AGENDA 1979/80
17:3-4-18.1
(triple issue)

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POUND AND THE GODS

> Only poetry is optimistic in the twentieth century, through its sensual avidity, its premonitions of change, its prophecies with many meanings... Poetic discipline is impossible without piety and admiration, without faith in the infinite layers of being that are hidden within an apple, a man, or a tree...

These are the words of Czeslaw Milosz, from *Native Realm.*[1] I want to connect the admiration he mentions to its roots, to the Latin *miror,* "to wonder", and back past that to the Greek for wonder, the word that Plato uses when, in the *Theaetetus,* he has Socrates say that the "sense of wonder (*thaumazein*) is the mark of the philosopher". Socrates adds a comment: "Philosophy indeed has no other origin, and he was a good genealogist who made Iris the daughter of Thaumas" (155d). The connection between philosophy and theogony is not accidental, and it is this connection in Pound's work, as well as in Plato's dialogues, that has led me to begin this brief inquiry into Pound's use of the gods with the quotation from Milosz. Whether Pound articulated any thinking that was truly philosophical, and whether his thinking was valid, are questions into which I will not enter here; they have been much considered by others. I am more interested in establishing the seriousness of Pound's use of the gods not simply as allusions to another world, an experience different from the everyday, but also as a signal for the intensity of his own poetic inquiry into value; and for Pound, insight comes from sight itself.

To begin with the classical antecedent, I will quote Eric Voegelin. He states that after Plato's concern with wonder had ceased to seem unusual,

> Aristotle could open his *Metaphysics* with the programmatic statement: "All men by nature desire (*oregontai*) to

know (*eidenai*)." All men, not the philosophers only; the philosopher's enterprise has become humanly representative. Everyone's existence is potentially disturbed by the *thaumazein,* but some express their wondering in the more compact medium of the myth, others through philosophy. By the side of the *philosophos,* therefore, stands the figure of the *philomythos* and "the *philomythos* is in a sense a *philosophos*" (*Met.* 982b18ss). When Homer and Hesiod trace the origin of the gods and all things back to Ouranos, Gaia, and Okeanos, they express themselves in the medium of theogonic speculation, but they are engaged in the same search of the ground [of being, or divine ground of reality] as Aristotle himself (*Met.* 983b28ss).[2]

If Pound insisted throughout his work on the connection between art as a "truthful report", sound thinking about matters aesthetic and political, and a way of writing that eschewed all useless ornament and prized accurate perception, I think that this connection is embodied, quite literally, in his nearly obsessive recurrence to the figures of the gods. I don't believe that my saying this can surprise any reader of Pound's poetry, and I can hope to offer very little indeed in the way of new scholarship. But I am troubled that discussion of Pound's gods usually seems to find an audience only among scholars, and I want to tease out, less formally, some of the connections between the "disturbing" effect of wonder and a number of things in Pound's work, and perhaps in poetry in general: what Milosz calls poetry's "sensual avidity" and its "faith in the infinite layers of being"; the Greek gods in Pound's poems; and what I will call, begging leave to do so without lengthy analysis or explanation, Pound's characteristic, mature style. This vividness and deft description I will trace briefly in its evolution out of a few early poems.

As I understand these poems, and especially the Cantos that grew out of them, they revolve around what is perhaps the most moving and most futile task he set himself — to revive unblemished perception, clear vision, unfettered sight, by constructing as the metaphor of its success and its charac-

teristic excitement, the presence of the gods. It is Plato's sort of wonder — not at a divine visitation, but at seeing into the "infinite layers of being", and at perceiving the manifold beauty of both the natural world and of a few heroic gestures of men — that excited Pound most, that seemed to him the remedy for the aesthetic and political morass into which writing and thinking had fallen. In his long poem, he set out to resuscitate not only "the dead art/Of poetry"; and not only " 'the sublime'/In the old sense" (we are coming to Longinus), but also a view of life and culture that would free men from conventional mental restraints while at the same time requiring of them great knowledge and sympathy when they regarded the past.

