

# THE BEHEADING OF IGNEZ

Katabasis, Ezra Pound and Three Maltese Artists

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A Draft of XXX Cantos (1930) from *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, New York: A New Directions Book, 1996, 3-149.

Editor's note: The titles of some of Ġoxwa Borg's paintings have been adapted by the author.  
The original titles have been retained in brackets.

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Book III

MALTESE MODERN ART SERIES: HISTORY & THEORY

# THE BEHEADING OF IGNEZ

Katabasis, Ezra Pound and Three Maltese Artists

GIUSEPPE SCHEMBRI BONACI

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# Preface

And those with crooked eyes see  
straightway straight<sup>1</sup>

Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci's exploration and example of creative praxis in this monograph *The Beheading of Iñez: Katabasis, Ezra Pound and Three Maltese Artists*, follows a similarly unfolding and allusive structuring to that used in Pound's incomplete epic katabasis, *The Cantos*. Here, taking Ezra Pound's *Draft of XXX Cantos* (first published 1930) as the source text, he interrogates this through a kaleidoscopic lens of predominantly Bakhtinian design, referencing and engaging with the extensive scholarship on Pound, literature and the arts. In chapters that mirror the rise and fall of the *Draft of XXX Cantos* - acting as a troubadour-figure, he re-activates a similar process of allusive, illuminating fragmentation evident in the writing of the first thirty *Cantos* - 'the silver mirrors catch the bright stones and flare' (*Canto IV*, line 5). But this is a project ordered to a different purpose, *vide* positioning works by three contemporary Maltese artists, Ġoxwa Borg, Caesar Attard and Anthony Catania within this textual and visual ecosystem, shining refracted analytical light upon their and

others' artworks, with differing creative trajectories across time and place. As readers we might choose to follow the fluctuating intellectual trace through from, say, Peire Vidal to Agostino di Duccio to William Blake to Pablo Picasso to Mark Rothko to Ġoxwa Borg and beyond, but the pivotal concern for this volume is how Borg, Attard and Catania currently explore the idea of katabasis in the materiality, process and design of their own art.

The choice of source text for this volume is crucial. Scholarship has not been kind to Pound's first attempt to collect his *Cantos*. This complex and challenging achievement is often viewed as the precursor to a more extensive array of *Cantos* normally associated with the publication of *The Cantos* (nos. 1-120) by New Directions Press in 1970. The paperback edition (1986), however, provided a supplement of two "Italian *Cantos*" (nos. 72-73) and then Carcanet Press added to the canon in 2015 when it published a volume of *Posthumous Cantos* (really scattered drafts and fragments that exist mainly in manuscript form). The incomplete

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<sup>1</sup> 'Sonnet XXXV to Guido Orlando', line 10, *The Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti with translations of them and an introduction by Ezra Pound* (London: Stephen Swift & Co, Ltd., 1912), 85.

status of the ‘work’ might indeed have been a sign that it could never have achieved a fully finished form; indeed, from the first, with the *Draft of XXX Cantos* (1930), it was not regarded as a work in its own right. The very title suggested a snapshot or glimpse of a fuller concept.

Pound commenced work on the project in 1915 with a very faint sense of direction and Three Mountains Press (beginning to make its [short-lived] mark in the Modernist world) brought out the first 16 Cantos in 1925. 1930 saw some more certain sense of form, yet early critics denied it had any: R.P. Blackmur, associated with New Criticism, used a yardstick of organic form by which to judge both Pound’s style and intention. Did it possess any consistency – and, if not, could his reputation be recuperated by applying other expectations? The Cantos he had seen up to 1962 (in his *The Double Agent: Essays in Craft and Elucidation*) ‘are not arrayed by logic or driven by pursuing emotion’. Indeed, anecdote and allusion were juxtaposed in a ‘rag-bag’ (p. 34). Yet when inspected once Modernist writing was perhaps better understood and appreciated, the very fragmentary nature of the whole project can be contextualised: the descent into Hell, the taking stock of what amounts to an individual and then a form of redemption and transcendence can be traced even if unevenly. However, by 1930, these formal elements – as Schembri Bonaci points out – are not evident; indeed, the very longevity of the writing process spans some radical changes in Pound’s own life. He commenced composition when becoming a famed reviewer for influential journals, principally *Poetry*, but rapidly withdrew from such intensity in the

poetic world, radically disturbed by the death in war of friends and acquaintances such as the critic and essayist T.E. Hulme and the sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska.

Referring to a troubadorian (and oral) legacy in the very title, Pound was attempting to capture an interplay of allusion and hint amounting to a thrilling journey into often unmapped territory. An aesthetics derived from a dismantling of consistency and finality takes some effort on behalf of the reader, yet it can be safely asserted that what is more securely (now) identified as Modernist form is pushed to its most extreme in Pound’s case. As Schembri Bonaci demonstrates, its shock waves can be felt in the visual arts, music and literature.

The interweaving of alternative styles and accents is also what fascinated Mikhail Bakhtin and this is significant for this current project. In Bakhtin’s paper entitled “Discourse in the Novel” (1934), he revived an interest in heteroglossia, a co-existence of different languages and registers that signalled the decline of faith in ruling mythologies. Dissonance was no artistic blemish and, in exploring this feature in his own selection of art, he knowingly went against the Formalist *zeitgeist* in the Russian academy. This difference was not only observed in a distribution of a novel’s characters, but could be unpicked in apparently individual discourse, the narratorial voice (now to be regarded as ‘voices’). This sudden switching of codes and its resulting hybridity threatens any sense of the ‘author’ as an originating source; we are constituted by linguistic borrowings and a crowd of perspectives. Instead of picking out consistency, we might now discern its opposite in the array and

Babel-like confusion, nearer to the modern condition than any Aristotelian hope of unity. Just as there is the attraction of multifariousness in this theory, there is also room for a reader’s (or spectator’s) active immersion in their reflective responses. For Bakhtin, this ‘dialogic’ relationship looks beyond any assumption that art can announce fully its own existence; it needs an audience, and, indeed, is inevitably involved in such exchanges at the moment of expression or display. In works such as *Problems in Dostoyevsky’s Poetics* (translated in English in 1963) and *Rabelais and his World* (in English, 1966), this carnivalesque quality radically challenged the aesthetic virtues of interdependency and clarity, in that we discover more by inverting and subverting than obedience to tradition.

In Schembri Bonaci’s innovative exploration of katabasis key synergies and affinities across visual, aural and written art forms are revealed, *vide* his exploration of *Canto XX*. Here he reveals the impossibility of a taking a single cohesive linear view and the significance of refracted light/sight, both seeing and unseeing. The political instability and eruptions of acts of catastrophic violence of recent times make ‘Chapter 13: Cantos XIV-XV-XVI’ particularly telling, where the Futurists’ early glorification of the violence of war ‘the world’s only hygiene’ contrasted with Ernst Ludwig Kirchner’s very different experience in the German trenches. The profound experience of senseless slaughter of WWI induced psychic distress and dislocation across a wide ideological range, as evidenced by Pound’s own *Memoir* (1916) of Gaudier-Brzeska.

This third volume of Schembri Bonaci’s series on modern art and the Maltese condition within an international comparative context, vivifies the voyage of never-ending return in Pound’s modernist elucidation of Homeric and Dantesque katabasis. Analogous in configuration to both a constellation and meteor shower, this fascinating study encapsulates - as Pound had employed - both the ancient, the modern, the past and the present, the alien as well as the apparently familiar.

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## Acknowledgements

What thou lovest well remains,  
the rest is dross
What thou lov'st well shall not be reft from thee

These words provoked in me a deep yearning to see, feel and *incognito* accompany Ezra Pound throughout his katabasis Dantesque path that would ultimately lead to a nowhere except to a *mess*. This holwege voyage could not be pursued had it not been for the assistance and the help of many close loved ones, friends, colleagues, and enemies. Amongst loved ones and friends who either pushed me forward still towards the vertiginous abyss or who, on the contrary, held me back just on the edge, I cannot abstain from mentioning Ġoxwa. On the same level, but harbouring different reasons and qualifications, I must mention Caesar Attard and Anthony Catania, without whom I could not have neared Pound's brink of *mess* so closely without him being unaware. And it was Nikki Petroni who held me back from the Liu Ch'e threshold verge, believing, poor friend, that my role *to make it new* has yet to overflow. Without Petroni's insistence, creative exchange, and pedantic control all would have been brought to naught.

I must along the way mention and thank David Bezzina from Horizons Publications, the New Directions Publishing and Christopher Wait for the rights to reproduce Ezra Pound's poetry, Dominic Fenech (Dean, Faculty of Arts), Keith Sciberras (Head, Department of Art and Art History), Krista Bonello Rutter Giappone for her erudite editorial exchange, Hannah Dowling, Paul Klee's Angel, and, ultimately, I have to extend my gratitude to Anna who, in spite of everything, showed me that it's time to, briskly enough, saddle on to Rozinante once again ... the rest is dross.

Thanks for image reproduction rights go to the three aforementioned artists Attard, Catania and Ġoxwa, as well as to Peter Bartolo Parnis, Joe P. Borg, Elio and Doreen Calleja, Daniela Lorena Fain, Carmel Galea, Franco Garau, Heritage Malta, Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti, Midsea Books, MUŻA – the National Community Art Museum, Joe Mizzi, Neville Sciberras, and Toc di Cormons.

# The Beheading of Ignez

Katabasis, Ezra Pound and Three Maltese Artists

# 1. Introduction

The Cantos, he said, were “a mess. Stupidity and ignorance all the way through”<sup>1</sup>

This work engages with the question related to the connections between selected artists originating from different cultures and artistic spheres who, unbeknownst to them, have all embarked on the same quest.

I have chosen Ezra Pound’s (1885-1972) *A Draft of XXX Cantos* (1930) and I have attempted to see the correlation between Pound and how three Maltese artists – Goxwa Borg (b. 1961), Caesar Attard (b. 1946), and Anthony Catania (b. 1969) – have reflected parallel preoccupations in their works. Such a comparison begets a fundamental and profound common denominator. All three, like Pound, have assumed the role of resonating humankind’s echo of its own Being and presence in this world.

The three of them, also similarly to Pound, reveal an intense hearing into the multi-level depths of humankind’s quest for the holy grail of meaning and essence. In this respect, these three artists constitute a vital link with the present call to go back to the Platonic cave, after facing the light and having broken with the contemporary scene characterised

by fetish and inauthenticity. These three artists have so far succeeded to a remarkable extent in this quest through their polyphonic aesthetic philosophy, one which aesthetically sublimates moral and ethical actions using subversive undertones.

Before entering into the various sections of Pound’s *Cantos* and displaying how the named Maltese artists responded to the same questions, one must begin by underlining how, in connection to this, *The Cantos* epitomise Bakhtin’s concept of *dialogised heteroglossia* (epistemological multi-‘vocal’ interaction) and encapsulate ‘time, social space and moral activity’,<sup>2</sup> together with a fundamental Rabelaisian *carnavalesque parody*. The latter found its reflection in the musical work of Pound’s contemporary Dmitri Shostakovitch (1906-1975) and was locally echoed in Giorgio Preca’s (1909-1984) *Malta Series* (1950s), discussed in an earlier publication.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John Tytell, *Ezra Pound. The Solitary Volcano* (New York: Anchor Press, 1988), 337.

<sup>2</sup> Deborah J. Haynes, *Bakhtin Reframed* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2013), 81.

<sup>3</sup> Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, *The Unreality of Realism: An insular perspective on the development of modern art* (Horizons: Qormi, 2019), 21-32.



It is important to underline that this is not a study on Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* but a study on the *Cantos*’ place in and contribution to the interrelationship between artists forming part of this twentieth-century epic, and on how three Maltese artists intermingled their aesthetic philosophy within the same polyphonic Pound theme.

This multistructured orchestration of *The Cantos* is shaped by preserving the specific qualities of things while presenting them in their multilateral relations and interactions<sup>4</sup>: a creative act as vital for Pound as it was for Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) and Pavel Florensky (1882-1937). Although Pound, Bakhtin and Florensky employ different terminology, it will be an acknowledged challenge in this study to attempt to see how such difference is, or may be, a dialectical form of uttering the same existential preoccupation.

This holds water even when taking into consideration the radically diverse sources drawn upon by each of the artists discussed here to sustain the creation of an aesthetic act. Goxwa dives into the Fayoum-Encaustic culture that has led her back to Pompeii and to the decorative wall surfaces of catacombs. Catania cleverly intermingles various European epic myths together with the Dantesque and the Coleridgean-Cervantesque-Carrollian hyperbole, superimposing these to generate a prehistoric cave-art aura. Attard goes into the materiality of the line and womb-cocoon world turning in on itself without the explicit manifestation of an external source, even that stemming from other spheres of art: catacomb, cave, cocoon world form an infra-centrifugal force

gravitating inwardly onto one’s self.<sup>5</sup> This connection with cavernous interior as primal source bears comparison with Pound’s own intra-spiralling path. In this vertigo-inducing manner, throughout the various oscillations of style and Cubist-Vorticist intrusions found in his *The Cantos*, Pound transforms *The Cantos*’ Vorticist polyphonic ‘repetition of design units in a way that reflected his increased appreciation for the qualities of counterpoint and harmony in music’.<sup>6</sup> This mantra-repetition evolves into what Bakhtin qualified as a polycentredly dialogic utterance of an event.<sup>7</sup>

In Bakhtin’s *heteroglossia*, Pound sees his own deep belief in the *inter-recognition* between and of different spheres of creativity,<sup>8</sup> a *heteroglossia* that in fact sustains the idea that ‘the very being of man is the deepest communion’<sup>9</sup> of humankind as a species-being.

Pound offered Vorticism’s simultaneity, juxtaposition and counter-positions in their interrelationships not, however, within a single moment, as in the work of Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881),<sup>10</sup> or of a single ‘abstract’ individual, but

5 In other works, Attard flows into a diametrically opposed path, that of line scratching which comes close to Antoni Tàpies’ (1923-2012) works, some of which were exhibited in *The Eye of the Artist*, at Palazzo Fortuny, from June to November 2013.

6 Ronald L. Bush, *The Genesis of Ezra Pound’s Cantos* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 9.

7 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Estetika Slovesnogo Tvorchestva* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979), 181-188. Pound’s appropriation of the language of music for his *Cantos* is widely known, debated, and studied. Many scholars attempt to give a mechanical meaning to this relationship between the *Cantos* and music, whereas this ought to be addressed from the point of view of appropriation, not by formally equating both. Thus, Yeats directly equates Pound’s work with symphonic notes, whereas Zukovsky opts for what is known as horizontal melodies. Whatever the validity of all these various links, Pound’s *Cantos*’ relationship with music in whichever mode this manifests itself is undeniable – as undeniable as his imagist-Vorticist and even Vorticist polyphony.

8 Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A memoir* (New York: New Directions Books, 1970), 84.

9 Haynes (2013), 124.

10 Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 161; Bakhtin (1979), 184-188.

4 A. David Moody, *Ezra Pound: Poet. Volume II: The Epic Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 76.

composed as an architectonical multitude of flows and moments, without losing the simultaneity of the shared uniqueness of humankind’s species-being in action. In the philosophy and structure of music he deeply intuited the holistic oneness between all forms of art and all forms of human species-being’s praxis. This played a fundamental role in Pound’s works. Thus, Pound goes back not only to European Antiquity and Medieval times, but transcends the West, taking his quest into Asia and China whilst at the same time extending his own creative praxis into the world of music and economics, creating and reconstructing an integrated hieroglyphic philosophy from seemingly unrelated and negating parts.

*The Cantos* are ‘constructing’ an epic showing the ‘fullness of time’ and ‘present-ness’ enmeshed together as one with unrealisable ‘potential’,<sup>11</sup> so vital for the actuality of creative praxis. This non-realisability provokes self-awareness of ignorance; a self-awareness, however, that the dialogic dialogue never ends, even if silenced.<sup>12</sup>

11 Haynes (2013), 87.

12 It is interesting and intriguing to know that in spite of the similarities in world-view and ambitions, according to A David Moody, when Pound found himself amidst the ‘ferment of new work all around him in Paris – Braque and Picasso were doing Cubism, Diaghilev’s Russian Ballet performed Stravinsky’s Petrushka that year ... Pound seems to have been hardly aware of what was happening. The modern renaissance he wanted was well under way and he was not yet part of it.’ *Ezra Pound: Poet. Volume I: The Young Genius 1885-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 156.

## 2. Canto I

With Dantesque solemnity, *Katabasis* opens Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* with:

And then went down to the ship  
[...]  
Came we then to the bounds of deepest water,  
[...]  
Covered with close-webbed mist, unpierced ever  
With glitter of sun-rays  
Nor with stars stretched...<sup>13</sup>

Anthony Catania’s necromantic depiction of Pound’s ship which ‘bore us out onward with bellying canvas’ transformed this Poundian *katabasis* rite into a Coleridgean Charonic gravitational passing-through.<sup>14</sup>

Charon’s craft represented as Odysseus’s boat (fig. 1), an analogy reminiscent of Miquel Barceló’s (b. 1957) contrary upward-dredging *Pluja Contracorrent* (1991), encapsulates Pound’s vertiginous ‘down’ journey as a journey that Ivan Callus calls the trope of *The Last Man* recognised as an Acoetes figure,<sup>15</sup> which is fascinatingly mirrored in Andrei Tarkovsky’s (1932-1986) film *Stalker* (1979). According to Callus, here we are constrained to deal

with ‘the figure of the sole human to survive an apocalyptic event, ... the one who, alone, can be aware of the “extreme singularity” of complete disaster, because in his sole embodiment of the “anonymous continuity of humanity” he cannot bear testimony to others about what he witnesses.’<sup>16</sup>

Catania, unlike Tarkovsky who in proposing a post-apocalyptic stalker gave us thus a modern version of the *epoptic* Virgil or Tiresias, and unlike Pound who introduced both, offers no Virgil nor Tiresias as an *epoptic nekyia guide*. This is a guide-less *katabasis*. Callus underlines here how the solitary one not only cannot bear testimony about what he witnesses but worse still, in a rather Kieferesque spirit, there is nobody to witness his redemption, assuming the possibility of such. What we have in Catania is the actual nonsensical journey to the underworld, the passing into the realms of the dead, while living,<sup>17</sup> a passing into the realms of the dead without any witness, and without the redemptive returnability granted to Dante, and likewise to Christ from Hades. What Barceló gives as an upper-thrust showing humankind’s still-existing power of action in going against the tumultuous current, is in

13 All quotations in this section are from *Canto I*, unless otherwise stated.  
14 Saviour Catania, “A Sickness of the Soul: The Coleridgean Spectrality of Anthony Catania’s Galleon-Ghost,” in *Anthony Catania: Spectre-Bark*, Exhibition catalogue (Valletta: Heritage Malta, 2009), unnumbered page.  
15 Ivan Callus, ““Spectre-Bark’: Visions and Visitations of Disaster,” in *ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*, 7.  
17 Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos, *The Celestial Tradition: A Study of Ezra Pound’s The Cantos* (Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992), 106.



Fig. 1. Anthony Catania, *Charon's Craft* 3, 2002, mixed media, 50.8x35cm, private collection (photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)

Catania's Charon's craft, on the contrary, a casting-adrift with the force of will-less *abouleia* towards the futility of darkness.

Souls who must pass through the darkness of Erebus, 'cadaverous dead ... impetuous impotent dead' embark upon and traverse a path, opened by the Anubis-ic Wepwawet, that in actuality would lead to nowhere (fig. 2). From the vertiginous *Katabasis* downfall, one now encounters the *holzwege* path of an upsetting tranquillity, disarrayed by this very same tranquillity so powerfully exemplified by Tarkovsky on reaching the long-desired room of mystery and aspirations.

The distressing tranquillity of the 'cadaverous dead' is enhanced in *Canto XVII* by the image of 'the boat drawn without sound, Without odour of ship-work'. The Phaeacian ships are superhumanly directed by intellect, as though bereft of will, *abouleia*, along the *katabasis-nekyia* path, and have 'no pilots and nor have the ships helms: but they know the thoughts and minds of men.'<sup>18</sup> The boat drawn without sound implies not only the *katabasis* of humankind, but also that of language and meaning itself. The death of language yearns for its own *katabasis*.

