowing that we are undertaking extensive reconstruction work. In his production of language as poetic text he employs an accelerated use of fragmentation, metonymy, and parataxis, to enact the sense of historical and personal trauma and recovery that *The Pisan Cantos* represent.¹⁶ Extreme synecdoche comes into play in relation to canto 36, for example, in that the philosophical definition of Love is recalled in the context of Pisa as a recurrent motif affirming the importance of memory. As Pound observes from first-hand experience: “What thou lovest well remains.”¹⁷

This leads me to a second observation. It also strikes me that Pound tends to favor the observer rather than the field point of view. Indeed this extends even to his observations of himself in his present situation. He becomes one more observable phenomenon in the DTC landscape. Even though he reconstructs poetic landscapes of his mind and imagination he proffers them with an impressive degree of discretion and restraint. He often avoids the use of the first person singular, as if that would be a fabrication too far from the retrieved bits of observed memory he has to work with. At the same time he does dramatize the crisis of personal ego identity, and does personify himself by enunciating personae of the poetic, historical and autobiographical self. He also continues the practice, established in the early shorter poems, of poetic utterance implying an addressee – whether that be the implied reader, poetic dramatis personae, or the self’s double. So at the end of canto 81 what we have is a dialogue between the Goddess who instructs him, “What

thou lovest well remains ... Pull down thy vanity” and the poet as initiator who replies, “But to have done instead of not doing / this is not vanity” (81/535). This exchange between the masked goddess and the figure of the poet comes after his near death experience and acts of contrition:

Les larmes que j'ai créées m'inondent
 Tard, très tard je t'ai connue, la Tristesse,
 I have been hard as youth sixty years (80/533)

As a young poet he dramatized old age as forgetting, as evading the traumatic memories. As an aging poet at Pisa the personal and political trauma instigates memory work, or to invoke Toni Morrison's emphatic neologism, rememory — including the recognition of past errors. The process of remembering, or drawing the fragments about him, is driven by emotions. Emotion sets the pace, rhythm and structure; it organizes the poetic form as never before.

5. “*I have forgotten which city*”

All readings of *The Pisan Cantos* are unsatisfactory since all are partial and of necessity selective. Each reader focuses on those elements that hold most significance for him or her at the time of reading, so this sketchy summary is merely indicative. I believe that other readers could trace similar patterns by focusing on other *tranches* of material in this sequence. Damasio suggests that memories are reconstituted in a “convergence zone.” Pisa becomes a site of such convergence, but within and throughout the Pisan sequence it is notable that Pound's memories are organized in clusters around specific places, and times in the past when he inhabited or visited those places. Memory is predominantly visual, so I would surmise that in these passages the cue to recollection is a visual image, around which converge fragmentary memories of people (these the companions), of conversations (often in the local language), and of texts connected

to those languages, people and places. These are drawn together by commentary that executes the work of reconstruction, and the commentating voice often positions the remembered past in counterpoint to the DTC present, and also in counterpoint to the few texts Pound has with him, particularly the Confucian text he is in the process of translating.¹⁸ What interests me most is how the poet is figured in this process of recollection. Memory and identity are interconnected, and the identity is still fragmentary just as the memories are multiple and at times overwhelming.¹⁹

Pisa offers us multiple versions of the poet figure; and each of these could be read as an instance of self-definition. Most of these have the quality of “personae,” if by that we imply a certain impersonality, or detachment or objectivity in the way the poet/speaker is defined in language. Even at his most personal and “confessional,” Pound enunciates the self through cultural and linguistic masks. These include: several versions of Odysseus (Noman, the episode in Circe’s sty, the hero who has known many men and their manners, the Nekuia, etc.) that dramatize aspects of his contacts and life; self dramatization as Villon; recapitulation of the Ronsardian motif from a different perspective; self dramatization as “a fallen gentleman,” and as the “Alchemist”; recollection of himself as the young acolyte poet of the San Trovaso Notebook; enunciation of himself as the initiate of an orphic mystery religion where the dead do not drink of Lethe (the river of forgetfulness) but from Mnemosyne (the river of remembrance);²⁰ and following on from this as experiencing and enunciating both extreme contrition and self-assertion. Here, I shall just comment in a little more detail on the position of the speaker and the forms of address in a couple of these instances.