I think I need only quote Longinus to make a point that has no doubt been established with more scholarly care by others:

> The Sublime, acting with an imperious and irresistible force, sways every reader whether he will or no... a sublime thought, if happily timed, illumines an entire subject with the vividness of a lightning-flash, and exhibits the whole power of an orator in a moment of time.[8]

Having begun with wonder, we may now begin our triangulation on Pound's method by noting this emphasis of Longinus on lightning-speed as an antecedent to Pound's own phrase, "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time". But before leaping ahead to what Hugh Kenner calls the "technical hygiene" of Imagism, I want to show how Pound kept Plato's ("wonder", and Aristotle's) — and Longinus's "lightning-flash" — in mind as he groped toward an understanding of the gods.

Adopted at first no doubt as literary devices — and rather Victorian ones at that — the gods take on sudden and urgent force in "Prayer for His Lady's Life" (from *Personae*) and "The Return" (*Ripostes* — 1912). And alongside the increasing command of the satiric manner of "Les Millwin" there were such very early lines as these, which stand at the head of Pound's *Personae: Collected Shorter Poems*: "The Tree":

I stood still and was a tree amid the wood
Knowing the truth of things unseen before,
Of Daphne and the laurel bow
And that god-feasting couple olde
That grew elm-oak amid the wold.
'Twas not until the gods had been
Kindly entreated and been brought within
Unto the hearth of their heart's home
That they might do this wonder-thing.
Nathless I have been a tree amid the wood
And many new things understood
That were rank folly to my head before.

That, from *A Lume Spento* (1908), Pound preserved as opening prayer, in a way, to the shorter poems. Announcing a vision of gods was difficult, and his revisions show some wobbling. He considered using these lines:

Felt Daphne turn into a laurel tree
& knew how Baucis and Philema could
Be intertwined in memorial boughs
after, the gods had been within their house

And he considered adding these lines to the end of the poem:

still uncertain whether he had been understood
Yes, I have stood with the secrecy
Been where our wits gain mastery.[4]

The second poem Pound put in the collection is "Threnos" ("Lo the fair dead!"), and he seems to make the very same poetic statement by this juxtaposition that he makes in the opening of the *Cantos*: observe homage and rites to the dead, honor them, and prepare for a vision of the gods. The wonder expressed in "The Tree" is less exciting than that at the end of Canto I, but it precedes it by some years, and does not yet benefit from the "technical hygiene" that is to come.

Lest it seem unreasonable to drive the wedge of "wonder" — that word specifically — into Pound's work, consider the epigraph Pound affixed to *A Quinzane for This Yule* (1908): "Beauty should never be presented explained," it begins, leading us ahead, inevitably, to thoughts of the Don'ts for Ima-

gistes: Pound needs the gods as a metaphor for a sudden access of vision, and one can see a straight path leading from this epigraph through Imagism to the god-filled *Cantos*. The epigraph continues:

> It is Marvel and Wonder — and in art we should find first these doors — Marvel and Wonder — and, coming through them, a slow understanding (slow even though it be a succession of lightning understandings and perceptions), as of a figure in mist, that still and ever gives to each one his own right of believing, each after his own creed and fashion.

"The Return", from this vantage point, serves almost as illustration for this text; and Longinus' "lightning" here joins "understandings and perceptions". The several threads have been woven already to make the cloth of the *Cantos*. The epigraph concludes with a restatement of Aristotle's stress on wonder. But first I will quote Aristotle:

> It is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize ... And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of Wisdom, for the myth is composed of wonders).[5]

Pound, striving always to rehabilitate not only poetry but a love of wisdom, unites these here, in the conclusion of the epigraph, almost repeating Aristotle's very words:

> Always the desire to know and to understand more deeply must precede any reception of beauty. Without holy curiosity and awe none find her, and woe to that artist whose work wears "its heart on its sleeve". (CEP, 58)

What Pound has translated from Aristotle as "holy curiosity and awe" is not so far from "wonder". Another translator of Aristotle has rendered the phrase, "it was their curiosity that first led men to philosophize and still leads them".[6] That the epigraph can be ascribed to Pound and not to the name beneath it, Weston St. Llewmys, has certainly been remarked

by many readers before now — one simply uncovers the Loomis hiding under the Celtic spelling.