*Katabasis-Nekyia*<sup>19</sup> thus takes a novel form and is transfigured into a journey where language, as the substantial mode of humankind's being, is lost and no longer understood, and in which meaning now belongs to a history 'half obscured by time's passing'. Language, as Being's mode of existence, needs this path into Hades. Thus, here too we may witness Pound's own linguistic descent to the depths

of art<sup>20</sup> in a *holzwege* search for meaning of Being, that can only be found in, but never drawn out, or wrested, from art.

This Dantesque path is not just to the depths of literature, as Christine Froula seems to imply, but to the depths of Being itself. Suffice it to say at this stage that one cannot separate language from Being and although the orchestral references in *The Cantos* suggest a compound of global literature, Pound wasn't solely proclaiming a heteroglossic compilation of Western, and later throughout *The Cantos*, global literature. He transcended this, and in so doing made manifest the tragedy that erupts when meaning is separated from Being. In other words, this would be the divorcing of value from action. Meaning hence is separated from language via that which Mikahil Matyushin (1861-1934) called the right of a word 'to be independent', an independence that would lead to 'new creations of words'.<sup>21</sup> Meaning is, according to Matyushin, senselessness, and he proceeds to underline this 'senselessness of our writers who are chasing after meaning'.<sup>22</sup> Alexei Kruchenykh (1886-1968) (a collaborator in the opera *Victory Over The Sun*, produced in 1913) emphasised in a similar vein that the 'word is wider than the meaning'. In a paradoxical sense this parallels Bakhtin's 'surplus-seeing' and Pound's 'residue', with one important qualified consideration, that is: 'width' has become, in the hands of such formalists, the central category

<sup>18</sup> Peter Liebrechts, *Ezra Pound and Neoplatonism* (Madison-Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), 176.

<sup>19</sup> *Nekyia* is the calling up of souls; *Katabasis* is the descent into the underworld.

<sup>20</sup> Christine Froula, *A Guide to Ezra Pound's Selected Poems* (New York: A New Directions Book, 1983), 129.

<sup>21</sup> *First Journal of Russian Futurists, January 1914*, in Mikhail Matyushin, "Futurism in St. Petersburg: Performances on the 2nd, 3rd., 4th and 5th of December 1913", in *Essays on 'Victory Over The Sun'*, ed. Patricia Railing (Sussex: Artists Bookworks, 2009), 45.

<sup>22</sup> Aleksei Kruchenykh, "New Ways of the Word", in *Essays on 'Victory Over The Sun'*, ed. Patricia Railing (Sussex: Artists Bookworks, 2009), 50.





Fig. 2. Anthony Catania, *The Isle of Wepawet 2*, 2005, pastel, 21x30cm, private collection  
(photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)

excluding the word itself and meaning from the essence of reality. The 'wider-width' rather than meaning becomes itself the category.

In Pound's 'meaning half obscured by time's passing' we sense the force of his belief that 'when words cease to cling close to things, kingdoms fall, empires wane and diminish',<sup>23</sup> a process that ends in a status of lethal *oubli* which would lead humankind to a loss of connection to the uniqueness of Being, and ultimately to *abouleia*, an Oblomovian<sup>24</sup> status of stasis, a loss of engagement, a total lack of will to act, as with the 'boat drawn without sound'. As in Kazimir Malevich's (1879-1935) *nekyia* showing the inner *Katabasis* path through his *Black Square* (1915), Pound is calling for a re-membering of the depths of language as a mode of Being. Parallel to his contemporary, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), he brought forth Being as the central category of human existence.

In Bakhtin's thought, also contemporary, is evident a pre-occupation analogous to Pound's *oubli*. Bakhtin underlines that 'by abstracting rules, norms or theories from actual human actions and mistaking those theories for the truth, the philosopher or artist loses connection to the unique human being and to real moral engagement'.<sup>25</sup> The abyssal deconstruction of meaning from language disrupts the inter-connectivity between the unique human being, its species-beingness, and corresponding praxis in this world, and thus disrupts meaning itself. A process of re-membering and re-constructing necessitates a path of return.

<sup>23</sup> Pound (1970), 114.

<sup>24</sup> See I. A. Goncharov, *Oblomov* (Saint Petersburg: Hudozhestvennaya Literatura, Sankt-Petersburgskoye Otdeleniya, 1993).

<sup>25</sup> Haynes (2013), 20.

The *Katabasis-Nekyia* path is an atemporal category, or better still, it is a spatial-temporal mode of Being in the sense that it forms part of humankind's existence. One exists within a permanent state of a *Katabasis-Nekyia* flow. It is the path one is incessantly facing when confronting this meaninglessness of existence, which is itself an event and is itself unfolding continuously in its spatial-temporal uniqueness as a riot of inchoate Bakhtinian potential dialogue.<sup>26</sup> The rupture between meaning and words, when they 'cease to cling to things', cracks the heart of this Bakhtinian concept of *dialogue*. Since the essence of all humankind is dialogue, a response-action relationship, this rupture transmutes dialogue into a monologicistic alienated illusion where 'kingdoms fall, empires wane and diminish'.

One must, within this Bakhtinian-Poundian dialogue, respond to this, either by ignoring and de-dialoguing the whole question – thus neutralising one's uniqueness of Being, or by trying to give meaning to meaninglessness – which would lead to insanity. In other words, this de-dialoguing would submit one inevitably to the Heideggerian 'they'. The alternative would be to attempt, as Pound did, to produce some kind of meaning which would only provoke a permanent state of insanity and madness. Making sense and creating meaning is therefore a continuous and permanent *Katabasis-Nekyia* fight between labyrinthine existential centripetal and centrifugal forces, a fight which treads a continuous path due to its infinite condition, that of unfinalisability, as the very Cantos themselves manifest with crystalline clarity. We are in a constant state of unfinalisability. Bakhtin's concept of unfinalisability can be deeply

<sup>26</sup> Holquist (1990), 47.



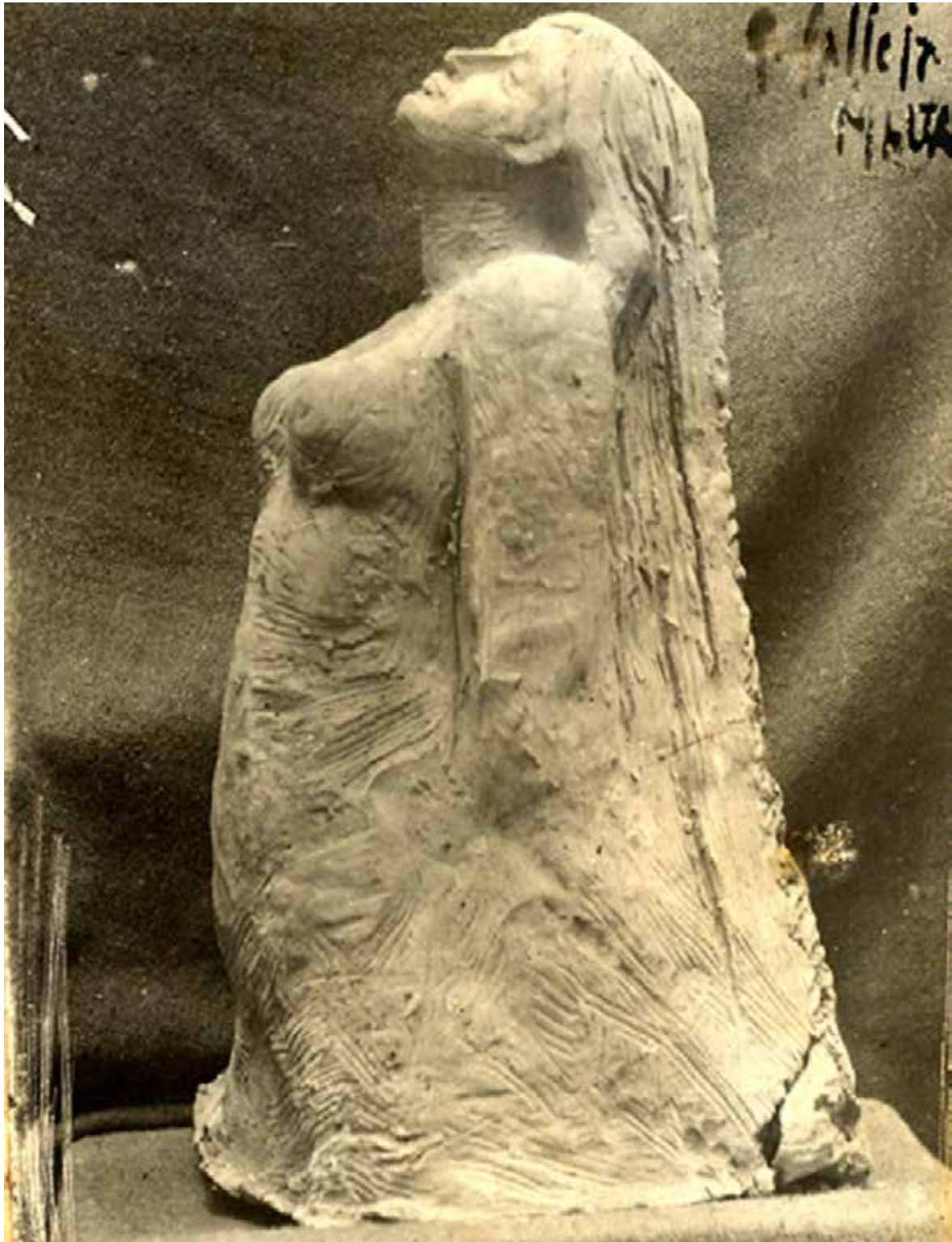


Fig. 3. Josef Kalleya, *Female Figure Representing Malta*, early 1920s, unknown medium, lost or destroyed (image courtesy: Josef Kalleya Family Archives)

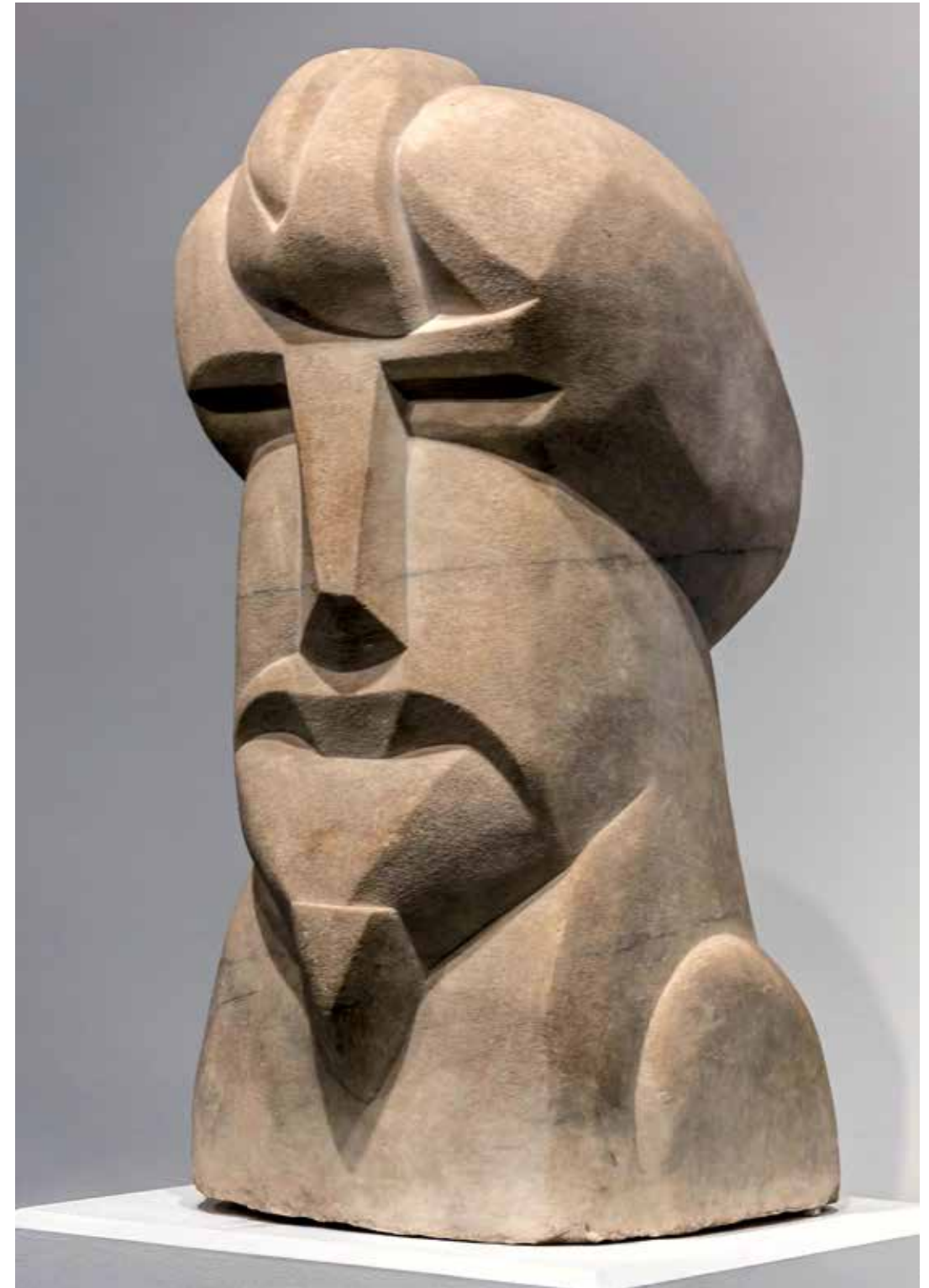


Fig. 4. Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, *Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound*, 1914, marble, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC (photo: Léna)



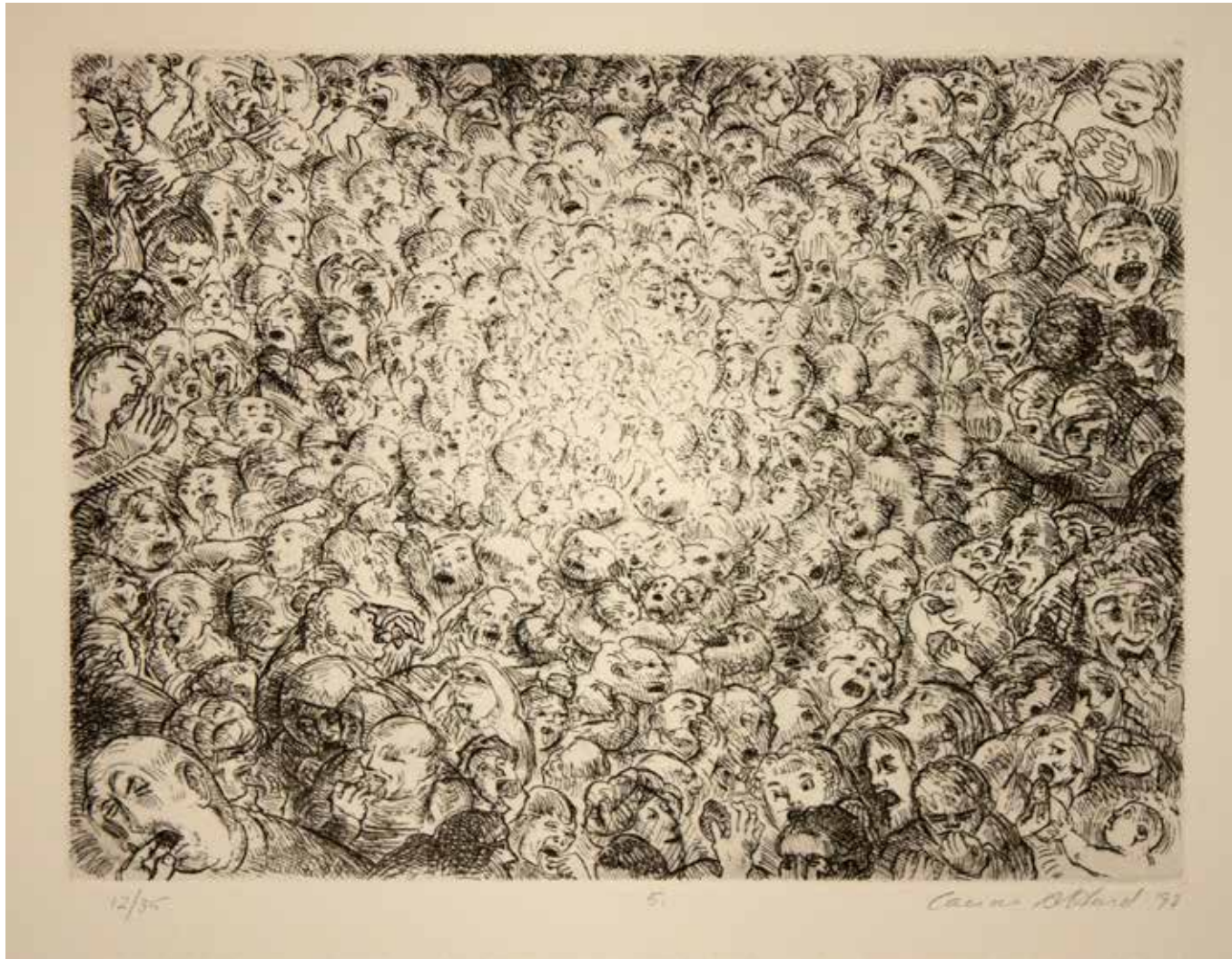


Fig. 5. Caesar Attard, *The Feeding of the Crowd*, 1992, print 12/35, 26x59cm, private collection (image courtesy: Caesar Attard)

discerned not only in Pound's philosophical beliefs on Being but also in his aesthetic creed, to be considered as a singular entity, as can be witnessed in his comments (which are also deeply related to Josef Kalleya's (1898-1998) aesthetic ideas and *oeuvre*) (fig. 3) on Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's (1891-1915) sculptural portrait (1914) (fig. 4). Pound here counterpoints *stasos*, that is *finalisability*, death, with *kinesis*, a titanic energy of *unfinalisability*. Finalisability is a path leading to nowhere;

The bust of me was most striking, perhaps, two weeks before it was finished. I do not mean to say that it was better, it was perhaps a *kinesis*, whereas it is now a *stasos*; but before, the back was cut out, and before the middle lock was cut down, there was in the marble a titanic energy, it was like a great stubby catapult, the two masses bent for a blow. I do not mean that he was wrong to go on with it. Great art is perhaps a *stasis*. The unfinished stone caught the eye.<sup>27</sup>

This Bakhtinian yearning for unfinalisability so dominant in his epic is here confronting the seemingly finalised bust which means only *stasis*, *dead-end*, a path leading to nowhere, *holzwege*: that is, death.

It is precisely *finalisability* that is the result of the meaning-word rupture and of the loss of connection for Bakhtin, as earlier elucidated. Only an Odyssean, Dantesque, Poundian *katabasis* path can seemingly offer either a respite from this Heideggerian hellish *holzwege* or the other futile circular labyrinthine *Stalker* path in an eternally damned *Zone*. This Bakhtinian-Poundian loss of connection, making us soulless and blind, is the path that leads to Hades, where our presence is perpetually rooted. The Dantean *fosse*-darkness filled with such lost souls, shadowless souls as in Virgil's third Canto, are echoed

in Caesar Attard's waves of soulless *thanatos-hypnos* souls. The latter find themselves in his biblical *fosse*-like composition *Feeding of the Crowd* (1992) (fig. 5), transfigured as spirits of those killed with 'souls stained', and who crowd about Odysseus,<sup>28</sup> who like Acoetes's crew, as we shall see in *Canto II*, refused to 'see what is hidden from ordinary sight',<sup>29</sup> their blindness making them unaware of the attempt to abduct and enslave Dionysus. Here, in Attard's work, the biblical feeding takes on a grotesque Elysian mystery, where 'corpses are set to banquet' (*Canto XLV*), a *passing-through* banquet being witnessed from above by Vincent Apap's (1909-2003) *Monument to Dante* (1965) (fig. 6) and an earlier version by Alfonso Canciani (1863-1955) (fig. 7).