6. *OY TIS* / *OLD EZ* / *ODYSseus*

The Pisan Cantos enact or enunciate the drama or process of what scientists call the autobiographical self.²¹ Those ele-

ments that might strike the reader as paradoxical are accurate manifestations or representations of the oxymoron-like quality of human personality. Pound retrieves aspects of his past contacts and life and draws them into a constellation that of necessity must be read in linear fashion in time. I feel that he might have preferred the reader to receive this text, or at least contemplate it, in a multi-dimensional fashion. The old poetic device of sound rhymes as well as the Poundian innovation that Kenner terms “subject rhymes” gesture towards this desired reception. So let’s briefly look at one version of the poetic self, which functions through multiplication/multiplicity. Near the start of canto 74 Pound rhymes, or constellates: Odysseus, Wanjina, Ouan Jin, with Noman, and a little further on with the Chinese ideogram for “no.” Thus he enacts a profound sense of negation or loss of selfhood, drawing on images of lack or loss of identity from several cultures. And yet in the pulling together of diverse linguistic signifiers and ideogrammic images to represent negation of the autobiographical self, and in the poetic energy that perceives and articulates – the correspondences, the subject rhymes and the complex system of assonance, consonance, alliteration, etc. in the play of the sound of these names – Pound generates or recovers the self that felt lost. The “self” is not a core that can be pinned down like a natural history exhibit; it is this process of continuous and repeated assemblage of constellations that then give way to other sets of constellated images.

In much of these Pound the poet can only identify himself through cultural images that have resonance for him. Just as he gazed on his personae in the glass, objectively viewing the array of instances of the self, here in Pisa he assembles these fragmentary figures in the third person. He even names himself “Old Ez,” not only objectifying himself in his observer memories, but objectifying himself at the site of recollection. Old Ez is at once the most familiar in this string

of rhyming personae and the most specular. For the early poem it commemorates, from *Ripostes* (1912), is from the “Collected Poems of T. E. Hulme”:

Oh God, make small
The old star-eaten blanket of the sky,
That I may fold it round me and in comfort lie. (268)²²

Pound now recognizes himself in the (mis)recalled fragment of “The Embankment” that is described as “The fantasia of a fallen gentleman on a cold, bitter night.” Memory transforms these lines into:

Old Ez folded his blankets
Neither Eos nor Hesperus has suffered wrong at my hands (79/508)

The scenario is similar, the linguistic enunciation differs. This matinal transformation is then followed by the alchemical lynx lyric. The poet as alchemist simultaneously expresses negation and loss, and a magical plenitude of resurgence. But even in these two lines we can see the movement from observer memory – “Old Ez folded his blankets” – to the use of the adjectival first-person “my hands.” Yet, if this is the closest Old Ez can get to first-person enunciation we, as readers, must conclude that the autobiographical self is still in fragments.

7. “remember that I have remembered”

Life is not Dantescan; Pound’s twentieth-century epic was unlikely to replicate that Italian renaissance model – at least one British politician could have told him “events, dear boy!” Yet in one respect there is something fundamentally Dantescan in Pound’s poetic praxis:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
che la diritta via era smarrita. (22)

Dante begins his epic poem with a strange ambivalence about his autobiographical self: is he multiple or unified? In his condition of loss/being lost he is both. Dante survives to tell the tale, to give testimony. And the autobiographical self that is E.P. / Old Ez / Ezra Pound does, even in the near death experience that is Pisa, find the sense of direction that gives him back himself. Recapitulating the Ronsardian motif from “Poems of 1908-1911” he addresses his daughter Mary:

Quand vous serez bien vieille
remember that I have remembered,
mia pargoletta,
and pass on the tradition (80/526)

The En Bertrans ambivalence of emotional tone is stripped away. The poet, speaking in the first person, knows that he is now aging, and the amatory arrogance of “gather ye rosebuds” is forgotten. In its place is paternal affection. This reversal – for now Pound finds himself in the position the poet usually reserves for the beloved, well-hated lady – is one more link in the chain from youth to old age and beyond. We cannot control “the tradition” we pass on, however many words we create. Deeper than words we know we age, we shall die, and the memory of our lives resides in the fragile power of DNA as much as in the fragile power of memory.

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Notes

¹ This paper is for my daughter Georgie Guise, if she wants it.

² This poem could be read as a prescient statement of the Lacanian scenario outlined in “The Looking-Glass Phase” (3 August 1936) — it strikes me that a keen student of Lacan might find many correspondences both here and elsewhere in Pound’s poetic anima-

tion of masks of mind. I, however, shall simply interrogate the poem and Pound's poetic praxis in order to understand the continuities (or otherwise) in Pound's representation and performance of self and memory in his *œuvre*.