At the time of writing this paragraph and the poems following it, Pound still felt somewhat defensive about his insistent treatment of the gods. He appended two footnotes to poems in this volume that testify to his hopeful earnestness. To "Aube of the West Dawn. Venetian June", he added this comment:

> I think from such perceptions as this arose the ancient myths of the demigods; as from such as that in "The Tree" (*A Lume Spento)*, the myths of metamorphosis. (CEP, 63)

The other hint of Pound's fusing of the gods and acute perception comes in the note to "Sandalphon":

> The angel of prayer according to the Talmud stands unmoved among the angels of wind and fire, who die as their one song is finished; also as he gathers the prayers they turn to flowers in his hands.
>
> Longfellow also treats of this, *but as a legend rather than a reality.* (CEP, 68)

The italics are mine. This poem returns us to a sacred wood — always important to Pound, and we meet again the Aristotelian words, as Sandalphon addresses an audience:

> Marvel and Wonder!
> Marvel and wonder even as I,
> Giving to prayer new language
> and causing the works to speak
> of the earth-horde's age-lasting longing,
> Even as I marvel and wonder, and know not,
> Yet keep my watch in the ash wood.
>
> (CEP, 68)

This is the watch kept by the voice that pronounces "The Tree", also. And Pound returned to the sacred wood in several early poems. By the time he reached the poems in *Ripostes* (1912), a volume in which he leaps ahead toward his mature work, with such poems as "The Tomb at Akr Çaar",

"Portrait d'une femme", "The Seafarer", and "The Return", he had taken a firm hold on his equation of vivid perception and the presence of the gods; or, as we phrase this with debts to Milosz, the gods as metaphor for vision not of divinity but of the beauty and complex stratification of earthly life, once the scales of conventional wisdom and outdated aesthetic distortions fell from the eyes. And the sense of gathering in the poem a kind of oddness — the fresh but necessarily strange quality things take on when the poem gives them expression — must still be apologized for, it seems. This is "Sub Mare":

> It is, and is not, I am sane enough,
> Since you have come this place has hovered round me,
> This fabrication built of autumn roses,
> Then there's a goldish colour, different.
>
> And one gropes in these things as delicate
> Algae reach up and out, beneath
> Pale slow green surgings of the underwave,
> 'Mid these things older than the names they have,
> These things that are familiars of the god.
>
> (CEP, 194)

This little poem looks ahead to passages in the *Cantos*: the lines beginning "And by the beach-run, Tyro,/Twisted arms of the sea-god,/Lithe sinews of water", and those beginning "If you will lean over the rock,/the coral face under wave-tinge", in Canto II, for example. But here the vision cannot yet be presented without apology. The poem following "Sub Mare" begins, "I would bathe myself in strangeness". (CEP, 194). Again, that is, it defends itself with apologetic tone. To many of Pound's early readers, these perceptions must have seemed exotic, merely "poetic". What he was after, however, was not at all ornamental but essential and entirely serious. It was a kind of therapeutic theogony, an allegorical ideology, perhaps, for the sweeping-clean that Pound effected in poetic technique. Let us return to this by another route.

For Pound was also working toward this in his criticism. Perhaps it is not always noticed that among his 1912 rules

he stressed that the "thing" to be treated directly could be subjective as well as objective, thus preparing the notion that an emotion or state of mind, while not a "thing", could be rendered precisely in language. Or as he puts it in "Religio", a poem to which we will return, "A god is an eternal state of mind... When is a god manifest?/When the states of mind *take form*" (my italics).

By 1928, when Pound published his "How to Read", his triad of the three "chief means" of charging language "with meaning to the utmost degree" included as the first means a process analogous to that first rule of 1912: "PHANOPOEIA, which is a casting of images upon the visual imagination." This became "throwing the object (fixed or moving) on to the visual imagination" in his *ABC of Reading* (1934), in which he prescribed exercises for the student: "1. Let the pupil write the description of a tree." That the first of these exercises is a description, and of a tree, cannot surprise us if we know Pound's poems. Then:

> 2. Of a tree without mentioning the name of the tree (larch, pine, etc.) so that the reader will not mistake it for the description of some other kind of tree. 3. Try some object in the class-room.[7]