Being shadowless, such souls lose their *nekyia* capacity to be called. This makes *katabasis* more vital for the potential re-connection of humankind with its own Being. Yearning for a re-connection with the uniqueness of Being, through *katabasis*, provokes redemption which implies a 'passing-through'. Where this Canto's *katabasis* path ends with 'So that', *Canto XVII* will similarly begin, thus Pound succeeds in bridging both events with the later Canto's 'So that the vines burst from my fingers'.<sup>30</sup> Such is Pound's Heisenbergian attempt at a re-connection with the unique human being, in the course of which, over eighty-nine Cantos, these *impotent dead* are in *Canto XC* finally turned into 'no shades more' but truly 'delivered and free'.<sup>31</sup> We have therefore a holistic

<sup>28</sup> Moody (2014), 80.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>30</sup> Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos, *The Celestial Tradition: A Study of Ezra Pounds The Cantos* (Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992), 108-109.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>27</sup> Pound (1970), 49.



Fig. 6. Vincent Apap, *Bozzetto for the Monument to Dante*, c. 1965, plaster, 17x55x16cm, MUŻA, Valletta (image courtesy: MUŻA – The National Community Art Museum and Heritage Malta)



Fig. 7. Alfonso Canciani, *Monumento a Dante (Monument to Dante)*, 1896, gesso, (h) 250cm, Palazzo Locatelli, Cormons (photo: Franco Garau, image courtesy: Tocs di Cormons. Thanks to Keith Sciberras for the reference to this artwork.)



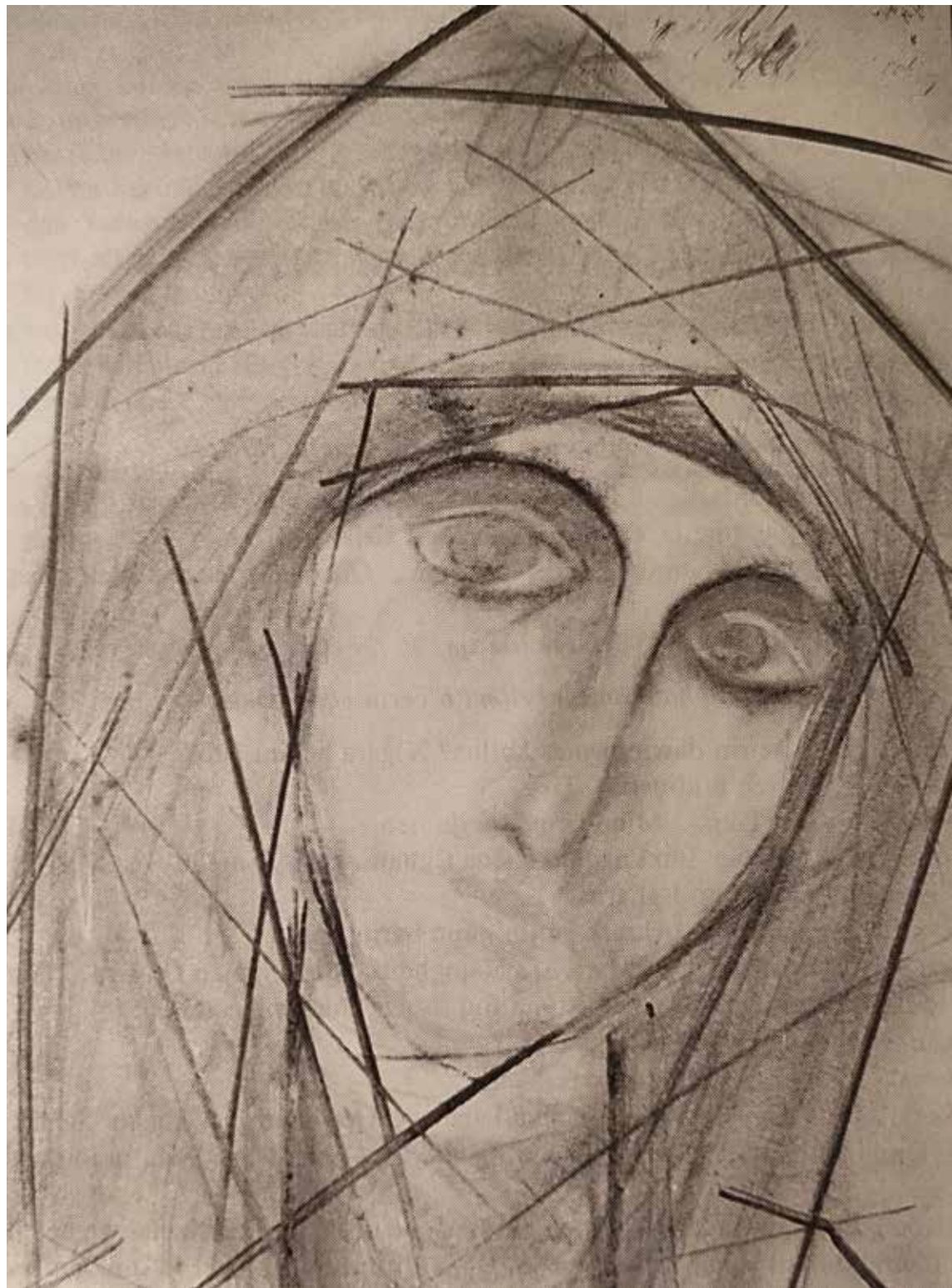


Fig. 8. Eyes gazing through a refraction of the Damascena and Vladimirskaya 'ikona'. Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, *Id-Duluri (Our Lady of Sorrows)*, early 1980s, charcoal, pastel and pencil on carton paper, 100x75cm, private collection (image courtesy: Nikki Petroni)

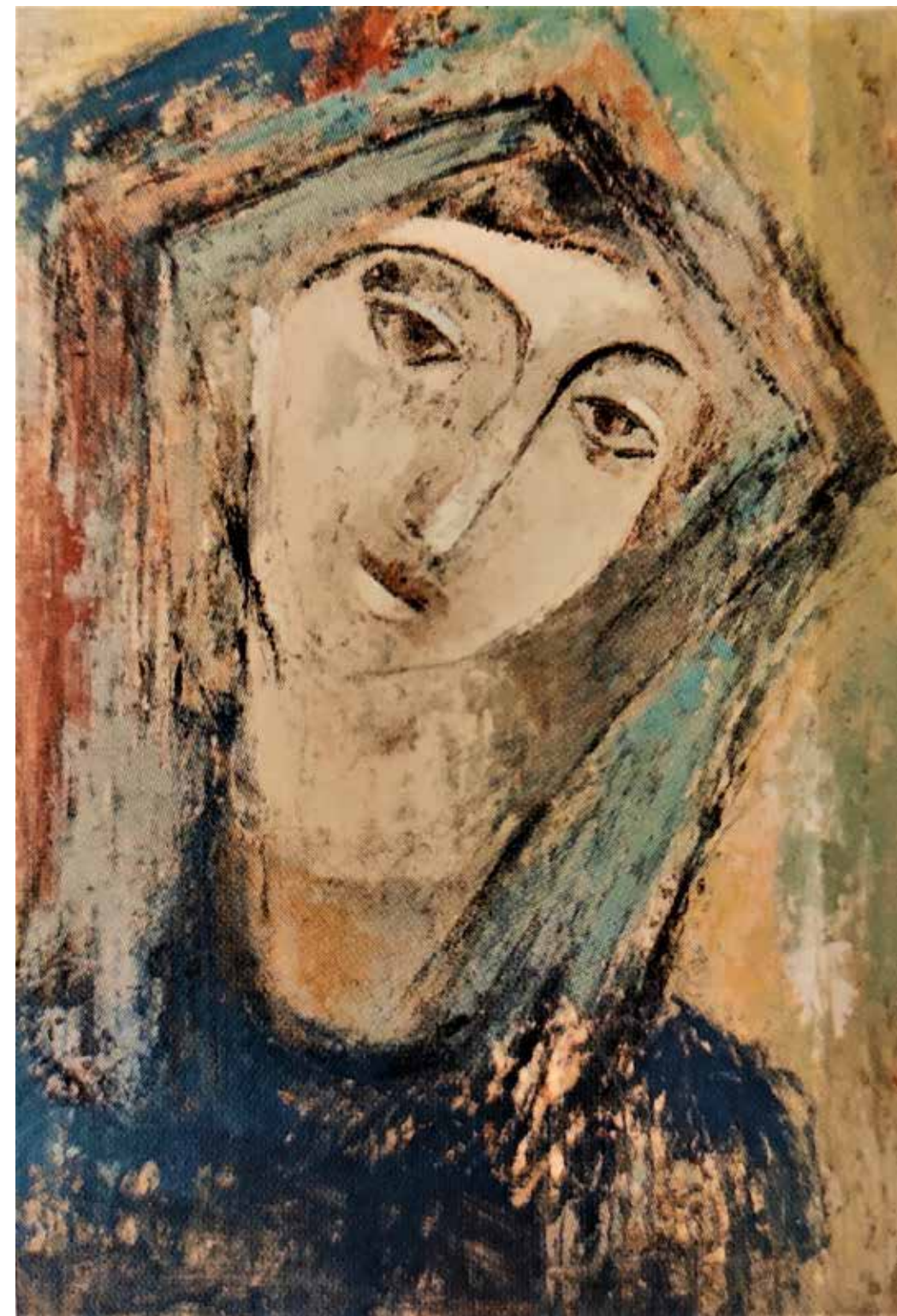


Fig. 9. Ġoxwa, *Madonna de Giuseppe (Giuseppe's Madonna)*, oil and wax on canvas, 1996-1997, 72x57cm, private collection (image courtesy: Nikki Petroni)





Fig. 10. Ġoxwa, *Byzantine Madonna*, 1996-1997, oil and wax on canvas, 43x35cm, private collection (image courtesy: Nikki Petroni)

ritual initiation of *passing*, such as can be witnessed in the Pompeian *passing* that so deeply reverberates in Ġoxwa's works.

By harking back to Pompeian encaustic form and content, Ġoxwa re-members the link archaic Malta had with the ancient Greek-Roman-Egyptian *fayoum* world, and by intelligently appropriating my own adaptation of Byzantine icon art (fig. 8) together with the art found in Malta's catacombs, she daringly attempts to resurrect that which for centuries has been obliterated from the collective consciousness of a nation. This can be seen in her *Madonna de Giuseppe* (1996-1997) (fig. 9) and her *Byzantine Madonna* (1996-1997) (fig. 10) so strongly paralleling Helene Schjerfbeck's (1862-1946) *Madonna de la Charité* (1941). Ġoxwa's works epitomise the powerful alternative of silence, a silence chanted by Pound as 'let the wind speak'. She gives an alternative to the modern world's being shut out *from art*, a world in which as T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) sings 'the women come and go' in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915).

Whilst preserving what Bakhtin calls the 'undying elements of the archaic', she succeeded in preserving these 'only thanks to their renewal, ... and their contemporization'<sup>32</sup> via her works' Bacchanalian, even demonic, aura that generates and drives all existence. She makes us experience what is experienced in spite of our refusal to 'see what is hidden from ordinary sight' amongst the world's polyphonic prehistoric noosphere, in particular in the Maltese phallic-sarsen Megalithic culture, in the African fiendish *atal/akwanshi* stone monoliths, and in the Australian-Aboriginal tormented 'Hollow-Tree' graves found in my own aboriginal-inspired series of works.

<sup>32</sup> Bakhtin quoted in Holquist (1990), 126.

### 3. Canto II

This same epiphanic and demonic Dionysiac force that drives all living things takes in Pound, paradoxically but clearly enough, the form of divine light.<sup>33</sup> It opens *Canto II*, structuring it in such a manner as to manifest how intelligence developed from and with the very act of seeing. It substantiates the Medieval idea asserting how the light of life is linked with light of intelligence.<sup>34</sup> It is the intelligence of *nous*. This is a Heraclitean intelligence which changes minds, perceptions, and values so as to threaten the established social order via wine-provoked freedom. It is the mind that brings forth new life, a bacchanal ever changing, interacting with its uncontrollable omnipresent-yet-unseen Bergsonian élan vital, and that is nothing less than the uncontrollable energy that defines the god of indestructible life.<sup>35</sup>

The rhythmic-musicality of such Heraclitean flow is continuously transformed into an image complexity, that is, in Pound's hands, 'melopoeia becomes phanopoeia',<sup>36</sup> before taking an unexpected *logopoeitic* turn to make us see. In other words, when charged with sound, the word enters into visual imagery in a manner that alters the word's

conventional relationship with the event, exposing aspects to which one is usually blind, so as to make one see what was previously unseeable. Such word-image transformation is vital for the act of seeing the *unseeable everywhere*. This is also the same reason why Bakhtin qualifies 'seeing as a means for grasping what is essentially a non-visual-situation'.<sup>37</sup> Seeing is an action that cannot be narrowed down to the crude act of seeing something, but it includes that which Bakhtin describes as *surplus-seeing*. This perspective is enriched by Pound's *melopoeia-phanopoeia-logopoeitic* metamorphosis.

Pound, in Moody's words, asserted that this transmutation and grasping of the unseeable is that universal generativeness and divine possession mythically intuited, *mythopoetically*<sup>38</sup>: a power that is reserved for the blinded elite, such as Tiresias, 'who even dead, yet hath his mind entire'.<sup>39</sup> This also recalls the Shakespearean Gloucester-Lear *blindness*, which proves, like the exemplary Tiresias, that decay of sight gives rise to poetry and prophecy.<sup>40</sup> Blindness sees the unseeable, whereas eyesight is blind. Seeing only the surface layer of the so-called object world without

33 Moody (2014), 11.

34 Ibid., 12.

35 Ibid., 12-13. Willie Apap's (1918-1970) *stricie*, or shafts of light, are in fact defining this same point, although here Apap succumbs to a cosmetic rendition of the same.

36 Froula (1983), 133.

37 Holquist (1990), 21.

38 Moody (2014), 14.

39 Carroll F. Terrell, *A Companion to The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: University of California Press, 1993), 2.

40 Jewel Spears Brooker, *T.S. Eliot's Dialectical Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 13.

seeing the unseeable leads to disaster. Seeing only by means of ordinary sight led to the massacre of King Pentheus, who, like Acoetes’s crew, refused to ‘see what is hidden from ordinary sight’.<sup>41</sup>

To see not some new particular thing but to see with new eyes<sup>42</sup> is what **Pound is** propagating. That is, he is **advocating a Modernist engineering of new eyes so as to be able to grasp the unseeable.**

Pound as Acoetes, sings how:

Aye, I, Acoetes, stood there  
and the god stood by me,  
Water cutting under the keel,  
Sea-break from stern forrards  
wake running off from the bow

Pound is poetically taking us back to the Heideggerian state of antiquity where intelligence of wisdom via seeing-as-intelligence is informed by light. Seeing plays the dominant role in all the sung *Cantos*, whether seeing through transparency, or seeing through crystallised reflection and refraction, or seeing as a ‘genetic’ mode of the Anaxagoras pre-Socratic *nous* – as cosmic intelligence. The image of crystalline ‘nous’ dominated by light and arising from water is a central image in *The Cantos*. In *Canto XXV*, we find ‘the waves taking form as crystal’ (118); in *Canto XL*, ‘NOUS, the ineffable crystal’; in *Canto LXXVI*, ‘the crystalline, as inverse of water’; ‘*a mer à boire*’, ‘Crystal waves weaving together toward the gt/

healing in *Canto XCI*. Furthermore, glass and crystal as solidified forms of water represent moments of revelation in the *Cantos*, as in *Canto XVII* where the poet has a vision of Venice, where the ‘men of craft, i vitrei’ or glass makers, translate the crystalline vision of light into terms of earthly reality, that is, into art. In *Canto XX*, the imagery of glass, light, and air comes together in the description of ‘the faceted air’ emphasising how man can see the crystalline vision in, through and behind sensible reality, although it is only a fragmented vision.<sup>43</sup> Such fragmentation is in fact underlined by Pound’s not creating any transitional shade between such decontextualized fragments: *macchiaioli*-style dabs of fragmented texts.

Back in *Canto II*, we witness how the ivory stillness is juxtaposed with the sea. The *crystalline sea*, the translucent view sung alongside the vitreous eye fluid, contrasts with the ‘black azure and hyaline’, and together with the blue-gray glass, becomes itself an eye, an eye ‘taking in and reflecting back the light of heaven’.<sup>44</sup> Since the eye, light, reflection, and colour as the form of light are reflecting back heaven’s light, this takes on the significance of a divine ritual. This brings Pound’s thought close to that of Florensky. The latter believed that eyes are signs changing not only the sacredness of colour, colour as a celestial sign, but also that of reality itself.<sup>45</sup>

Pound’s crystalline sea, as an eye reflecting celestial heaven, recalls Grigori Kozintsev’s (1905-1973) sea in his *Hamlet* (1964), which forms another element in the *katabasis passing-through* path: that of an epiphanic expectation. It encapsulates and

41 Moody (2014), 13-14. Fascinatingly I would, as a modern example of a ‘crew refusing to see the unseeable’, add here the fate of Lake Nemi. Diana-Nemorensis-Artemis’s sanctuary Lake Nemi which was from ancient times defined as *speculum Dianae* (Diana’s mirror) was drained by Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) who not ‘seeing the unseeable’, decreed the tangible objective to recover Caligula’s ships from the unseeable sacredness of this space. 500, 000 cubic meter of mud erupted, causing such damage as to have the project abandoned to be later intermittently resumed, with the only outcome being the destruction of everything by the Allied bombardment of 1944.

42 Pound (1970), 85.

43 Liebrechts (2004), 143.

44 Moody (2014), 15-16.

45 Pavel Florensky, *Beyond Vision. Essays on the Perception of Art*, ed. Nicoletta Misler (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 115-122.

becomes the modality of Being, awaiting concurrently a sudden realisation of an image without being able to name it,<sup>46</sup> except by the only utterance ‘I have seen what I have seen’.<sup>47</sup> This awareness of an epiphanic expectation transforms the *mystes*, the initiate, into an *epoptes*, the actual chosen overseer,<sup>48</sup> the one who sees back; the *stalker*.

The eye is thus presented as the dominant fugue throughout the whole *Cantos*, particularly in *Canto II*: eyes and colour, inter-metamorphosing powers and colour. Pound’s own eyes were a constant attribute attested by all, not only for their acute passive functionality but also for their power to actively *change* reality: his actual eyes.

Daniel Swift writes how: ‘in November 1913 a writer in London described Pound’s ‘sharp red beard posed at a forward-downward angle and well-shaped features and deep-set blue eyes’. In late 1915 Pound was issued with an identity card by the American Embassy in London, and here he has green eyes and fair hair, and when in Paris in 1919 he applied for a new passport it lists his grey eyes and light brown hair. Perhaps his eyes were grey: in *Canto LXXIX* he appeals to Athena and follows it with the Greek epithet most often given by Homer to the goddess: ‘glaukopis’, which can mean ‘grey’ or ‘blue-eyed’: ‘The eyes are changing colours’.<sup>49</sup> Pound’s quasi-neurotic belief in light being a cosmic force and the eye as a crystalline reflection of the heavens was not separate from the particularity of one’s own eyes. It is quite fascinating to see how the mythological-philosophical importance he obsessively attributed to

eyes and sight can also be discerned in his personal correspondence with his contemporaries, particularly with James Joyce (1882-1941). Pound writes to Joyce: ‘Thanks for the photo. It is a bit terrifying. I suspect your oculist of believing that your astigmatism is harmonic and not inharmonic. Hence the lines of eyestrain in the forehead’.<sup>50</sup>

According to Forrest Read:

Pound, dismayed by the appearance of Joyce’s eyes in his photographs, had suggested that it might be worthwhile to write to Dr. George Milbry Gould ... ophthalmologist, writer... poet ... not only had Gould, a refractionist, helped Pound, but he saw a connection between eyestrain and genius ... He had studied past writers in order to show that medical facts ‘Like flashes of lightning of the past storm ... reveal for an instant the whole landscape of their time and work and suffering’ ... in one of his six volumes of studies Gould argues that near absence of eyesight caused Lafcadio Hearn to become ‘the poet of myopia’ (Pound had been on the verge of calling Joyce ‘the novelist of myopia,’ ...<sup>51</sup>

Pound also characterises the sculptor Gaudier Brzeska by defining his eyes. He underscores the sculptor’s ‘vivid, incisive manner, the eyes “almost alarmingly intelligent”’.<sup>52</sup> In *Canto II* we hear Pound sing the praises of the eyes of Picasso as the power of light that changes reality. David Douglas Duncan (1916-2018), the photographer who shot the image

46 Bush (1989), 102.

47 Ibid., 237.

48 Tryphonopoulos (1992), 152.

49 Daniel Swift, *The Bughouse: The Poetry, Politics and Madness of Ezra Pound* (London: Vintage Publications, 2018), 164.