³ See for example Grosz's commentary: "[t]he child sees itself as a unified totality, a gestalt in the mirror: it experiences itself in a schism, as a site of fragmentation. The child's identification with its specular image impels it nostalgically to seek out a past symbiotic completeness, even if such a state never existed and is retrospectively imposed on the pre-mirror phase; and to seek an anticipatory or desired (ideal or future) identity in the coherence of the totalized specular image. Lacan claims that the child [...] sees an image of itself that is both accurate (since it is an inverted reflection, the presence of light rays emanating from the child: the image as icon); as well as delusory (since the image prefigures a unity and mastery that the child still lacks.)" (39)

⁴ As in Eliot's francophile usage "the deception of the thrush."

⁵ Bowie's commentary on Lacan reminds us that accounts of the mirror phase often omit Lacan's sense that "something derisory is going on in front of the mirror. [...] Man must break the charm of his reflected image by accepting the reality of its unreality. If he is to make progress towards truth, he must pass beyond the 'mirror without radiance which offers him a surface where nothing is reflected.'" (23) Arguably Pound's late poetry achieves this transcendent positioning.

⁶ Yeats 46, Ronsard 362.

⁷ Compare the final stanza of "Song of Myself": "The last scud of day holds back from me, / It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadow'd wilds, / It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk. // I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun, / I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags. // I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love, / If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles" (85).

⁸ The first, less taut version of "The Alchemist" was written in 1912. See King & Martz 223-229.

⁹ Later in this paper I shall cite Daniel Schachter on the centrality of memory to a sense of identity.

¹⁰ Pound relates this in "'Noh' Plays (1916)": "There is a tradi-

tion of a young actor who wished to learn Sekidera Komachi [...] He followed a fine old woman, eighty years of age, in the street and watched her every step. After a while she was alarmed and asked him why he was following her. He said she was interesting. She replied that she was too old. Then he confessed that he was an ambitious Noh actor and wanted to play Komachi. / An ordinary woman would have praised him, but she did not. She said it was bad for Noh, though it might be good for the common theatre, to imitate facts. For Noh he must feel the thing as a whole, from the inside. He would not get it copying facts point by point. All this is true. [...] There is a special medium for expressing emotion. It is the voice” (241). See also Waley 46.

¹¹ I realize this is not an original observation. Many critics have commented on the importance of memory in *Pisa*. See for example Rabaté’s perceptive discussion of *The Pisan Cantos*: “These structural patterns enable Pound to shift from memory to memory, while keeping a certain progression ... from tragedy to contrition and final assertion in spite of everything to the contrary” (154). See also 169-172.

¹² See Damasio 219-226, Schacter 66, 85-88, Shenk 51-56.

¹³ Scientists working on memory don’t necessarily share a vocabulary. I have chosen to employ Schacter’s terminology as set out in *Searching for Memory*, since it is relatively self-evident to the lay person. Other useful and thought-provoking discussions of memory, mind and consciousness include the work of Damasio who developed the notion of convergence zones, Draaisma, and Shenk.

¹⁴ See also Damasio’s discussion of the autobiographical self 195-233.

¹⁵ Cookson’s brief introduction to *The Pisan Cantos* glosses these events eloquently: 68-72. See also de Rachewiltz’s account in *Discretions* 236-271.

¹⁶ See Schacter 192-217 and Damasio *passim* for recent research on the importance of emotions in consciousness, memory and identity.

¹⁷ Although as I have argued elsewhere, I would interpret the ending of canto 81 as the figure of the poet being addressed by the mask or persona of the composite Goddess of insight, mercy and wisdom. See Dennis 434-447.

¹⁸ Pound had available to him James Legge *The Four Books*, Shanghai, 1923; a Chinese Dictionary; The Bible; M. E. Speare,

The Pocket Book of Verse, 1940 (Cookson 71 & Terrell 361).

¹⁹ So do I need to revert to that Lacanian model of personality after all?

²⁰ See Harrison 574-583.

²¹ “[T]he autobiographical self is a process of coordinated activation and display of personal memories, based on a multisite network. The images which represent those memories explicitly are exhibited in multiple early cortices. Finally they are held over time by working memory. They are treated as any other objects are ... What we usually describe as a ‘personality’ depends on multiple contributions” (Damasio 221-222). See also Schacter 66 & Shenk 53-55.

²² I the only reader of this line to be haunted by the unvoiced rhyme “die” that seems to echo in the “lie”?

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