And in the *Cantos* Agassiz and Linneaus appear very deliberately as exemplars of the minute attention that leads to precise description because it proceeds from vivid perception. Does it seem very far-fetched to link this attentiveness, so prized by Pound, to the metaphor of the presence of the gods, or more generally, of the divine? The "technical hygiene" is only a part of the whole programme, which included reading, too; and as Pound put it in a letter to Margaret Anderson in 1917: "The classics, 'ancient and modern', ...are the antiseptics." Cleaning out the mind in order to reach the divine, by starting with clean perception; or, if need be, by reading poets whose perceptions were cleaner than those of modern writers. Removing attention from the writer and placing it on his material. (This was the advice Pound thanked Thomas Hardy for.[8]) Focus on the thing, and then be led into the precinct of the gods thereby. Or, as Pound put it in the letter to his father about the Cantos, into:

> The "magic moment", or moment of metamorphosis, bust thru from quotidien into "divine or permanent world." Gods, etc.[9]

The path from concentration or meditation on object, to the gods, can seem not only a poetic inevitability, but a genuinely spiritual one:

> Pick up, for example, any object at all. Draw mentally a ring around it, setting it off from the world. Forgetting its use, forgetting its name, not remembering that it was made, or how, or that names are given to its parts; not knowing *what* it is, but only *that* it is, simply regard it; and so then, What *is* it?
>
> Anything at all, any stick, stone, cat or bird, dissociated from every concept this way, will be seen as a wonder without "meaning", a beginning and end in itself —like the universe, "thus come" (*tathagata*). The Buddha is called the "One Thus Come", Tathagata, and "all things are Buddha-things". Or as James Joyce states in *Ulysses*: "Any object, intensely regarded, may be a gate of access to the incorruptible eon of the gods."

This is Joseph Campbell in *The Mythic Image*.[10] He follows this passage with a series of illustrations, presented without comment: oriental paintings of birds by Mushashi, Mu-Ch'i, and Tan-an Chiden, a Japanese tea-bowl and whisk, van Gogh's "Sunflowers", and so on. Whether under the tutelage of Campbell or of Pound, it seems that the quick eye and alert mind must reach that state of wonder first described in the "classics" Pound thought of as antidotes to muddy thinking and writing. The nature of wonder — its transience, its rarity — came to Pound as both a spiritual and a technical problem. Even Poe can be detected among the literary ancestors of Pound's method, the Poe who wrote "a poem is such, only inasmuch as it intensely excites, by elevating, the soul; and all intense excitements are, by psychal necessity, brief."[11] What Poe considers a problem of poetic technique, he also admits is a question of the durability of wonder, outside poems.

The substance of Pound's beliefs has been debated; he

has been called pantheist, pagan, Platonist. What cannot be questioned is the seriousness with which he advanced his claim for the gods. And the most beautiful passages in the *Cantos* are often those in which the reflections of lamps over water, or an ash-tree, or a column, or a gesture, produce a flood of divine immanence that enters the poet and his readers, when they are properly disposed, the way evidence of inconceivable mastery enters the ken of a child — to whom the actions of adults seem god-like.

The evidence of Pound's seriousness is in the re-ordering of the first *Cantos.* Commentators have taken the significance of this to be architectonic — to announce an Inferno, before moving upward toward a Paradiso. But Pound's version of the Nekyia, Odysseus' trip to the underworld, seems equally significant as a prologue vigorously establishing a duty to the dead and to the gods. A story of ceremony and sacrifice and divine immanence, it prepares the reader not only for infernal *Cantos* but also for the frequent light and awe-struck wonder at the remnants of the gods that illuminate many of the first thirty *Cantos.* The *Cantos* will strive to resuscitate dutiful ceremony to the realm of the invisible, extracting therefrom prophecies and divinations.

In 1930 Pound wrote, in a brief Credo,

> Given the material means I would replace the statue of Venus on the cliffs of Terracina. I would erect a temple to Artemis in Park Lane. I believe that a light from Eleusis persisted throughout the middle ages and set beauty in the song of Provence and Italy.[12]

In 1922 he had written to Harriet Monroe, "I consider the Writings of Confucius, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* the only safe guides in religion... I refuse to accept ANY monotheistic taboos whatsoever." In the same letter, he reiterated his condemnation of "the dregs of the Xtn superstition", of "Jew religion, that bitch Moses and the rest of the barbarians", and so on.[13] How is one to find the centre of Pound's belief, working forward from the status of Venus and backwards from Judeo-Christian tradition?