50 Letter dated December 20, 1916. Reproduced in *Pound/Joyce: The letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce*, ed. Forrest Read (New York: A New Directions Book, 1970), 85.

51 Read (1970), 96-97.

52 Pound (1970), 39.



titled *Picasso's Eyes* in 1957, talks a lot about the power of Picasso's gaze, and 'piercing eyes' which 'seduce, caress and even frighten people.'<sup>53</sup>

Seal sports in the spray-whited circles of cliff-wash,  
Sleek head, daughter of Lir  
Eyes of Picasso  
Under black fur-hood, little daughter of Ocean;

Carroll F. Terrel notes that:

the reference to Picasso's seal's eyes evokes the artist's faculty for changing the shape of things he sees. In ancient mythology the seal is the animal most closely linked with Proteus, who among other things used to assume the shape of a seal.<sup>54</sup>

However, Picasso Midas-like power is not only felt in the changing of the shape of things he sees through the act of seeing, but is also like Proteus sensed in the changing of his own form. Assuming the shape of a slippery seal, it is only through painting that Picasso is caught and finally held, as Proteus was ultimately caught and held by Menelaus. Picasso's own creative power in painting is his own Menelaus. And as with Proteus who, once caught and held, has to utter the truth, Picasso's paintings are compelled to manifest and proclaim it also. Painting, in all its assumed shapes, lies – but lies in order to proclaim the truth.

Proteus, the god of the sea, rivers, waters, and oceans – also known as the 'Old Man of the Sea' – who dwells in Pharos on the Nile Delta is the god of 'elusive sea change', a seer into the future. This power can only be exploited if he is captured whilst metamorphosing into every possible form in a bid to escape. He

figures on the right-hand side of Raphael's (1483-1520) composition, known though the engraving by Marcantonio Raimondi's (c. 1470/82-c. 1534), *The Judgement of Paris* (c. 1515) – a compositional theme taken up by Édouard Manet (1832-1883) 350 years later in his *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (*The Luncheon on the Grass*) (1862-63), and completely destroyed and fragmented by Picasso's variations (1959-61) four and a half centuries after Raphael.

Menelaus, King of Sparta, husband of Helen of Troy succeeded in capturing Proteus thanks to the devious intrigue of Proteus's daughter Eidothea, whilst her father emerged from the sea among his colony of seals. On capture, Proteus constrained now to tell the truth, informed Menelaus that Odysseus was captured on Calypso's island,<sup>55</sup> Ogygia: Ġoxwa's island (fig. 11).

Precisely because she had not been invited, Eris 'the goddess of discord' made her unsolicited presence violently felt during Zeus's banquet in honour of Peleus and Thetis' marriage – a marriage that would birth Achilles, and be ensued by the most devastating war ever known. Eris offered her *Garden of Hesperides* golden apple with 'kallistei' ('to the most beautiful') inscribed on it. As expected, the three main goddesses Aphrodite, Hera, and Athena all claimed it. Zeus decreed that Paris, a Trojan mortal and prince, be the judge.

On Mount Ida the nude goddesses confronted Paris. Hera offered him all Europe and Asia, Athena wisdom and war skill, whereas Aphrodite offered him the most beautiful woman: Helena of Sparta, that

<sup>53</sup> Jane Robbins Mize, "From the Outside In: David Douglas Duncan's photograph "Picasso's Eyes," 1957," *Ransom Center Magazine* (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas at Austin, 2014), accessed May 10, 2019, <https://sites.utexas.edu/ransomcentermagazine/2014/03/06/from-the-outside-in-picassos-eyes/>.

<sup>54</sup> Terrell (1993), 5.

<sup>55</sup> Lino Bugeja, "Malta's encounter with Homer's greatest hero," *Sunday Times of Malta* (January 8, 2012), accessed September 8, 2019, <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20120108/life-features/Malta-s-encounter-with-Homer-s-greatest-hero.401536>

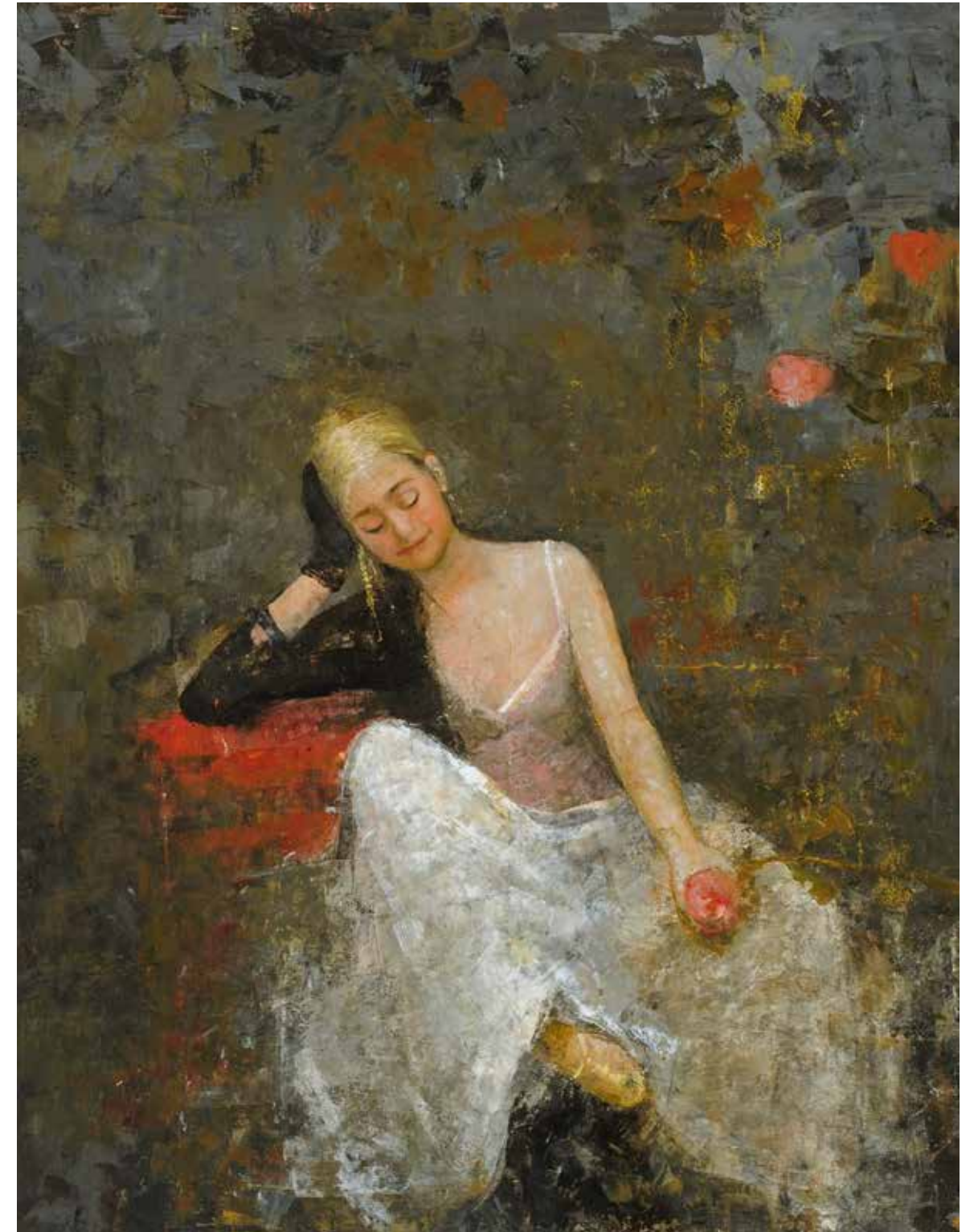


Fig. 11. Ġoxwa, *After Paris's Choice (Black Glove)*, 2011, oil and wax on canvas, 162x130cm, private collection (photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Ġoxwa)



same Helena whose face in Christopher Marlowe's (1564-1593) masterpiece provoked Faustus's Trojan quasi-*oratorio* declamation:

Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?  
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss:  
Her lips suck forth my soul, see, where it flies.  
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.  
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,  
And all is dross that is not Helena.  
I will be Paris, and for love of thee  
Instead of Troy, shall Wittenberg be sack'd,  
And I will combat with weak Menelaus,  
And wear thy colours on my plumed crest.  
Yea, I will wound Achilles in the heel,  
And then return to Helen for a kiss.  
O, thou art fairer than the evening's air,  
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars.  
Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter,  
When he appear'd to hapless Semele:  
More lovely than the monarch of the sky,  
In wanton Arethusa's azur'd arms,  
And none but thou shalt be my paramour.<sup>56</sup>

Picasso, with his creative and destructive, shamanesque eye-genius becomes Pound's Helen as *helenaus* and *heleptolis* (ship-destroyer and city-destroyer) in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*.<sup>57</sup> He is an overseer, who through his eyes and gaze, destroys the judgement of Paris, in all its forms: Picasso as destroyer of language, Pound no less so. Both challenged and participated in the process of fragmentation when 'words cease to cling close to things'. Both challenged the philosophy of fragmentation by means of that very same process of fragmentation.

Similar to *Canto I*, which vertigo-like introduced humankind's loss of connection to Being, one here again finds its reflection in the relationship of words to how one perceives, sees reality. This relationship, according to Pound, is so existentially vital 'for when words cease to cling close to things, kingdoms fall, empires wane and diminish'.<sup>58</sup> The anticipation of meaning is in this *Canto* linked with the act of seeing: anticipation for the epiphanic curtain to be drawn so as to reveal what was concealed, when seeing becomes knowing. Analogously to Bakhtin's formulation, one waits for the time 'when every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival',<sup>59</sup> its *nostos*, the return, in which path colour and light play the same role as Pound's heteroglossic *katabasis* epic interaction. Seeing finally becomes knowing again. The moment this happens is a frightening one. The subversive character of art is ignited by encroaching on the frontier between seeing and unseeing, a *xaqq*, a glimmering dawn-lit *għabex* awakening. It is the *déjà-vu* feeling that binds the act of seeing and knowing. Ġoxwa's works give us this chronotopic initial position of art (figs. 12, 13). In other words, art starts 'when sensation glimmers at the edge of recall, almost known, already', as succinctly said by Daniel Swift in his study on Pound.<sup>60</sup> When one *feels* the seeing, one is initiated into the knowing: the verb *oida* (to know) re-members its root *eidô* (to see). *Oida* and *eidô* become one.

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. Roma Gill, in *The Plays of Christopher Marlowe Vol. II* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 97-116.

<sup>57</sup> C.W. Willink, "Aeschylus, "Agamemnon" 681-716," *Mnemosyne*, Fourth Series, 57, no. 4 (2004): 478-481.

<sup>58</sup> Pound (1970), 114.

<sup>59</sup> Bakhtin quoted in Holquist (1990), 39.

<sup>60</sup> Daniel Swift, *The Bughouse: The Poetry, Politics and Madness of Ezra Pound* (London: Vintage Publications, 2018), 17.



Fig. 12. Ġoxwa, *L'arbre des songes (The Tree of Dreams)*, 2005, oil and wax on canvas, 100x50cm, private collection (image courtesy: Ġoxwa)





Fig. 13. Ġoxwa, *Silver Tunic*, 2011, oil and wax on canvas, 130x97cm, private collection  
(photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Ġoxwa)



Fig. 14. Ġoxwa, *The Pilgrimage*, 2003, oil and wax on canvas, 103x89cm, private collection  
(image courtesy: Ġoxwa)

By giving us the Neoplatonist *aeon post-mortem*,<sup>61</sup> a post-mortem of an age drowned in emptiness and alienation, Ġoxwa aggravates in us a rather uncomfortable eschatological, incomprehensible sensation in the act of seeing (fig. 14).<sup>62</sup>

Her co-authoring act of *Seeing-Knowing* is always dialogic and epistemological and makes one experience one’s self. This act is constantly engaged in dialectical strife, yet wedged in between ‘emptiness’, ‘ghostliness’ or ‘solitariness’ that indicates a self-encountered in isolation from the world, and inner feeling on the one hand, and ‘will’ on the other<sup>63</sup>: an *angst*-filled isolation in emptiness and decay, which dislodges this act, is central to the subsequent chapter in Pound’s *Cantos*; *Canto III*.

61 Bruce Ellis Benson, “The Economies of Knowledge and Love in Paul,” in *Transforming Philosophy and Religion: Love’s Wisdom*, ed. Norman Wirzba and Bruce Ellis Benson (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 30.

62 *Eidos* (Form-Essence), at the moment of the death of *aeon* (the eternal world of ideas outside Plato’s cave), is the death of the emanation of transcendental power.

63 See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: The Early Essays of M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov and Kenneth Brostrom (Austin: University of Texas, 1990), 30-37.

# 4. Canto III

Emptiness begotten by decay, by ‘the sense of a past which is crumbled and decayed, which frustrates nostalgia at the same time that it denies Browning’s vision of progress’<sup>64</sup>: a pervasive decay of the Renaissance splendours described by Pound as ‘drear waste’.<sup>65</sup> Decay is not only deterring one from a nostalgic feeling of some idyllic past, but it is also hindering any dreams of a utopian future.

In this *Canto*, we sense Paul Klee’s (1879-1940) *Angelus Novus* (1920) as interpreted by Walter Benjamin (1892-1940). We are witnessing the apocalyptic result stemming from both utopian and dystopian philosophies. On the one hand, the Socialist Realist philosophy attempted to develop Browning’s idea of Hegelian progress towards a heaven-on-earth. On the other hand, this was concurrently counterposed by a Costumbrista Realism, which proposed a nostalgic idyllic-realist alternative calling for a return to an alienated blissful rurality, as can be seen in the painting philosophy of Gianni Vella (1885-1977) (fig. 15), and Edward Caruana Dingli (1876-1950) (fig. 16), as well as in Dun Karm Psaila’s (1871-1961) poetry. These two opposing philosophies were declaring a war on change, which provokes nothing but decay, and the dread of emptiness. Pound militantly participated in the venture for change and,

unlike Auden in his later years, made it abundantly clear that he wanted to make ‘his poetry a force for social change and a solace to the suffering humanity he sees around him ... [a dream which however later with the past in tatters and fragments] appears unfulfilled’.<sup>66</sup> ‘Unfulfilled’ later, but at this earlier stage the young poet was already expressing what he would like to have seen in Venice or Sirmione, that is, ‘a vision of the vital universe to set against the drear waste left behind by “heroic” violence ...’ The is a consequence of a dearth of enlightened conduct.<sup>67</sup> *Drear waste* and *decay* create the sensation of ennui, angst, and emptiness.

Whereas Ġoxwa reacted to this dissatisfaction and emptiness with her encaustic knowing-seeing solitariness, Caesar Attard’s reaction is visually embedded in his *Sleep* series (1994): an amassed frontier, liminal, and conveying claustrophobic entangled frustration. He captures a nightmarish weary exasperation caught between the ultimate futility of both utopian idyllia and nostalgia, leading to an apocalyptic point where Thanatos is *fumed* into his twin sibling, Hypnos (figs. 17, 18, 19).

His *phanopoeic* works, to be discussed shortly, provide the needed polyphonic sensibility behind all other voices. Whilst they articulate a fragmented

64 Froula (1983), 137.

65 Terrell (1993), 10.

66 Froula (1983), 136.

67 Moody (2014), 81.





Fig. 15. Gianni Vella, *Street Hawkers - the open market at B'Kara*, unknown date, oil on canvas, 46.5x98cm, private collection  
(image courtesy: Midsea Books and Joe P. Borg)



Fig. 16. Edward Caruana Dingli, *Collecting Water*, 1914, watercolour, 43.5x31.6cm, private collection  
(photo: Peter Bartolo Parnis, image courtesy: Dr. Carmel Galea, Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti)





Fig. 17. Caesar Attard, *Sitting on the Bed*, 1991, oil on canvas, 93x62cm, private collection  
(image courtesy: Caesar Attard)



Fig. 18. Caesar Attard, *Eye of the Storm*, 1993, oil on canvas, 40x51.5cm, private collection  
(image courtesy: Caesar Attard)





Fig. 19. Caesar Attard, *Large Sleeping Figures*, 1995, oil on canvas, 99.5x145cm, private collection (image courtesy: Caesar Attard)

vision, they simultaneously succeed in making visible, through refraction, what is hidden in the heteroglossic élan vital of humankind’s existence. In a Baudelairean manner, Attard extends an offer of a ‘living visual voice’ to the dead, echoing the Dantesque-Tiresian resonance of spirits which are both physically and spiritually dead,<sup>68</sup> found in *Canto I*. With such shadow-less souls, soulless souls, horror is laced with the residue of an unmitigated ennui (figs. 20-33).<sup>69</sup>

Without wishing to sound simplistic, this invites a comparison of how Anthony Catania exposes the viewer to the gloom and harrowing darkness of the *katabasis* path leading to the inferno of Hades, whilst Attard accentuates the liminal slumbering of shadows in the sleep-death of *purgatorio*. Furthermore, Ġoxwa unseals, through visual vulnerability, the primitive crude rawness of *paradiso*: together they constitute Maltese art’s participation in the Benjaminian constellation of Poundian antiquity, which in *Canto III* is, as already stated, intermeshed with ‘dreariness and decay’. It echoes the Faustian ‘all is dross’, which will appear as a double echo in Pound’s last ‘testament’: ‘the rest is dross’ (*Canto LXXXI*). Pound’s dreariness, dross and decay are damply sensed amidst a polyphonic heteroglossic ‘erotic drama of violence’ (still resounding in *Cantos IV* and *XXIII*),<sup>70</sup> which is beautifully *logopoeitically* fragmented and juxtaposed with the grey steps of a

Japanese shrine opening for a divine perception.<sup>71</sup> At this ‘neither by hope nor by fear’ epiphanic awaiting is found Mantegna (1431-1506)<sup>72</sup>:

Ignez da Castro murdered, and a wall  
Here stripped, here made to stand.  
Drear waste, the pigment flakes from the stone,  
Or plaster flakes, Mantegna painted the wall.  
Silk tatters, ‘Nec Spe Nec Metu’

Through jealousy and conspiracy, Ignez was stabbed whilst begging for clemency from Alphonso IV. When Pedro succeeded to the throne, he had her body exhumed for all the court to pay homage to the corpse dressed in splendour,<sup>73</sup> an image that features in both *Cantos III* and *XXX*.<sup>74</sup> Through such a necromantic event, with its erotic memory flakily plastered by limestone and mouldy fresco, dreariness and decay seep through into more murky depth.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Liebrechts (2004), 134.

<sup>69</sup> Brooker (2018), 39.

<sup>70</sup> Tryphonopoulos (1992), 133.

<sup>71</sup> Bush (1989), 138

<sup>72</sup> See *Mantegna and 15<sup>th</sup>-Century Court Culture: Lectures delivered in connection with the Andrea Mantegna exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, London*, ed. Francis Ames-Lewis and Anka Bednarek (London: Department of History of Art, Birbeck College, University of London, 1993).

<sup>73</sup> Terrell (1993), 10.

<sup>74</sup> Froula (1983), 178.

<sup>75</sup> Mantegna was a Renaissance painter ‘who spent his last years in Mantua under the patronage of the Gonzagas, painting the frescoes in the ducal palace and in the countryside at Goito, whence the Sordello family came. Mantegna also painted the fresco of “Gonzaga and his heirs and concubines” mentioned in the Usura Canto [45/229] as a prime example of the quality of art in a non usurious era’. Terrell (1993), 10.



Figs. 20-32. Ğoxwa, *Soulless Gazes Series*, 1997, charcoal on paper, 81x65cm, private collection  
(image courtesy: Ğoxwa)





Fig. 33. Ġoxwa, *Soulless Gazes Series*, 1997, charcoal on paper, 81x65cm, private collection (image courtesy: Goxwa)

## 5. Canto IV

*Canto IV* invites us to an epiphanic suspension, a suspension of waiting – a waiting for some kind of supernatural manifestation,<sup>76</sup> again an expectation for the seeing of the unseeable. Pound does this with a mantra-like repetition of his multilevel chronotopic flow. Froula believes that *Canto IV*'s repetitive ritual chant 'is a poetic restatement of this idea that a common religious sensibility links apparently different poetic forms',<sup>77</sup> whilst confronting the sensual tangibility already experienced in other writings by Pound, of Propertius's being 'in love and aware of love's folly'.<sup>78</sup> The epiphanic event with its multiple poetic forms finds its palpable form when the American poet juxtaposes and, in one wave, integrates four Greek-Provençal narratives: Itys, Guilleme de Cabestanh, Actaeon and Peire Vidal.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Bush (1989), 109.

<sup>77</sup> Froula (1983), 140.

<sup>78</sup> Ezra Pound, *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, quoted in Bush (1989), 175.

<sup>79</sup> Peire Vidal settled in Malta whilst participating in one of the crusades. See Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes (ed.), *Les Troubadours* (Paris: Egloff, 1946), 189. One of the Counts of Malta named Henry Pescatore is known to have used his island base to launch a personal crusade to the Holy Land: 'accompanied by 300 *iuvenes maltenses*, he led a successful expedition to Tripoli in Syria, in 1205. This won him the praise of Peire Vidal, the renowned Provençal troubadour who was his guest in Malta.' In the following year with support from Genoa, Henry Pescatore led an expedition against Crete and for six years managed to retain some form of presence on that Island until he was ousted by the Venetians in 1212. Subsequently, in 1221, he participated in the ill-fated naval expedition against Damietta on the African coast (Charles Dalli, *Malta: The Medieval Millennium* (Sta Venera: Midsea Books, 2006), 98-99).

The troubadours, having lost the names of the gods, have lost meaning to history and thus cannot see. They are endowed with remembering only the remnant names of distant loves.<sup>80</sup> They can only retain the distant echo of the rubble surviving from the remote, to use Eliot's terminology.<sup>81</sup> The archaic primordial meaning of Being is lost but its form and façade still hover as cave shadows. In other words, 'context and the original meaning may have vanished, the form and the voice have held'.<sup>82</sup> The primordial relationship with gods and mystery is lost. We are now constrained to deal with the fractured remnants of memory. With these troubadours harbouring remnants and crumbs from antiquity, one is 'dealing with men who are encapsulated [only] by lust for sensible beauty'.<sup>83</sup>

They are set against the epiphanic awaiting, which they cannot understand. Nor are they aware that such an awaiting renders 'tangible' 'the experience of confronting a goddess'.<sup>84</sup> They have lost the ability of *anagnorisis*, the poetic recognition of power, the sudden apprehension 'of previously unknown or veiled truth'.<sup>85</sup> They end up being bereft of the

<sup>80</sup> Froula (1983), 140.

<sup>81</sup> Brooker (2018), 66.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Liebrechts (2004), 145.

<sup>84</sup> Bush (1989), 204.

<sup>85</sup> Brooker (2018), 141.



Fig. 34. Goxwa, *The Wind*, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 195x97cm, private collection  
(photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Goxwa)



Fig. 35. Goxwa, *Mirage*, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 130x97cm, private collection  
(photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Goxwa)



dramatic, but unrepeatable, *kairos* moment, the opportune moment of revelation juxtaposed between the Japanese stairs and Venice's marble-ity.

The same multiform-polyphonic story is interwoven fugue-like into what Pound called a 'repeat in history'. This is when a subject unremittingly and continuously reappears in history, in the same form, often in different forms, and sometimes in apparently seemingly unconnected events. Pound terms such reappearance as a rhyme-in-history, *subject rhyme*, which means a rhyme in the continuity of the spirit which is able to invoke similar shapes,<sup>86</sup> through different chrontopes of humankind's evolution: Procne-Philomela-Cabestan-Soremonda, swallow-nightingale-interwoven into one, and all inter-merged into one flow when 'her sleeve catches the wind' – the 'vento benigno' (Pound, *Canto LXXX*, 532) 'like the swallow's wing, and the swallow's cry, 'Tis. 'Tis. Ytis!' – thus affirms this miraculous metamorphosis<sup>87</sup> throughout the ages, and in a way that transcends all chronotopes.

Wind: which one of the Anemoi is this swallow's wind? Children of the guardian of all winds – Aeolus and Eos, the Dawn Goddess – which wind fanned the swallow's wing? Is it the transformed northern bearded winged wintry Boreas, the southern hot midsummer fiery Notus, the caved-in western gentle breezy 'vento-benigno' blooming Zephyrus (West) or the damning eastern Eurus?

Ġoxwa depicts a new non-existing intangible wind, that of silence (fig. 34). She does this in the form of a siren, with its unhearable song. Here we are experiencing a Dido-endurance of unrequited love.

One feels the siren's plight, accepting defeat in her futile attempts to lure back her beloved, within the *sirenum scopuli* islands just touching the turbulent deceptive seas of the Maltese *Ġhawdex-Kemmuna's fligu*. As in Franz Kafka's (1883-1924) *Silence of the Sirens* (1931), the viewers are weak *abouleai*-ic bystanders witnessing how a siren 'possesses a more fatal weapon than [their] song, namely ... silence.' This siren-silence compels us to follow Persephone with her *nondum orto jubare* before sunrise's or sunset's shimmering light, when Phoebus has not yet risen (Pound, *Canto XXIX*, 145),<sup>88</sup> or just flickering away to Hades. In Ġoxwa's art sunrise and sunset are one, thereby upsetting the *alba* tradition (fig. 35).

Arising from the ashes and plaster flakes of the Pompeian initiation ceremony in the ruins of the Villa dei Misteri (fig. 36), Ġoxwa's *Wind* flows in and provokes an angst-filled expectation of nothing, a suspension towards nothing in silence, the epiphanic expectation this time anticipating no divine intervention – an expectation of nothing (fig. 37). However, this is not a nothing of emptiness but, echoing Malevich's *Black Square*, an alternative to the emptiness of *drear waste*. Ġoxwa captures a nothing full of resonant and deep completeness against the fetishism of 'Sunset grand couturier' (Pound, *Canto LXXX*, 536), a fading of beauty.<sup>89</sup> Turandot-Salomé like majesty, after the Beheading (fig. 38). Hope against hope. Kierkegaard's (1813-1855) leap into nothing (fig. 39).

<sup>88</sup> Terrell (1993), 117.

<sup>89</sup> See *Canto LXXXI* in Jean-Michel Rabaté, *Language, Sexuality and Ideology in Ezra Pound's Canto* (New York: SUNY Press, 1986), 287-298.

<sup>86</sup> Froula (1983), 140.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.



Fig. 36. Ġoxwa, *Variation of Fruits*, 2005, oil and wax on canvas, 116x89cm, private collection (image courtesy: Ġoxwa)





Fig. 37. Ğoxwa, *Lagoon Marble-ity (Lagoon)*, 2005, oil and wax on canvas, 116x89cm, private collection (image courtesy: Goxwa)



Fig. 38. Ğoxwa, *After the Beheading (Amphitrite)*, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 130x97cm, private collection (photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Goxwa)





Fig. 39. Goxwa, *Hope Against Hope (The Awakening)*, 2012, oil and wax on canvas, 195x97cm, private collection  
(photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Goxwa)



Fig. 40. Goxwa, *Marilyn in the Studio*, 2018, oil and wax on canvas, 195x130cm, private collection  
(photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Goxwa)





Fig. 41. Goxwa, *Marilyn in the Studio*, 2018, oil and wax on canvas, 195x130cm, private collection, detail  
(photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Goxwa)



Fig. 42. Goxwa, *Turandot-Salomé/Artemis-Diana (Angel)*, 2011, oil and wax on canvas, 195x130cm, private collection  
(photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Goxwa)



As already highlighted, Poundian metamorphosis welcomes Bakhtin's idea of chronotopic interculturality which is so deeply characteristic of the poet's intermeshing of all levels of all possible narratives, narratives which have determined and still are determining humankind's definition of its own *species-being*. Torch flames surrounding the Aurunculeia bride evoke Helen's Troy in flames, together with Dido's Carthage inferno. Noh Theatre intermeshed with Kwannon the Goddess of Mercy and the lotus petal, invokes a sub-conscious Turandot image in my mind, meeting Cunizza eloping with Sordello, and Catullus's Roman bride whose 'saffron sandal so petals the narrow foot', lighted by the 'eternal celestial Nile and Iamblichus' light'.<sup>90</sup> These are counterpointed by Ġoxwa's decayed and aged ballet 'sandals', reminiscent of Marilyn Monroe's (1926-1962) image (figs. 40, 41). The Canto's images of sudden light as analysed by Peter Davidson<sup>91</sup> contrast 'with its focus on the destructive potential of desire', a destruction that one can see in Ġoxwa's sandals, and the ensuing Artemis/Diana-Acteon event, which I perceive in Ġoxwa's Turandot-Salomé version of Artemis-Diana (fig. 42).

Pound's Cocteau-esque ideographic style<sup>92</sup> is dominant in this *Canto*, which introduces Artemis-Diana facing the Noh Japanese pine, a 'symbol of permanence'.<sup>93</sup> She is amongst her 'attendant nymphs and is seen as ... agne in the very special sense of inviolate and inviolable virgin with Acteon paying with his life for his glimpse of her divine nakedness'.<sup>94</sup>

Catania as we shall see later, particularly in his *Selve Oscure* series (2006) (figs. 43, 44, 45, 46) and in his *One Fell Swoop* series (2003-2009) (figs. 47, 48, 49, 50) reaches towards these Chinese-Poundian ideograms in which form comes into shape as a regenerative force. At this stage however, the Maltese artist operates on the visuality of the narrative without lessening Agne's destructive dynamism for the depiction of Acteon (figs. 51, 52, 53, 54). Agne's multi-polyphonic meaning includes not only the idea of purity and holiness, but also that of fire in the Sanskrit Fire God Agni who having the absolute power to consume, transform and convey represents cosmic spiritual energy *in continuum* permeating the universe. Pound ideographico-hieroglyphically transposed *Agne* onto Agnese, Ignez, Ines, and Inez re-echoing our previous macabre episode of Ignez da Castro. Through this lineage, Ġoxwa traces an association with *Turandot*. Agnese, Ignez, Ines, Inez, Ignez reappears as 'the goddess of the fair knees' in *Canto XVII*, to 'punctuate the direction of the katabasis'<sup>95</sup> (fig. 55).

Titian (c. 1488/90-1576) and Domenichino (1581-1641) give us two different versions of the Acteon event, the former in 1556, the latter in 1617. In Titian's, the event arrests time as Diana's voiceless gaze, through Ovid, proclaims the fatal 'tell others you have seen me' – an utterance that falls at the exact moment of the dropping of the bow from the hands of a startled and bewildered Acteon. In a flash, the hunting hounds, with only one perceptible due to the appearance of its leash, await voraciously for the next horrific but expected sacrifice of the deer metamorphosis. The Bakhtinian utterance is here

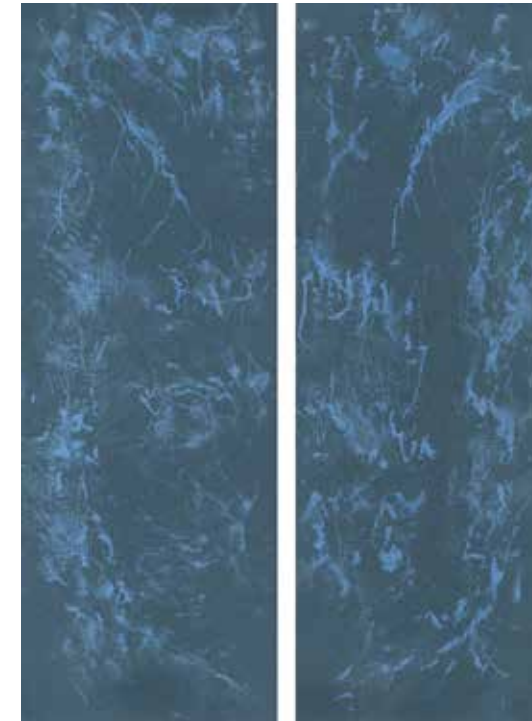


Fig. 43. Anthony Catania, *Wood of the Harpies*, 2000, pastel, 75x110cm, private collection (photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)

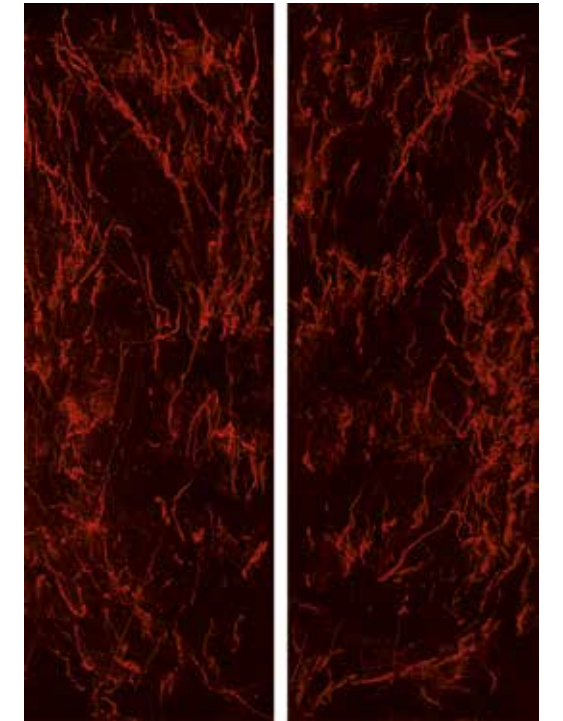


Fig. 44. Anthony Catania, *Wood of the Sullen*, 2000, pastel, 75x110cm, private collection (photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)



Fig. 45. Anthony Catania, *Wood of Wrath*, 2000, pastel, 75x110cm, private collection (photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)

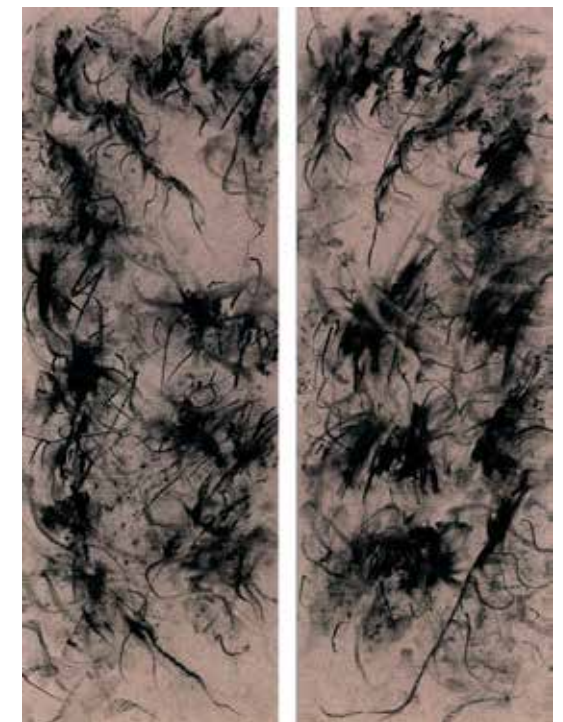


Fig. 46. Anthony Catania, *Wood of Death 2*, 2002, pastel, 75x110cm, private collection (photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)

<sup>90</sup> Bush (1989), 218.

<sup>91</sup> Peter Davidson, *Ezra Pound and Roman Poetry; A Preliminary Survey* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 1995), 79.

<sup>92</sup> See Bush (1989), 11.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>94</sup> Tryphonopoulos (1992), 117.

<sup>95</sup> Tryphonopoulos (1992), 117.





Fig. 47. Anthony Catania, *One Fell Swoop diptych 4*, 2004, pastel, 42x14.25cm, private collection  
(photo: Anthony Catania)



Fig. 48. Anthony Catania, *One Fell Swoop diptych 7*, 2004, pastel, 42x14.25cm, private collection  
(photo: Anthony Catania)





Fig. 49. Anthony Catania, *One Fell Swoop diptych* 26, 2003, pastel, 42x14.25cm, private collection  
(photo: Anthony Catania)



Fig. 50. Anthony Catania, *One Fell Swoop diptych* 17, 2009, pastel, 42x14.25cm, private collection  
(photo: Anthony Catania)





Fig. 51. Anthony Catania, *The Death of Acteon 1*, 2004, oil on canvas, 120x150cm, private collection  
(photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)

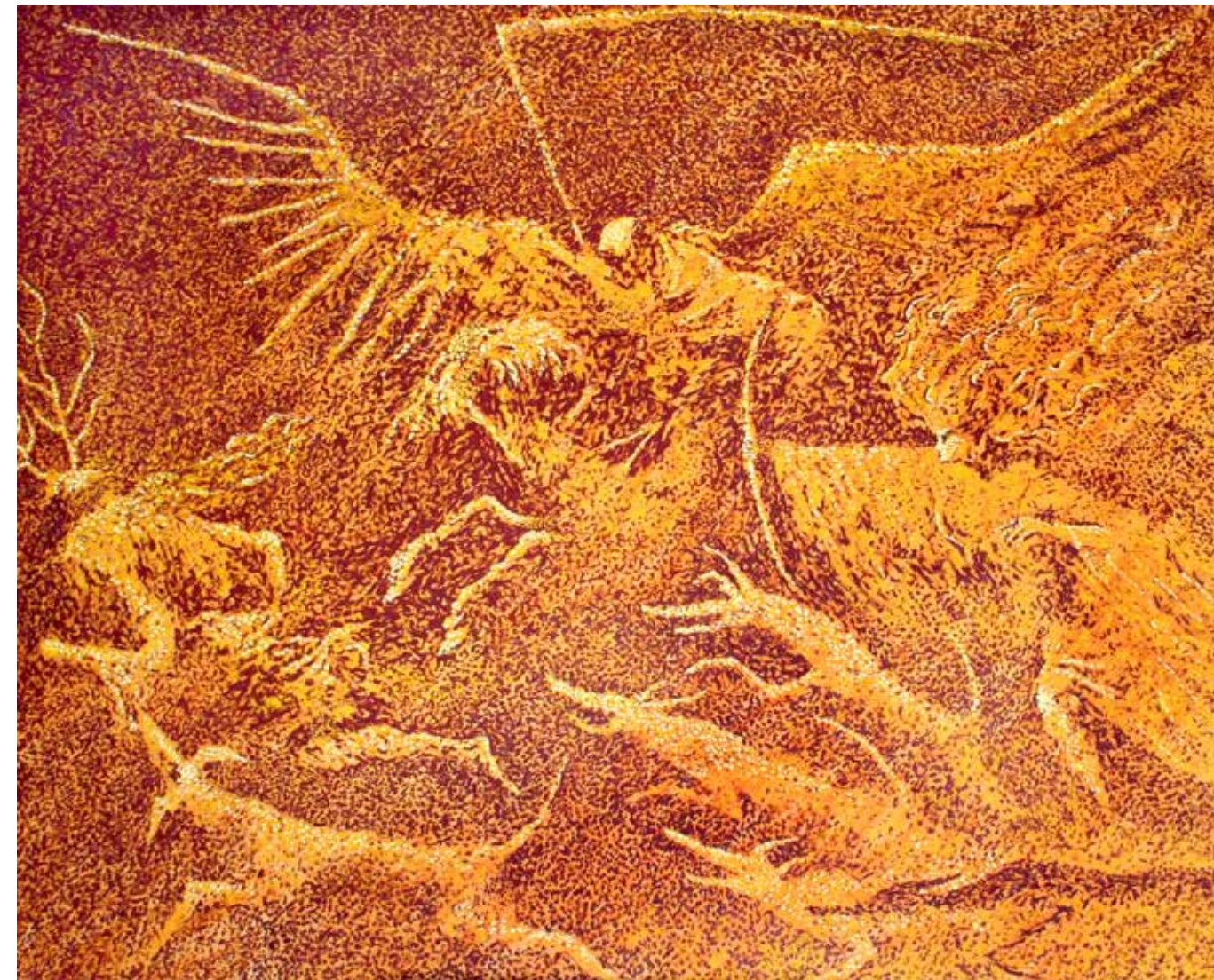


Fig. 52. Anthony Catania, *The Death of Acteon 2*, 2005, oil on canvas, 120x150cm, private collection  
(photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)





Fig. 53. Anthony Catania, *The Death of Acteon 3*, 2004, oil on canvas, 40x50cm, private collection  
(photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)



Fig. 54. Anthony Catania, *The Death of Acteon 4*, 2004, oil on canvas, 40x50cm, private collection  
(photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)



surrounded by a prominent 'sky' of skeletal head and animal skins, totemic proof of what was, what is, and what will be.