I cannot here solve a problem that many commentators

have considered with greater scholarship. But I can emphasize the extent to which Pound's belief in the gods was not theoretical but experienced and came to him through his work. The best text to examine is "Religio, or, The Child's Guide to Knowledge", a poem which Pound excluded from *Personae* and reprinted only in *Pavannes & Divagations,* a miscellany of fairly light pieces. Yet the piece is intimately tied to the technical articles of faith we have already rehearsed, and also to the notion of wonder. Too long to quote entire, the poem must be excerpted here:

> Are all eternal states of mind gods?
> We consider them so to be.
> Are all durable states of mind gods?
> They are not.
> By what characteristic may we know the divine forms?
> By beauty.
> . . .
> In what manner do the gods appear?
> Formed and formlessly.
> To what do they appear when formed?
> To the sense of vision.
> And when formless?
> To the sense of knowledge.
> May they when formed appear to anything save the sense of vision?
> We may gain a sense of their presence as if they were standing behind us.[14]

Compare this with the way Pound described poetry in "The Serious Artist". There he says that in poetry, "something has come upon the intelligence". This something moves on its own impulse into the sphere of man's intelligence. "The intellect has not found it but the intellect has been moved", Pound reiterates. And he draws this distinction: in prose "the intelligence has found a subject for its observations. The poetic fact pre-exists."[15] It is beauty in art which "reminds one what is worth while", Pound says. "Even this pother about the gods reminds one that something is worth while."[16]

The pre-existing poetic fact is Aristotle's "wonder", or,

as Voegelin phrases it, approaching it from the side of philosophy,

> The philosopher feels himself moved (kinein) by some unknown force to ask the questions, he feels himself drawn (helkein) into the search. Sometimes the phrase used indicates the urgent desire in the questioning, as in the Aristotelian *tou eidenai oregontai;* and sometimes the compulsion to raise the question that rises from the experience is grandly elaborated, as in Plato's Parable of the Cave where the prisoner is moved by the unknown force to turn around (periagogue) and to begin his ascent to the light.[17]

Or Pound:

> We may gain a sense of their presence as if they were standing behind us.

Or as another philosopher put it, in his modern treatise on the gods: after recounting the strange effect that standing at a cliff's edge can have on us, or seeing the moon rise among buildings, seeming impossibly large, or suddenly seeing a face in a pattern of foliage or cracks in a wall,

> We seek our own emotion in the same irreproachable image from which the physicist takes his measurements;

That is, there is nothing inherent in the physical world that can account for our emotional experience at these moments; "the imagination is entirely within the human body". He continues:

> we call that image to account for the outsize interest it holds for us, and the image cannot respond. Out of its silence we form the hidden and lurking presence, the mysterious other side of reality that makes us believe that everything is full of souls, or, as Thales said, that everything is full of gods.

This is Alain (the pen name of Emile-Auguste Chartier), in a book published in 1934, *Les dieux.* Elsewhere he states, "Every emotion is a presence"[18]; and one begins to think that

certain chapters of *The Gods* might be the best companions to the *Cantos*. It is a book of great richness, not least when discussing poetry; and what I have quoted above, along with the Voegelin, should bring us closer to what Pound is after in those passages of the *Cantos* in which gods appear, or, having been evoked, fail to appear. For Pound cannot state unequivocally that gods do appear; he is insistent, however:

> Scaevola, pontifex maximus (died 82 B.C.), said there were three theologies: the poet's anthropomorphic and false, the philosopher's rational and true but not for use, the statesman's built on tradition and custom.
>
> Herein self-proclaimed the defeat or defect and/or limit of the school [of Stoics].
>
> For the gods exist...
>
> A wisdom built of the first and third theologies. We do not marry young ladies to trees. But there is truth in the custom. It has taken two thousand years to get round again to meditating on mythology...
>
> Without gods, no culture. Without gods, something is lacking.