Pound intermeshes not only events, heroes, and anti-heroes, cultures, dates, language, texts, and memories but also space-time chronotopes. The Acteon event occurs in the same space of Calypso's cave. One witnesses Calypso's chronotope-ic multiple transfigurations in Ovid's *gargaphie of death* covered, by Titian, in reddened royal-blood. This enflamed rubicund grove opens onto and encapsulates the splashing of water, crystal glass, and light reflections which interweave all such dominant particulars into a work that manifests and, at the same time, transcends the act of looking – turning seeing to knowing – a knowledge that led and leads and will continue to lead towards death. Knowing divinity implies death. With this aim in mind, the *Canto* offers the ritual of 'reunification of the mystes and the divine ... world',<sup>96</sup> through the 'liquid and rushing crystal/beneath the knees of the gods' discussed earlier, and that would evolve in *Canto XC* into 'Gods moving in crystal'.

Domenichino's version infuses Virgil's (70 BC-19 BC) *Aeneid* (19 BC) into the work. It manifests one uncomfortable innocent nymph with its deep Manet *Olympia-Déjeuner* gaze directly staring out at the viewer, disarmingly so, seemingly oblivious to the many 'hunting-hunted' iconic signs erupting behind her back. This transforms us into voyeurs, and also participants partaking not only in Pound's multi-symphonic weaving under the spell of Artemis's curse, but also in Acteon's fate.

This *Canto* reintroduces, in a fascinating manner, what Manet half a century before destroyed, and what a century later Picasso would shatter into refracted fragments. Pound challenged Manet's crude realism (which can also be discerned in some of Goxwa's later works) by making a black cock announce the birth of Aphrodite. According to Froula, who links this part with *Canto XVII*, 'the black cock crowing in the sea-foam parodies the birth of Venus, ironically picturing the origin of beauty in what W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) called the "rag-and-bone shop of the heart".<sup>97</sup> Since the black cock is in fact proclaiming Venus-Aphrodite's birth, I do find Froula's idea quite debatable.

Far from being just a parody, the black cock forms part of three ideograms involved in prophecy, and sacred to Nyx (night), whilst calling dawn.<sup>98</sup> As indicated in the *Cantos Project*, the black cock, in Pound's words 'is not [some] Plymouth rock rooster', but on the contrary 'it is the premonition of the violent destruction passions associated with Aphrodite':

Pound wanted the cock, the bird of dawn and warning, to be 'purely apparitional' and to give a 'hypernatural atmosphere'. Part of this estranging effect is that, after the Botticelli-like scene, the black cock is where radiant Aphrodite might have been seen taking shape in the sea-foam. The discordant image effects a necessary transition to the contrasting episodes of violent passion which follow.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Yeats quoted in Froula (1983), 139.

<sup>98</sup> Akiko Miyake, *Ezra Pound and the Mysteries of Love: A plan for the Cantos* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991), 86; 88-90. See Colin McDowell, "Literalists of the imagination: Pound, occultism and the critics," *Paideuma: Modern and Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* 28, no. 2/3 (Fall/Winter 1999): 7-107.

<sup>99</sup> Moody (2009), 365; 266.

<sup>96</sup> Tryphonopoulos (1992), 179.



Fig. 55. Goxwa, *The Path (The Secret)*, 2010, oil and wax on canvas, 146x114cm, private collection (photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Goxwa)

This is Macbeth's raven, and 'the Raven himself is hoarse'<sup>100</sup> (figs. 56, 57). The cock, as Yeats's *rag and bone*, needs to be considered, as comparison with Yeats's own *katabasis* path – leading him to the past and depths – would also enrich the discussion. As Katherine Worth explains: 'The vision of the "foul rag and bone shop" which Yeats's re-experiencing of his past has drawn out of him is intensely dramatic. As in Pound, his passion as he confronts the awful reality of the mounds of refuse and broken cans, seems about to explode.'

Together with Pound's No-Man one should here recall Beckett's *The Unnamable*, 'when one of the voices reaches a pitch of agitation (having called out earlier "not I").'

'The poet may have lost the ladder that let him climb high up above the discordant litter of life. To lie down among the old cans looks a grim alternative. But the dynamic energy that has rushed into the poem is the best illustration of the poet's reminder – to himself as well as to us – that the foul rag and bone shop is the place where all the ladders start. [...]

Like Beckett, whose characters must all venture down among "the trash" in order to find their right way, Yeats in this poem goes lower only to find new ways of climbing higher.'<sup>101</sup>

It is, in fact, a *katabasis*, without forgetting, however, that in spite of the glittering sun above the 'mud, mud' (*Canto LXXXIX*) is mud and will remain mud. Pound relies on Guido Guinizelli (1230-1276) singing that it is true that the sun beats against the mud, but 'mud it remains' [and the] 'sun does not lose

its ray',<sup>102</sup> and mud will it remain. This bears echoes of the Tarkovsky-Strugatsky brothers' mud-filled open-cave zone as the Chernobyl-Stalker crises of our times bringing the *Cantos* much closer to us: like mud, 'when you look at it, it looks like any other piece of land. The sun shines on it like on any part of the earth. And it's as though nothing had particularly changed in it. Like everything was the way it was thirty years ago' (from Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's *Roadside Picnic*, 1972).

Juxtaposed with this apocalyptic premonition of cosmic disaster, Pound, in his usual ideographic style counterpoints and visits Stefano da Verona's (1374-1451) inverse-proportional space of the *Madonna in hortulo*:

Adige, this thin film of images,  
Across the Adige, by Stefano, Madonna in hortulo,  
As Cavalcanti had seen her  
Cavalcanti: XXXV (to Guido Orlandi)  
Una figura della Donna mia  
s'adora, Guido, a San Michele in Orto,  
che, di bella sembianza, onesta e pia,  
de' peccatori è gran rifugio e porto.  
E qual con devozion lei s'umilia,  
chi più languisce, più n'ha di conforto:  
li nfermi sana e' domon' caccia via  
e gli occhi orbatì fa vedere scorto.  
Sana 'n publico loco gran langori;  
con reverenza la gente la 'nchina;  
d[i] luminara l'adornan di fòri.  
La voce va per lontane camina,  
ma dicon ch'è idolatra i Fra' Minori,  
per invidia che non è lor vicina.

MY Lady's face it is they worship there.  
At San Michele in Orto, Guido mine,  
Near her fair semblance that is clear and holy  
Sinners take refuge and get consolation.  
Whoso before her kneeleth reverently  
No longer wasteth but is comforted;

<sup>100</sup> The words of Lady Macbeth uttered in Act 1 Scene 5.

<sup>101</sup> Katherine Worth, "The Circus Animals' Desertion," in *Studies on W.B. Yeats: Meeting Places of Life, Poetry and Theatre* (Caen: Presses universitaires de Caen, 2012), 239-255.

<sup>102</sup> Guido Guinizelli in Terrell (1993), 530.



Fig. 56. Anthony Catania, *Avian Duel*, 2011, pastel, 40.6x50cm, private collection (photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthon Catania)





Fig. 57. Anthony Catania, *Raven Harpy*, 2001, pastel, 25x31.5cm, private collection (photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)

The sick are healed and devils driven forth,  
And those with crooked eyes see  
straightway straight.  
Great ills she cureth in an open place,  
With reverence the folk all kneel unto her,  
And two lamps shed the glow about her form.  
Her voice is borne out through far-lying ways  
‘Till brothers minor cry: “Idolatry,”  
For envy of her precious neighborhood.<sup>103</sup>

Pound transfers Cavalcanti’s heretic image of his lady love *sive* Madonna, explaining ‘that the miracles worked by the painting of the Madonna of San Michele in Orto (in Florence) are owing [...] not to the Divinity of Madonna’s intervention but [...] to her having been painted with his Lady’s face’.<sup>104</sup> In other words, we also have here an artistic inter-transposition from Cavalcanti’s Madonna onto Stefano’s<sup>105</sup>: a flow of faces and introversions of events happening at the same time, within a paradisiac space of a garden of flowers.

The concept of an enclosed garden tallies well with the mystical-philosophical-aesthetic parameters chosen by Pound: a garden of spirituality counterpointed with the idea of passion and erotic love, a garden which Gōxwa contrarily opens up to the skies (fig. 58). A garden is a source of memory. It is a space in which

Time present and time past  
Are both present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past.  
If all time is eternally present  
All time is unredeemable.<sup>106</sup>

103 Translation by Ezra Pound. “A Draft of XVI Cantos,” *The Cantos Project*, accessed January 15, 2018, <https://thecantosproject.ed.ac.uk/index.php/a-draft-of-xvi-cantos-overview/canto-iv/iv-sources/140-cavalcanti-sonnet-35>.

104 Terrell (1993), 15.

105 Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love: Volume 2: Courtly and Romantic* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), 149.

106 From “Burnt Norton” by T.S. Eliot, cited in Brooker (2018), 154.

The *hortus conclusus*, with its ‘unheard music in the shrubbery’, recovers and brings forth memory. It is derived from the Christian re-reading and appropriation of the erotic *Song of Songs*, in which the enclosed garden, shut off from the earthly world, sheds its original sensual passion, to be transformed from the garden vignette temptation into something symbolic of virginity, the very negation of the *Song*. All plants are now divested of their coital thrust: ‘gilded phaloi of the crocuses [are] thrusting at the spring air and become solid witnesses’, testifying to the purity of the virgin’s enclosed womb.

The paradise garden of the early fifteenth century shows the virgin in the company of saints, meditating in an enclosed garden of spiritual peace, a contrast to carnal gardens of love, where physical and emotional delight is the focus. Stefano da Verona’s different versions Madonna in the Rose Garden, c. 1410 show the Virgin and Child, Mary Magdalene, St Catherine, and several almost incorporeal angels among flowers and birds in a garden.<sup>107</sup>

Like the Icon’s inverse perspective structure as defined by Florensky, which is profoundly adverse to any hint of *quattrocento* spatial illusion, this ‘painting announces its spirituality by offering little suggestion of Renaissance spatial illusion or perspective’.<sup>108</sup>

The *Cantos’* structure itself, like the Madonna icon, reflects the idea of inverse perspective which in Chinese and Egyptian art, according to Florensky:

demonstrates the maturity of their art, and even its senile over-ripeness, rather than its infantile lack of experience. It demonstrates the liberation from perspective, or a refusal from the very

107 Helen Ostovich, “‘Here in this Garden’; The Iconography of the Virgin Queen in Shakespeare’s *Richard II*,” in *Marian Moments in Early Modern British Drama*, ed. Regina Bucola and Lisa Hopkins (London and New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 23.

108 Ibid.



Fig. 58. Ġoxwa, *Maiden in the Garden*, 2012, oil and wax on canvas, 130x81cm, private collection  
(photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Ġoxwa)

beginning to acknowledge its power - a power which ... is characteristic of subjectivism and illusionism - for the sake of religious objectivity and suprapersonal metaphysics<sup>109</sup>

A thesis that adheres perfectly to the philosophy of Pound. Florensky is inciting a return to the arts of antiquity, and Pound to its mysteries. By calling the Eleusinian mysteries back to our existential structure, Pound was, like Florensky, challenging the Modernist neo-Kantian science of the Marburg school which underlined that truth can only be found in the seeing and touching of tangibility, as written by St John. According to critics of this school of thought, 'Reality exists only when and to the extent that science deigns to allow it to exist, giving its permission in the form of a fictitious schema',<sup>110</sup> thus dimming 'divine' aura, and ultimately leading to further blinding.

<sup>109</sup> Florensky (2002), 208.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 217.



## 6. Canto V

I was not expecting to find the subject of an earlier paper of mine, ‘Death in an age when death means nothing’,<sup>111</sup> so manifestly and poetically dealt with in Pound’s *Canto V*. Modern contemporary society has buried gods, mysteries, and death deep in the burial grounds of history making the ‘aura of providence [be] dimly perceived’,<sup>112</sup> if perceived at all. Quite unconsciously, I was reformulating Pound’s portrait of an era in which the blisters of Modernist neon light shroud divine light. One ends up in superfluous inauthentic talk on a ‘divine light in an age when the gods are hidden and poetry discouraged’.<sup>113</sup>

Another beautiful parallel with Florensky arises here. According to the Russian philosopher, when gods are hidden, and providence dimly perceived, spatial demarcation between ‘that other, Gospel world, and this secular one’ is removed.<sup>114</sup> In place of gods and mysteries this removal can only give rise to one alternative, that of an empirical-positivist scientific alliance between the laws of Kantian space and Newtonian mechanics, embodying the ideals of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. These are

consolidated by the usury, according to Pound, and the ultimate victory of commercial prosperity that would bring in the global dominance of post-truth and fake-news. Gods, forms, and perception thereof are forgotten in these gales of commerce.

It is true that a deep relationship between Pound’s thought and that of the Renaissance may be sensed in his work, but in fact, as Moody states: ‘it is a common mistake to assume that Pound looked back to the Renaissance as a golden age when constructive intelligence prevailed’.<sup>115</sup> This clearly draws Pound’s philosophy closer to Florensky’s.

*Canto V* chants that, with the disappearance of awe and worship, ‘Fades the light from the sea’.<sup>116</sup> Gods are forgotten:

Venus falls into the hands of Raphael, Rubens, and Rembrandt ... ‘the metamorphosis into carnal tissue becomes frequent and general somewhere in 1527. The people are corpus, corpuscular, but not in the strict sense “animate”, it no longer radiates, light no longer moves from the eye, there is a great deal of meat, shock absorbing, perhaps --- at any rate absorbent. It has not even Greek marmoreal plastic to restrain it. The dinner scene is more frequently introduced; we have characters in definite act of absorption; later they will be stuffing for expensive upholsteries.’<sup>117</sup>

111 Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, “Death in an age when death means nothing’: Modern and Contemporary Art,” paper presented at the annual Visual Culture of Death symposium, Department of History of Art and the Mdina Biennale, St Peter’s Monastery, Mdina, November 2015.

112 Bush (1989), 220.

113 Ibid., 87.

114 Florensky (2002), 229.

115 Moody (2014), 84.

116 Bush (1989), 124.

117 Pound quoted in Bush (1989), 124.

This attack again recalls Florensky, who whilst debating the different West-East philosophies of perception and perspectives of the unseeable, argued that were it not for the so-called ‘absurd’ measurement ratio between the men involved in this particular event and the space within which they are celebrating The Last Supper, the scene would have been that of a casual dinner between friends relaxing on sofa upholsteries: only Leonardo Da Vinci’s (1452-1519) conscious violation of perspective imparts the transcendence of this happening, what Florensky deems ‘a farewell meal, the significance of an historic, universal event, and the centre of history’.<sup>118</sup> In other words, Florensky’s inverse perspective induces our sight to see the unseeable.

Florensky attempts to explain this development of Pound’s ‘upholsteries’ by his belief that the unseeable has been relegated to a history in which gods are forgotten and which Pound qualifies as a process in which ‘forms are lost and with them the perception of gods in the forms’.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, in Florensky’s words, ‘the Renaissance world-view lacks the elements that would enable it to understand religion. Religion was reduced to morality or to individual feelings, and morality became formal in character ... [losing its spiritual aroma] ...’.<sup>120</sup> Whilst Pound is chanting back to primordial mystery, back to childish awe, Florensky is building the same path through his call for a return towards the ancient philosophy of inverse perspective, the only path back to divine-childish awe. Florensky yearns for ‘a return to childhood,

to childhood layers of understanding, to medieval culture ... in which ... once again the world begins to take on a mystical character.’<sup>121</sup>

In attempting to induce a return to a state of ecstatic childhood, this ritual chant conjures up the power to resist the modern temptation ‘to accept passively the evil conditions of the world’<sup>122</sup> – conditions that, as already described, are fully saturated with fragmentation, deformation, snippets, post-truths and alternative facts ‘falsifying the facts of the past’<sup>123</sup> – that would ultimately ‘get you inexorably lost’.<sup>124</sup>

Similarly to Pound’s characterisation of the Renaissance-Baroque as ‘great deal of meat, shock absorbing upholsteries’, Florensky untiringly underlines how the ‘philosophy of the Renaissance began with the destruction of form as a real principle. This philosophy wished to nullify form, fragmenting the whole into parts...’<sup>125</sup> – causes us to recall that same Pound’s lyric of how forms are lost and with them the perception of gods. According to Pound, this is exactly what Picasso achieved, but rapidly qualifies this by asserting that the Spanish artist’s genius succeeded in this only by ‘chew[ing] through and chew[ing] up a great mass of classicism’.<sup>126</sup> Pound was quite aware of Picasso’s creation-through-destruction genius, so ‘evident in [his] use of primitivism, which *Les Femmes d’Alger* of 1907

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Bush (1989), 217.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 217.

<sup>125</sup> Florensky (2014), 23.

<sup>126</sup> Ira B. Nadel, *The Cambridge Introduction to Ezra Pound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 29.

<sup>118</sup> Florensky (2002), 230.

<sup>119</sup> Bush (1989), 124.

<sup>120</sup> Pavel Florensky, *At the Crossroads of Science and Mysticism: On the Cultural-Historical Place and Premises of the Christian World-Understanding*, ed. and trans. Boris Jakim (New York: Semantron Press, 2014), 74.



Fig. 59. Goxwa, *Stillness (Bernadette)*, 2010, oil and wax on canvas, 146x89cm, private collection (photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Goxwa)



illustrates through its angular bodies with African connotations',<sup>127</sup> an angularity permeating the whole of Pound's epic *Canto*.

According to Nadel, for Pound,

Picasso seemed to dismantle conventional erotic figures, which bodies lacking a formal aesthetic unity through the absence of a conventional perspective ... to make something new is to fashion the unexpected and in the process express unresolved conflicts: Regularity and unity have been rejected by irregularity and fragmentation.<sup>128</sup>

These very same categories of fragmentation, chewing, destruction, and dismantling caused Florensky to define Picasso as a genius poisoned.<sup>129</sup> Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948) and Georgii Chulkov (1879-1939) defined him as a genius 'swayed by Satan himself', and Sergei Bulgakov's (1871-1944) described Picasso works as 'mystical terror verging on horror'.<sup>130</sup> These views prompt us to qualify Pound's statement identifying this with his own process of creation. In a manner quite similar to Picasso's, the poet identified himself as 'a master of those that cut apart, dissect and divide'.<sup>131</sup> Picasso's 'sum of destructions' involved a terrible and invasive yet innovate collage, paralleling Pound's 'minute' detailed intrusions of recorded events and documents pasted outright over the epic journey, very much analogous to the newspaper cryptographic cuttings, clippings, and clues spread across Picasso's works.<sup>132</sup>

127 Ibid., 21.

128 Ibid.

129 Florensky (2002), 59.

130 Ibid., 58.

131 Nadel (2007), vii.

132 See Natasha Staller, *A Sum of Destructions: Picasso's Cultures & The Creation of Cubism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 226-234.

The Pound-Florensky parallelism in relation to the dichotomy between fragmentation and deformation as a means of forgetting the gods is strongly highlighted in the poetics of *Canto V*<sup>133</sup>: multi-fratricides for the good of the state and the resulting falsification of history is transformed into a riddle, where one is constrained either to 'accept traditional explanations, and to be damned; or deduce your own explanation, which might lead you out of the inferno or might get you inexorably lost',<sup>134</sup> that would lead to insanity. The Trojan war motif found in the Pierre de Maensac narrative further links *Canto V* with the Parisina-Ugo idyllic passage of *Canto XXIII*. This, along with multiple metamorphoses into carnal tissue, sexual violence, and murder, is confronted with the neo-Platonic light from 'God's fire'... 'Iamblichus' light ... / 'Et omniformis': Air, fire the pale soft light', which later in *Canto XXIII* becomes 'Et Omniformis', Psellos, 'omnis/ Intellectus est.' God's fire. Gemisto: .... In this divine conflagration, 'every intellect is capable of assuming every shape',<sup>135</sup> reminiscent of, and literally taking us back to, Picasso's eyes and Proteus's seal-like power of metamorphosis, sung in *Canto II*.

Such contra-punctually woven *poiesis* leads us to Liebrechts's assertion that the unity of a poem, and for this discussion also the unity of a painting, in spite of all the fragmentation, lies in us, the co-participants. Our relationship with the painting or poem becomes thus a Bakhtinian co-authoring, a Poundian *chewing*.

133 Bush (1989), 192; 213-217.

134 Ibid., 217.

135 Porphyrios quoted in Terrell (1993), 92.

From this external de-forming destruction and fragmentation of *Demoiselles* and the *Cantos*, defragmentation has to be holistically achieved through an internal *katabasis*, a process of multiple co-authoring that takes place in our minds, a co-authoring with the poet's own personality and worldview being shared. As Liebrechts asserts:

the unity of a poem could ultimately reside in the self or the sensibility of the poet that was being expressed through a seemingly fragmented and impersonal presentation of and references to many myths ... which were all connected and made meaningful in relation to the personality of the poet.<sup>136</sup>

Pound, thus, constructs the Bakhtinian web in which the self-achieves the outsideness it needs to perceive itself through this process of self-transgression, a passing-beyond, a *katabasis* taking the form of *living-oneself-into* the experience of another, and the further corresponding return into the self.<sup>137</sup> Goxwa is taking us there (fig. 59).

136 Liebrechts (2004), 133.

137 Haynes (2013), 144.

## 7. Canto VI

Echoing or mirroring the forgetting of the gods and mysteries in *Canto V*, *Canto VI* manifests a surplus of resulting fragmentation and destruction of humankind which is reflected in the poetic structure of the poem itself. The butchery of poetics is the butchery of reality.

In *Canto VI* one witnesses a ‘wood of death’ which enunciates a continuation of how lust is integrally linked with violence and how murder achieves material power. This is again shown in multi-levelled heteroglossic imagery, this time via Medieval Aquitaine and Eleanor’s adventures, the uneasy alliance with Louis VII of France and Henry II of England, with Saladin wedged into the picture as sung by troubadour Bernart de Ventadorn, so that ‘the enlightened love of beauty shines out for a moment against the blind possessiveness which makes for abuse and war’<sup>138</sup> (fig. 60).

Eleonor and Helen, Troy and Aquitaine are intermeshed into one.<sup>139</sup> One of the central roles here is played by Alessandro de Medici (1511-1537), son of Pope Clement VII (1478-1534). Alessandro was slandered by allegations of being a Moorish slave, who in accepting his ‘death for a doom’<sup>140</sup> is heroically juxtaposed with the ‘greed, duplicity, and internecine

struggle’ that would further lead into the damned Malatesta’s decline throughout *Cantos VIII* to *XI*. These ‘heroes’ are recognised as heroes and hellishly contrasted against others who ‘are not men enough to be damned’,<sup>141</sup> not even enough to be damned. As we shall see later, Malatesta is one that at least has the Eliotian privilege to be damned:

[he] contains the evil forces of his age within him. He is the epitome of the Renaissance condottiere ... possessed qualities of ‘intelligent constructivity’, he was also prone to the condottiere’s two misdirections of will --- violence and luxury ... a bit too ‘Polumetis’, a bit too enthusiastic ‘Poliorcetes’, a taker of cities.<sup>142</sup>

The choice constantly posed is here repeated: to accept passively the evil conditions of reality and be damned, or to deduce your own path towards loss and inferno and into insanity, as was Benedetto Varchi’s (1503-1565) fate,<sup>143</sup> and as, according to me, the plight of Abate Vella (1749-1814) demonstrates strongly enough – as strongly as Pound’s own.

*Canto VI* occupies a weird position in recalling, paradoxically enough, the enigmatic and reputedly fraudulent case of Abate Vella, which occurred at the end of the eighteenth century, and exposed concealed events ousted from the annals of history. It laid bare

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<sup>138</sup> Moody (2009), 406.

<sup>139</sup> Bush (1989), 214.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 217.

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<sup>141</sup> Eliot’s essay on Baudelaire found in Moody (2009), 150.

<sup>142</sup> Bush (1989), 248.

<sup>143</sup> Terrell (1993), 19.



‘the manner in which discrete moments build accurate history as well as genuine art’,<sup>144</sup> so strongly that it has to be consecutively fragmented and destroyed amidst the multi-layered epical path Pound chose to lead the reader through: the path chosen by ‘snippets of the concrete moment and only gradually made history out of contradictions’.<sup>145</sup>

144 Bush (1989), 216.

145 Ibid.



Fig. 60. Anthony Catania, *Wood of Death*, 2001, oil on canvas, 100x150cm, private collection (photo Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)

## 8. Canto VII

In *Canto VII*, one reaches the actual long-awaited disappearance of gods and worship.<sup>146</sup> Eros finds itself drowned in Dido’s grieving lament which echoes that of Agamemnon.<sup>147</sup> Such choral lament makes civilisation’s aesthetic sensitivity rotten.<sup>148</sup> All this rot is manifested by ‘hollow men’ and ‘the image of the desiccated old men and their ‘rattle of old men’s voices’. The fusion of Eleonor, Artemis, and Helen<sup>149</sup> are counterpointed with their choral Purcellian ‘away, away, away’. Through this, one senses the weave of multiple narratives that enhance the rottenness of our *hollowed* aesthetic sensitivity. The other choice: Away, Away [Purcell’s Dido to Aenaes] (fig. 61).

Thy hand, my Anna, darkness shades me,  
On thy bosom let me rest,  
More I would, but Death invades me;  
Death is now a welcome guest.

When I am laid, am laid in earth, May my wrongs create  
No trouble, no trouble in thy breast;  
Remember me, remember me, but ah! forget my fate.  
Remember me, but ah! forget my fate.

This hollowness of Pound’s desiccated old men is tied to a matured cancerous aesthetic rotten sensitivity, transposing the ‘I’ into the rattle of the ‘they’. The

Heideggerian *they*, after years ‘of conforming to the judgments of others, are so atrophied that they are unable to “feel” what is good for them or to know what is beautiful. Pound has no sympathy for them, and feels no horror’,<sup>150</sup> and they are treated as Heidegger’s *perishables*, as Kierkegaard’s faceless masses. They see not. And Pound continues his chant: ‘Ione, dead the long year/ My lintel, and Liu Ch’e’s lintel.’

Ione, a pseudonym for a Miss Nancy Jones, was also the ‘Ione who was the petrified maiden in Bulwer Lytton’s Last Days of Pompeii’,<sup>151</sup> a novel inspired by the Russian painter Karl Briullov’s (1799-1852) painting *The Last Day of Pompeii*.<sup>152</sup>

Nancy Jones, Petrified Maiden, Blind Flower Girl, Ignez, Lin Che, become one.

Again here, one may perceive Pound’s interlacing of personalities from different narratives as he compounds them into a concise chronotopic event

<sup>146</sup> Bush (1989), 124.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>151</sup> Terrell (1993), 31-32.

<sup>152</sup> Terrell offers some background for ‘Pound’s poem “Ione, Dead the Long Year” [P,112], first published in ‘Poetry and Drama’ (London, Dec. 1914), seven years before the first publication of Canto VII. It has been variously pointed out that Landor used the name “Ione” as a pseudonym for a Miss Nancy Jones and also that “Ione” was the petrified maiden in Bulwer Lytton’s ‘Last Days of Pompeii’. There was, however, among the New Freewoman group a beautiful 19-year-old French-born dancer, Jeanne Heyse, going under the professional name Ione de Forest. She committed suicide at her home in Chelsea, on August 2, 1912, which can be fairly described as a “long year” before the publication of Pound’s obituary poem. She reappears in “Dance Figure” [P, 91; cf. Chicago MSS, Dec. 3, 1912] before its publication in ‘Poetry’, II, 1 (April 1913), 1-12, and in ‘New Freewoman’ I, 5 (Aug. 15, 1913), 87-88 [EH]’. Terrell (1993), 31-32.





Fig. 61. Goxwa, *Away, Away (The Echo)*, 2009, oil and wax on canvas, 130x97cm, private collection (photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Goxwa)

that is felt and unified as a singular moment. Echoing, yet radically juxtaposing, Ignez da Castro’s macabre-esque decaying fate, is Li Furen, the Chinese emperor Liu Che’s (Wu-ti, 156-187)

dead mistress who having passed through the various phases of natural decay, ends as a dead leaf clinging to the threshold, from which lowly position Pound elevates her to the lintel, the supporting beam spanning the top of the doorway. In “Liu Ch’e” (P, 108) she was still clinging to the threshold [EH].<sup>153</sup>

Ignez da Castro’s macabre character finds its counterpoint in Liu Ch’e’s clinging leaf (fig. 62).

The leaf ‘clings to the threshold’ in Ezra Pound’s poem *Liu Ch’e*:

The rustling of the silk is discontinued,  
Dust drifts over the courtyard,  
There is no sound of footfall, and the leaves  
Scurry into heaps and lie still,  
And she the rejoicer of the heart is beneath them:

A wet leaf that clings to the threshold.

This last utterance harks back to *Canto IV*’s Cabestan’s *heart in the dish* of his love, and back to Artemis-Diana’s Acteon:

swung for a moment,  
and the wind out of Rhodéz  
caught in the full of her sleeve.  
... the swallows crying:  
‘tis. ‘tis. Ytis!  
Actaeon ...

In *Canto VII*, the brittle leaf becomes the lintel. The lintel becomes the leaf, the leaf is the discontinued silk whispering and rustling. All are transformed in Goxwa’s painting into a leaden heavy rejoicing

of heart under a door-gate heaved shut. Doors, thresholds, and gates are sacred, and in Pound one finds the cave’s sacredness equated to the sacredness of gates and doors<sup>154</sup> which are, as in Gustave Courbet’s (1819-1877) *Origine du monde* (1866), also ritually identified with female genitals: *pecten cteis*, gate of wisdom;<sup>155</sup> thus ‘all gates are holy’ (fig. 63).

In Goxwa’s work is embedded a Balthusian Alice in Wonderland ‘air’ prohibiting, in a rather gravity-less weightiness, the entrance via my series *Doors* to an echo world of *pectin cteis* prohibitions, delving into unknowability.<sup>156</sup>

Goxwa has displaced her earlier archaic walls defined as receptacles of lost memory, to the *Porphyric*<sup>157</sup> doors in my works, of which threshold ‘in ancient times it was not permissible to speak ... [since] ... “divinity who is the principle of the universe is to be worshipped in silence”’.<sup>158</sup> Although these spaces are heavily enclosed, and thus contrast with the openness of her *Young Maiden in Garden*, Goxwa gives a subtext of potential, but essentially futile, openings onto paths which may lead nowhere. The Maltese artist accomplishes this without, however, losing her previous wall language-structure and character. She transforms these threshold-doors into her characteristic solid walls. These encompass the whole canvas and fascinatingly highlight elements

<sup>154</sup> Tryphonopoulos (1992), 113.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>156</sup> Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, “Inverse, Reverse Perspective as Subversive Perspective in Florenskij’s Silent Mutiny,” *Measuring Divinity: Pavel Florenskij’s Integral Vision of the Finite and the Infinite*, Inter-Faculty Colloquium, Faculty of Theology, University of Malta (6-7 November 2017).

<sup>157</sup> Tryphonopoulos (1992), 113.

<sup>158</sup> Thomas Taylor quoted in ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Reference to the poem *Lo-yeh ai-ch’an ch’u* in Terrell (1993), 32.





Fig. 62. Anthony Catania, *Wood of Suicides*, 2001, pastel, 75x110cm, private collection  
(photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)



Fig. 63. Goxwa, *Behind the Door*, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 146x114cm, private collection  
(photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Goxwa)



that powerfully echo Pound's ambience of 'plaster flakes, Mantegna painted the wall' introducing the wall-hanging *arras* scene of the Canto below.

Unlike Balthus' (1908-2001) sombre alba-*ghabex* tonalities, Ġoxwa's impenetrable blocked-out space is nonetheless endowed with light; a light that sheds no light or shadow except its own. Ġoxwa is re-articulating Pound's Medieval philosophy of light as transcendental knowledge. It is a light that sheds no light via the bulb in the 'rag-and-bone shop of the heart'. It is simultaneously an unreal shadow of the bulb, itself stemming from some other mysterious light: the seeing and the unseeable meet at Ġoxwa's crossroads of light. A Poundian enchantment of light in the electric bulb is fascinatingly encountered. This evokes not only Pound's 'thought of the current hidden in the air',<sup>159</sup> but also Florensky's hidden magnetic forces which, although hidden, are the dominant category defining the magnet, as much as the unseen current is determining and qualifying our seeing.

The effortless flight touching both vertical matrixes with the child's thrown gaze and the sensed isolated force creates the tension needed to compose and establish the mystical balancing act. The only Newtonian gravitational pull on the skirt, which is Pound's 'wet leaf that clings to the threshold', being drawn towards the lower centre creates the only erotic drive, that harking back to Balthus and his *Wuthering Heights* illustrations (1933).

Whereas in Balthus's work one senses a crystal-clear Malatesta gaping manifesto of lustful eroticism, in Ġoxwa's art we see an erotic illusionary Medieval innocence, an innocence, however, not less devious nor less inviting. As Alexander Adams underlines, one

should not 'downplay the violence and provocation apparent in Balthus's early work... distinctly disturbing in tone ... explicitly aggressive The Guitar Lesson'.<sup>160</sup> In Ġoxwa's compositions one senses expectation of an invitation, while in Balthus one experiences an explicit invitation of 'unwanted desires'<sup>161</sup> for Pound's *pectin cteis*. The closed door provokes an expectation for a divine encounter via suppressed lust in her work, which does make it more paedophilic than Balthus's 'disquieting ambiguity'. Unlike Ġoxwa, Balthus was manifesting a clear consensual empowerment which is all too blatantly evident and unblemished, even if 'illicit ... with the certain knowledge of the guilt and soul-searching that will ensue'.<sup>162</sup>

Ġoxwa manifests the 'twinkling' baroque moment, the very second, the split second, just before the violent and invasive attack that shatters the pseudo-innocence, perplexedly and uncomfortably witnessed. It is the last second of lightness and non-gravity foreseeing the resultant heaviness. From *Canto VII* we recall 'what have we now of her?' The result is a Monroe-Bernadette fusion (fig. 64).

Here we have a decomposing, mouldy, decaying Monroe-Ignez da Castro image, completely divested of the Warholian pop, advert pin-up art (fig. 65): the rot is scented.

What is fascinating about this point is that Andy Warhol (1928-1987), in spite of his pop, Adornesque culture-industry marketable implementation of an icon, oxymoronically succeeded in portraying exactly the opposite – that is the decaying of an entire civilisation in front of our very eyes: 'the Pound

<sup>160</sup> Alexander Adams, "Testing ethical boundaries," *The Art Newspaper* 261 (October 2014), 81.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*



Fig. 64. Ġoxwa, *Marilyn*, 2014, oil and wax on canvas, 146x89cm, private collection (photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Ġoxwa)

<sup>159</sup> Froula (1983), 158.



ebony stillness of Venice'. Goxwa confronts us with a concrete decay in process, as that caused by leprosy, which in her works' texture does recall Nicolas de Staël's (1914-1955) *Nu debout (Standing Nude)* (1953). She de-iconises the icon, giving the figure quite a de-sexualised form especially in the heaviness of the breasts, previously iconic and enticing, now shingling away with age. By exaggerating and deforming the ratio of the buttocks with the rest of the figure, Goxwa deepens the deterioration of flesh. To this waning of the icon she further adds a very weird aspect by adding ballet shoes, an echo of previous child-lightness and abandonment, to the figure now



Fig. 65. The iconic photo of Marilyn Monroe arriving at Ciro's nightclub for a soirée celebrating Louella Parsons, published in the November 1954 issue of *Modern Screen* (image source: Wikimedia Commons)

turning into sheer dermis. She, in this way, confronts Pound's 'saffron sandal so petals the narrow foot' with these carp-infested ballet shoes.

Goxwa subliminally defies Warhol's consumerist matter-of-fact-ness to instead project a poetic statement on the prosaic 'messiness of everyday life'<sup>163</sup>: Yeats's 'rag-and-bone shop of the heart'. In fact, the ballet shoes imply a certain lightness of flight, which in Goxwa's work seem to give a rather Bakhtinian grotesque yet prosaic aspect to the heaviness and rot of the scene.

Goxwa bestows on us a Sophoclean *Women of Trachis* de-iconised icon. She unravels the stories, legends, and fables, in quite a Poundian manner, around Monroe-Herakles. As in the case of Herakles, Monroe in the hands of the artist 'is tricked into burning [her] own skin ... and as (she) strips (she) demands that we look upon (her)ruined body'<sup>164</sup> demanding, as Auguste Rodin's (1840-1917) *La Belle qui fut heaulmière (The Old Courtesan)* (1885) does, 'to now go and tell you know me', This yet again recalls Acteon's fate, and is very much in line with Apollo punishing Marsyas for his victory by openly and publicly flaying him alive (fig. 66).

<sup>163</sup> Haynes (2013), 20.

<sup>164</sup> Swift (2018), 149.



Fig. 66. Anthony Catania, *The Flaying of Marsyas*, 2004, oil on canvas, 40x50cm, private collection (photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)



## 9. Canto VIII

A protagonist in *Canto VIII* is Piero della Francesca (c.1415/20-1492),<sup>165</sup> as the *Maestro di pentore*, alongside Fra Angelico (c.1400-1455) participating, at different times, in the creation of the Malatesta-paganised Santa Maria-San Francesco space known as *Tempio*. Piero della Francesca's humanism and his mathematical perspective – which was directly challenged by Florensky's inverse perspective of the divine – was well-known to Malatesta, who was recognised by all as the incarnation of evil of the time. He was thus called due to his ambitions to sustain and establish, it seems, the pervasive ideas of the Neoplatonist Plethon,<sup>166</sup> who proposed a radical reorganisation of Byzantium and a new system of philosophy with which 'he hoped to replace the Christian religion and help restore Greece to her ancient glory'.<sup>167</sup>

In fact, in *Canto VIII* (31) and in the *Pisan Cantos*, Pound directly points to the relationship between Plethon's notions about Poseidon and the sculpted aquatic scenes in the *Tempio*.<sup>168</sup> This return to Greek antiquity throughout the Malatesta cantos has the same aura of Picasso's collages and newspaper cuttings. Notwithstanding, Pound, according to Bush,

had at different stages rejected 'as indecorous' this Cubist 'inclusivity' previously experimented with in his *Gaudier-Brzeska*.<sup>169</sup> I do find this assertion rather perplexing, especially when taking into account the continuous and consistent Cubist-collage character of Pound's writings, not only in this particular *Canto* but in the whole epic. These are imbued with letters and historical documents *scattered* throughout, as underlined by Bush himself, which makes them partake of a Cubist rendition.<sup>170</sup> The vocal shifts and verbal collage in Pound are parallel to, and even reflective of, Picasso's visual shifts and textual collages together with his *objet-trouvé* textual intrusion into visuality. This makes both artists' creative praxis quite mutually heteroglossic. Moreover, Pound's and Picasso's works bear unavoidable links with other texts such as Joyce's *Ulysses* and Eliot's *The Waste Land*, both published in 1922.

Going back to the *Canto*, the dominant line of lust is felt in the word 'arras' which alerts us both to the lintel threshold door aura discussed in the previous Canto, and obviously to the recognition that the two lovers of this scene, who appear also in Canto *XXIII*, are Parisina Malatesta and Ugo Aldobrandino (1405-1425). This *Canto*, which unites the evolution of the Este family throughout *Cantos VIII, XX, XXIV*, culminating

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<sup>165</sup> Terrell (1993), 38.