That is from the chapter on "Sophists" in *Guide to Kulchur*. Later Pound adds:

> The worship of the supreme intelligence of the universe is neither an inhuman nor a bigoted action. Art is, religiously, an emphasis, a segregation of some component of that intelligence for the sake of making it more perceptible.
>
> The work of art (religiously) is a door or a lift permitting a man to enter, or hoisting him mentally into, a zone of activity, and out of fugg and inertia.[19]

I could continue to quote from this book, and elsewhere, but only to reiterate the same point: everywhere Pound's treatment of the gods is meant to link perception, heightened mental activity, and a sense of sacredness attached to certain emotional states. If "every emotion is a presence", these presences are the gods, and take form in the mind when perception is clean and unfettered. It is another way of Pound's saying that powerful emotion causes patterns to form in the mind.

The pattern thus formed is potentially a poetic representation of the gods. And as such, its nature, as a species of perception, is to re-unite men with the "universe of fluid force" of which he is a part. "The function of an art is to strengthen the perceptive faculties and free them from encumbrance, such encumbrances, for instance, as set moods, set ideas, convention."[20] We are not expected to be able to repeat, ourselves, a vision of metamorphosis such as that in Canto II. But as Pound puts it in "Religio",

> Is hearsay of any value?
> Of some.
> What is the greatest hearsay?
> The greatest hearsay is the tradition of the gods.
> Of what use is this tradition?
> It tells us to be ready to look.

So we are expected to understand how such a vision might come to us, and might be mythologized by us as individuals according to the traditional pantheons, or, as Alain sees it, by participating in a more primitive, but still living, psychic experience. Pound's famous paragraph on the origin of the Greek myths (from "Psychology and Troubadours") is emphatic in its insistence, not that the Greek myths are true, but that the vision of metamorphosis and divine presence is real.[21] And, as Ronald Bush summarizes Pound's meaning in that essay, taking up the Alan Upward metaphors:

> In his writing, the artist's unswirling creative imagination became the means by which the downswirling energies of the gods became manifest. Man did not express God by trying to mirror him, but by struggling to create new forms.[22]

Pound's earlier poetic efforts, in their often awkward floundering, yet represent his efforts, continued right through to the end of the *Cantos,* to find the new forms that, throwing off convention and encumbrances, would allow vision of the gods to take a place in modern poetry.

If in fact we must quarrel continuously with Pound over the adequacy of the forms he presents, and over their obscurity

when taken together, it is worth remembering that Pound's emphasis on the sense of sight is no idiosyncrasy, but merely his own way of hewing to the center line of all poetry, from its first manifestations: the sense of sight, as vision and revelation, is historically the seed of much of the overwhelming emotional experience that finally takes issue in, and is institutionalized in, religions. This is only one of many curious circles that encompass both the rational exactitude of scientific observation (Agassiz for Pound, or as Osip Mandelstam puts it, praising Darwin, "The power of perception functions as an instrument of thought"[23]) and the revelation of divine presence when Pound accomplishes his "bust thru from quotidien into 'divine or permanent world.' Gods, etc." Or again, as in the mysteries of Eleusis, which Pound from time to time suggested had survived among the troubadours, the climactic stage of the rite was not sacrifice but a revelation to the eyes of the initiate of sacred things. As Leon Surette puts it in his study of Pound's use of Eleusinian materials, the purpose of the Eleusinian rites was "to produce in the faithful a psychic experience, an encounter with the divine, which mystically transforms the lives of the initiates. Eleusis has no moral teaching, no theology, no cosmology, and no eschatology."[24]

But what is implied by this brief surveying of Pound's treatment of the gods is that references to specific figures from the Greek myths, and elsewhere, cannot with much profit be continually regarded as signs pointing to material outside the poems. Most readers assume, with reason — given the difficulty caused them by Pound's allusiveness and ellipsis — that such references in the *Cantos* are meant to stand for a great deal of information and learning about the history of religion and culture in the Mediterranean countries. To be sure, sometimes a commentator (like Surette) wishes to stop readers from thinking that Pound is referring to Greek myths, and to see instead that he is fashioning for himself a set of mythological instances that revolve around the divine merging of male and female that is the centre of illumination and vision: "in coitu illuminatio"; and "Zeus lies in Ceres' bosom."[25] The vision of this, that is, the presence in the mind of wonder, causes forms and patterns to struggle into shape in the poet's

mind, not always successfully. Vision is celebrated and sacred; light and landscape and crystalline air — these attend divine presence because they *are* divine presence, a presence which Pound wants to name, when he can, out of the great hearsay, the tradition of the gods. But it is the primacy of the vision that outweighs the significance of the allusion, not vice versa. Names of gods and goddesses must serve not only to illustrate the divinity of religious invention, but also the universality of religious experience. In some way, all such references and allusions should be read more inward than outward, back into the poem.

What I am arguing here is not a defence of the *Cantos*' obscurity, but a sense of their essential gesture, a gesture that contains both despair and ecstasy. The live tradition that Pound began to gather from the air was intimately bound to his technical innovations, because his insistence on art as an honest report enforced a tireless scanning of the world and of words for those moments and rhythms which could adequately convey the value, perhaps the morality, of clear vision. Of course, Pound's vision clouded and darkened almost always when he turned wondrous eyes away from nature and metamorphosis to political structures and economic history. Yet clarity remained one of Pound's cardinal principles, as long as we understand it to mean the special light that illuminates the beautiful details as well as the gestural significance of much in Cantos I–XVI, of some Cantos in the Fifth Decad, and the Pisan Cantos. "The infinite layers of being that are hidden within an apple, a man, or a tree", there receive their due; and the fluidity of the universe, the metamorphosis of men and beasts and gods, there produce that wonder which on occasion gives the divine ground of being a voice; and it tells many versions of the great stories; and it sings.

NOTES

[1] New York, 1968, p. 280. The quotation from the *Theaetetus* is from *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, Princeton University Press, 1961, p. 860.
[2] Eric Voegelin, "Reason: The Classic Experience", *The Southern Review*, X:2 (April 1974), pp. 241–2. The germ of my thinking in this essay was largely set to growing by Voegelin's very packed and trenchant work.

[3] Translated by H. L. Havell in *Aristotle: Poetics,* Dent: Everyman's Library no. 901, p. 136.
[4] Ezra Pound, *Collected Early Poems,* ed. by M. J. King, New York, 1976, pp. 35, 296. Further references to this volume will be carried in the text as CEP.
[5] *Introduction to Aristotle,* ed. by Richard McKeon, Chicago, 1973, p. 281 (*Metaphysics* 982b12ss).
[6] Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* translated by Richard Hope, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1962, p. 7.
[7] "How to Read", *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound,* ed. by T. S. Eliot, Faber, 1960, p. 25. *The ABC of Reading,* New York, 1960, pp. 63, 66.
[8] See John Peck, "Pound and Hardy", *Agenda,* 10 : 2–3 (Spring–Summer 1972), pp. 3–10, for a very concise account of Pound's literary relationship to Hardy, one that is manifest through the course of Pound's letters, and in the *Cantos.*
[9] *Selected Letters, 1907–1941,* ed. by D. D. Paige, New York, 1971, p. 210.
[10] Princeton University Press, 1974, p. 305.
[11] Quoted from "The Philosophy of Composition", often reprinted, and to be found, for instance, in a useful collection, *American Poetic Theory,* ed. by George Perkins, New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1972, pp. 27–38. Poe rephrases the same point in "The Poetic Principle", also reprinted in Perkins.
[12] *Selected Prose, 1909–1965,* ed. by William Cookson, New York, 1973, p. 53. The American edition of this book differs from the Faber edition in several small but important ways, and pagination in the two editions is not identical.
[13] *Selected Letters, pp. 182–3.*
[14] *Pavannes & Divagations,* New York, 1974, pp. 96–7.
[15] *Literary Essays,* "The Serious Artist", pp. 53–4.
[16] *Ibid.,* p. 45.
[17] Voegelin, p. 242.
[18] Alain, *The Gods,* trans. by Richard Pevear, New York, 1974, pp. 15, 49.
[19] *Guide to Kulchur,* New York, 1968, pp. 124–6, 189–190.
[20] *Selected Prose,* "The Wisdom of Poetry", (1912), p. 360.
[21] *The Spirit of Romance,* New York, 1968, p. 92.
[22] Ronald Bush, *The Genesis of Ezra Pound's Cantos,* Princeton Univ. Press, 1976, p. 99.
[23] Osip Mandelstam, *The Complete Prose & Letters,* Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1979, p. 336.
[24] Leon Surette, *A Light from Eleusis: A Study of Ezra Pound's Cantos,* Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979, p. 221.
[25] Cantos LXXIV and LXXXI.