<sup>166</sup> Tryphonopoulos (1992), 139.

<sup>167</sup> Milton V. Anastos, "Pletho's Calendar and Liturgy," *Doumbarton Oaks Papers* 4 (1948): 186-269, 186, cited in *ibid.*, 140.

<sup>168</sup> Tryphonopoulos (1992), 139.

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<sup>169</sup> Bush (1989), 249.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

in *Canto XXVI*,<sup>171</sup> bridges the Eleonor and Ignez da Castro narratives with Aphrodite and the Trojan war. Heteroglossic and seismic shifts juxtaposed with Malatesta and the *Tempio* are reiterated.

And tell the Maestro di pentore  
That there can be no question of  
His painting the walls for the moment,  
As the mortar is not yet dry  
And it wd. be merely work chucked away  
(buttato via)  
But I want it to be quite clear, that until the chapels are ready  
I will arrange for him to paint something else  
So that both he and I shall  
Get as much enjoyment as possible from it,  
And in order that he may enter my service  
And also because you write me that he needs cash,  
I want to arrange with him to give him so much per year  
And to assure him that he will get the sum agreed on.  
You may say that I will deposit security  
For him wherever he likes.  
And let me have a clear answer,  
For I mean to give him good treatment  
So that he may come to live the rest  
Of his life in my lands –  
Unless you put him off it –  
And for this I mean to make due provision,  
So that he can work as he likes,  
Or waste his time as he likes  
(affatigandose per suo piacer o no  
Non gli mancherà la provizione mai)  
never lacking provision.  
Sigismundus Pandolphus De Malatestis  
In campo Illus. Domini Venetorum die 7  
aprilis 1449 contra Cremonam

Pound’s Cubist-Vorticist collages and shifts do not terminate with this example. Piero della Francesca and the paganised *Tempio* are here further juxtaposed with the event concerning Mehmed II (1432-1481) and Matteo de’ Pasti (1420-1428).<sup>172</sup> What Cevizli calls a

match between the *Terrible Turk* and the *Citizen of Hell*<sup>173</sup> infuriated the Venetians who, in 1461, precisely before the Ottoman-Venetian war, arrested Pasti in Crete when on his way to Istanbul. A painter but also a fortification expert, Pasti was burdened with Roberto Valturio’s (1405-1475) *De Re militari* (1472), as a gift to the ostensible enemy, the Sultan. He was accused, by the Venetians, of being in league with the Turks. Little did it matter that a few years later in 1479 during Ottoman landings in Lepanto and Veneto, Venice sent its own Gentile Giovanni Bellini (1430-1516) on a similar mission.

This failed mission of Pasti’s, accomplished thereafter by the Venetian Gentile Bellini, underlines the Machiavellian nature of Italian inter-statal tensions and contradictions immortalised in recent times by Orhan Pamuk’s (b. 1952) *My Name is Red* (1998).

Piero della Francesca commemorated the Malatesta dynasty in his fresco at the *Tempio* in the Chapel of Relics. The Tempio had been transformed from a Christian space dedicated first to Santa Maria and later to St Francis, and was ultimately a project ‘for the beautifying of a tempio’. It was a multi-pagan mausoleum dedicated to Isotta-Helen, as a temple ‘so full of pagan works’ reflecting the ‘past ruined Ilion Helen lives’ (from W.S. Landor’s (1775-1864) poem to Ianthe).<sup>174</sup>

173 Antonia Gatward Cevizli, “Mehmed II, Malatesta and Matteo De’ Pasti: a match of mutual benefit between the ‘Terrible Turk’ and a ‘Citizen of Hell’,” *Renaissance Studies* 31, no. 1 (February 2017): 43-65.

174 Piero della Francesca’s fresco shows ‘Sigismundo V, 1368-1437, Holy Roman Emperor (1433-1437) of the House of Luxemburg. In the fall of 1433 he was crowned emperor in Rome by the pope. On his way back north he stopped at Rimini where, being received with elaborate ceremony, he knighted both Sigismondo and his youngest brother Domenico.’ Terrell (1993), 43. See also Birgit Laskowski, *Piero della Francesca* (Cologne: Könemann, 1998), 70-85.

171 Tryphonopoulos (1992), 133.

172 Terrell (1993), 54.

# 10. Cantos IX-X

Evolving the *Tempio* theme of the previous *Canto*, Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) and Agostino di Duccio (1418-1481) figure in *Canto IX*, which opens with major epic episodes in Sigismondo’s adventures, the former as the architect of the *Tempio*, and the latter having worked on the bas-reliefs of the same *Tempio*.

The historical context of this particular Canto brings in Pound’s attempt to show how poetry must be made a mirror of history and, according to Froula, ‘*not a fictional transcendence of*’,<sup>175</sup> but an actual event of history, very much what Picasso visually succeeded in doing with his *Guernica* (1937). With this objective in mind, Pound was showing how the history of truth and the history of falsity are continuously being challenged by a history of tempestuous waves and flows that impinge on memory and presence. This is sustained by an illusion that ‘by unveiling the obscurities concealing memory, one can arrive at some kind of truth through a revival of memory, a revival that is provoked by the creative act of art which helps us to perceive reality holistically’.<sup>176</sup> This

175 Froula (1983), 143.

176 See Hayden White’s analysis of the intricate relationship between historiography and power delves deeper into this inference, together with the work of Michael Baxandall and Hans Belting with regard to the art historical discipline. See Hayden White, “Modernism and the Sense of History,” *Journal of Art Historiography* 15 (December, 2016): 1-15, accessed August 8, 2018, <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2016/11/white.pdf>. See also Michael Baxandall, “The Language of Art History,” *New Literary History* 10, no. 3 (April, 1979): 453-465; and Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art?*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

possibility of revival is based on the Bergsonian belief that since perception is ‘impregnated with memory-images which complete it as they interpret it’,<sup>177</sup> interpreting reality is nothing but the recalling of missed or forgotten facts.

Lack of memory, forgetting the past, forgetting gods, together with a lack of written, visual, or oral sources, are vital tools for the sustaining of power structures. This is the reason why Pound’s daring poetic objective as a mirror of non-fictional history is difficult to comprehend when, furthermore, as Julian Barnes (b. 1946) puts it in *The Sense of an Ending* (2011), ‘History is that certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation.’<sup>178</sup> Pound was quite precise when he poetically and dauntlessly asserted how:

despotism or absolute power ... unlimited sovereignty, is the same in a majority of a popular assembly, an aristocratical council, and oligarchical junto, and a single emperor, equally arbitrary, bloody, and in every respect diabolical. Wherever it has resided has never failed to destroy all records, memorials, all histories which it did not like, and to corrupt those it was cunning enough to preserve ...’ (*Canto XXXIII*).

177 Brooker (2018), 37.

178 Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending* (London: Vintage, 2011), 17.





Fig. 67. Anthony Catania, *Wood of Silence*, 1998, pastel, 70x120cm, private collection  
(photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)

Pound poetically again contrasts this with Emperor Wu Wang's 'historians [who] left blanks in their writings, I mean for things they didn't know' (*Canto XIII*).

Imperfections meet inadequacies. These imperfections of memory impinge on rational analysis because meaning, interpretation, and assessment, are historical-power concepts, which are *imposed* structures of thought, and therefore create specific pre-determined thought. Against this engineering of thought and memory, Pound and Picasso are counter-offering their deconstructive, destructive-juxtaposition of multiple-heteroglossic events, and a Bakhtinian chrono-calliope imagery reflecting a Deleuzian flow-in-history, as an affronting alternative to such imposition. This polyphonic flow of history is closer to truth. As Pound asserts, 'we do NOT know the past in chronological sequence. It may be convenient to lay it out anesthetized on the table with dates pasted on here and there, but what we know we know by ripples and spirals eddying out from us and from our own time (GK, 60)'.<sup>179</sup> This Poundian imagery of truth placed on a surgical table strongly parallels Lado Gudiashvili's (1896-1980) *Beauty* laid out on the same table: as though beauty or truth can be surgically discerned! The Georgian artist's etching *Quest for the Secret of Beauty* (1942), and Pound's poetic historiographic aesthetic beautifully defy the imposition of hegemonic engineering of thought.

Through such engineering, the admonition of Truth and the Divine, as in the beginning of the *Cantos*, are yet again unheeded. The admonishing appearance of the eagle is not heeded, unlike '*li antichi cavalier romanij davano fed a quisti annutii*',

at the end of *Canto X* and at the beginning of *Canto XI*, are not heeded.<sup>180</sup> Mankind is blinded by the thought-engineering process. It cannot see the unseeable. This unseeability is here linked with Pound's 'Until the eagle lit on his tent pole' which shifts us not only back to the black cock above and to Macbeth's raven, but also to the *Canto V ciocco*, the omen-sparks that fly up on striking a burning log,<sup>181</sup> attesting, moreover, to a drastic whirl in sands and fortune. Confronting such human blindness, Divinity reacts through cosmic silence and punishes us by silence (fig. 67).

*Stupro, coede, adulter,  
homicidia, parricidia ac periurus,  
presbitericidia, audax, libidinosus,  
wives, jew-girls, nuns, necrophiliast,  
fornicarium ac sicarium,  
proditor, raptor, incestuosus, incendiaries, ac  
concubinarius ...  
fattore di monete false, sodomitico, uxoricido ...*

are met with silence.

<sup>179</sup> Pound quoted in Froula (1983), 142.

<sup>180</sup> Bush (1989), 248.

<sup>181</sup> Pound quoted in Terrell (1993), 17.

# 11. Cantos XI-XII

From above the actual space of the Verona Arena fused with the Diocletian Roman Theatrum,<sup>182</sup> *Cantos XI* and *XII* are a meditation on the mushrooming of historical events realised from that very theatre stage, a stage upon which many events were brought into fruition. This contemplative act gradually introduced the Dantesque damned sodomite-usurer theme encapsulated in *Canto XII* within the intriguing Bakhtinian-Joycean Bloomesque character of Baldy Bacon. The latter, characterised as ‘a low-life alter ego of Odysseus and Malatesta’,<sup>183</sup> recalls Brecht’s Macheath’s mercantile-financial machinations. Furthermore, it relates to Quinn’s obscene story about sodomy,<sup>184</sup> one which equates financial usurious actions with the act of sodomy. Such ludicrous Bataillean sublimity can be sensed and seen in Attard’s *Life and Passion* series of etchings (1992) and in Gustave Flaubert’s (1821-1880) *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881) as a ‘vomitorium’<sup>185</sup> in farce.

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182 Terrell (1993), 59.

183 Bush (1989), 249.

184 Ibid., 250.

185 Julian Barnes, “Flaubert C’Est Moi,” *The New York Review of Books* (May 25, 2006), accessed October 3, 2019, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2006/05/25/flaubert-cest-moi/>.



## 12. Canto XIII

*Canto XIII* opens the collaged gates to and from the East, an opening that proclaims the harbinger of ‘order, jen, sympathy’,<sup>186</sup> ‘perfection’, and ‘true virtue’,<sup>187</sup> without which music ‘fit for the Odes’ cannot be played. These Eastern gates are now positioned for battle against the contemporary rebellious doctrine of relativism. This twentieth-century relativism, which triumphed on the ashes of Western European culture, on the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Enlightenment’s indisputable faith in scientific empirical reason,<sup>188</sup> was ferociously manifested gladiator-like in the Bergson-Einstein debate, contemporary to Pound’s sojourn in Paris. Pound’s poetic attack against twentieth-century relativism, one that did not, however, make him a proponent of the Catholic position that was close to his own idea of order and absolutism, foresaw not only Le Corbusier’s (1887-1965) and Amédée Ozenfant’s (1886-1966) post-Cubist philosophy of Purist Order, but also looked forward to the thought of Austrian philosopher Paul Feyerabend (1924-1994), as particularly expressed in his *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (1975).

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<sup>186</sup> Froula (1983), 148-149.

<sup>187</sup> Bush (1989), 138; 250.

<sup>188</sup> Froula (1983), 149.

We are hence conveyed back to an idyll of ‘pure order’ that existed before the fall, evocating the ‘golden world’ before nature had fallen under the hands of technology and engineering:

The blossoms of the apricot  
blow from the east to the west  
And I have tried to keep them from falling.

Pound’s chant implies a state of natural increase and divine tranquillity.<sup>189</sup> At the same time, and in a manner similar to the repetitive admonition throughout the *Cantos* to be prepared to see what is unseeable, here one finds the poet admonishing the futility of Modernism in its endeavour to challenge and to control nature, fate, *and* the divine. The *Canto*, recalling Acotes, rebukes and cautions not to ‘protest against the leaves falling in autumn’.<sup>190</sup> It also recalls the ‘wet leaf that clings to the threshold’ between heaven and earth (fig. 68).

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<sup>189</sup> Bush (1989), 251.

<sup>190</sup> Pound quoted in Froula (1983), 150.



Fig. 68. Goxwa, *Between Heaven and Earth (Between Sea and Sky)*, 2008, oil and wax on canvas, 130x97cm, private collection (image courtesy: Goxwa)

## 13. Cantos XIV-XV-XVI

Accompanied by the sirens' song of *Cantos XIV* and *XV*, Pound takes the reader back to Hell.<sup>191</sup> There one meets the choir of perverts, those fallen through money-lust, and other offenders rioting against the Plotinus's *Nous*.<sup>192</sup> We encounter perverts, who are requalified by Pound not only as usurers of money, but also of language, and of nature. All these perversions and their perpetrators tie in with *Canto II*, in which sailors abuse a natural human bond for money ... with *Canto III* in which CID foils the moneylenders, with *Canto IX*, in which the Tempio stands as an image of what was possible in a 'Europe not YET rotted by usury', and with *Canto XIII* which connects the well-kept state with language that does not lie ....<sup>193</sup>

The epoptic guidance of Plotinus leads Pound, and the reader, *out* from the hell of London in *Canto XIV*, 'just as Virgil lead Dante through the Inferno',<sup>194</sup> onto the still hellish border line of the *Purgatorio* in *Canto XVI*, which, in my opinion, does not seem to be a lesser hell. In *Canto XIV*, humankind is thrown 'into a place where the light has died out', as Dante described it in the first line of the *Inferno*, reflecting the banal nefarious horror of the spiritual desert that late capitalism, evolving through the second decade of the twentieth century, had created,

according to Pound.<sup>195</sup> This usury hell finalises what is ultimately unfinalisable,<sup>196</sup> that is, finalising creativity as a species-being act, a finalising by which creativity dies, thus making art characterless. Since the *Canto's* usury perversions are not only of a mercantile nature but also flow into perversions of language and nature, then the sinister darkness sung by Pound here includes the emptiness of the desert found now in language and nature. Language emptiness uproots art from its very foundation, transforming it into a characterless act. Art becomes characterless due to usury culture.

This 'characterless-ness', as debated by Giovanni Cremona (b. 1918) in his analysis of early twentieth-century Maltese art, is linked to an economic situation that is paradoxically distinctive enough and that can aid us in delving deeper into some kind of understanding of an island art liminally cobwebbed into cosmopolitanism. This category of characterless-ness, which I have discussed in various publications, is not an abstract concept.<sup>197</sup> It can still be witnessed, and tangibly so today. When witnessed in small but

<sup>191</sup> Tryphonopoulos (1992), 109.

<sup>192</sup> Moody (2014), 82.

<sup>193</sup> Froula (1983), 151.

<sup>194</sup> Tryphonopoulos (1992), 91-92.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>196</sup> Haynes (2013), 36.

<sup>197</sup> See Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, *Metal and Silence: The quest for daringness and authenticity in the arts* (Qormi: Horizons, 2019) and Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, "Isla, Insula, Insularity and the Arts. With a Footnote on St Paul and Sancho Panza – The relationship between the Maltese art scene and the development of modern art," in *Insularity: Representations and constructions of small worlds*, eds. Katrin Dautel and Kathrin Schödel (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2016), 267-275.



significant detail, it is understood more clearly. The following examples amongst others can give us an intriguing picture. This might take the discussion off on a temporary tangent from the dominant theme under study, but its importance is such that I do feel its inclusion to be vital.

So many are the examples to sustain this concrete category of characterless-ness, which according to Pound is tied with a usury culture. A recent example is the removal of the original Latin text from the University of Malta emblem to now show an empty book with blank pages, a telling gesture. This Modernist and Postmodernist post-truth aura was still further enhanced by another example that mirrors the situation dealt with here, that is, the plastic material utilised to render the very same image of the prestigious emblem at the entrance to the University, done in a pseudo-stained-glass fashion. Beyond comprehension yet, after reading Pound, quite comprehensible if one understands Pound's insistence on seeing the unseeable and the plight ensuing from the forgetting of gods, is the same university's official prohibition against using terms such as 'to analyse', 'to know' and 'to understand'. A university stemming from the Humanist-Renaissance spirit of sixteenth and seventeenth-century scholarship has finally succumbed to a grotesque situation in which it is itself prohibiting the very use of such language. This fake-news stage of humanity can be beautifully contrasted, and violently so, to Pound's *Canto LIV* where he quotes how Chinese stone tablets 'and the books were incised in stone/ 46 tablets set up at the door of the college'<sup>198</sup> so as to eternalise the rooted quest for knowledge.

<sup>198</sup> Ezra Pound, *Confucius* (New York: A New Directions Book, 1969), 11.

Pound attributes this anti-development to the economic situation, particularly the predominant power of usury economics. The way one earns one's daily bread within a socio-economic context determines one's way of thinking. The how of eating determines the how of thinking, and thus of creating. The actual means of subsistence form a particular way of thinking and behaviour. A radically novel way of how a society materially subsists and how it engenders its own existence necessarily provokes a new way of thinking, behaving and creating. A particular mode of producing and sustaining one's existence induces a corresponding way of seeing the world, a way of structuring one's thoughts, and thereby of creation. The unprecedented economic industrial globalised market begotten by the bourgeois-capitalist mode of production throughout these last three centuries ushered in a new language, a new language that slowly but assuredly seeped into a new human way of thinking: an evolution that has now, during its post-imperialist globalised autocratic monopoly, reached an epic form with Information Technology culture and with digital 'cut and paste' thinking.

Such correspondence between material sustainability and thought is neither linear nor uniform. It flows conflictually together with a multiple dis-levelling of the same status amongst different cultures and societies. Developed capitalist societies imposed a system in which unfettered enormous material production and continuous invention were directed towards global material richness and investment of profit in further production, deeper creative inventiveness, and further profit, a point is nonetheless reached in which profit itself is transformed into the material objective and aim. Money loses its *techne* feature in having been a means for the development of human skill towards producing,

creating, generating, inventing, [re-]constructing, and thus enriching mankind's habitat. Money transfigures itself into its own profit-making aim, surpassing, however, the actual previous link with the material enrichment's objective. Thus, money becomes money to produce money. Money is fetishised and ascribed a 'divine' purpose. Historically, this stems from what is known as a pre-capitalist mode that was based on the bartering system and now, however, with money transfigured from its original exchange function into its own masturbatory objective of money for money's sake, money becomes an object itself to be bartered produced, essentially, nothing. The money-to-money status is one that engendered a fetish production of nothing except itself – that is, money producing money, that is, usury which Pound, and Dante for that matter, equated with sodomy.<sup>199</sup>

<sup>199</sup> Usury is thus a form of interest-bearing capital characteristic of precapitalist formations and originating during the period of the breakdown of the primitive communal system. Industrial capital, which is based on material tangible means of production, in producing wealth finds itself aggressively confronted by the world of bank loans, stocks and bonds, which transform themselves into *the* exclusive legal claims on wealth. However, such financial claims do not themselves create the surplus directly, which is the direct result of industrial capital, but they are like 'sponges absorbing the income and property of debtors – and [they] expropriate this property when debtors (including governments) cannot pay. "Usury centralises money wealth," Marx elaborated. "It does not alter the mode of production, but attaches itself to it as a parasite and makes it miserable. It sucks its blood, kills its nerve, and compels reproduction to proceed under even more disheartening conditions. ... usurer's capital does not confront the laborer as industrial capital," but "impoverishes this mode of production, paralyzes the productive forces instead of developing them"' (Michael Hudson, "From Marx to Goldman Sachs: The fictions of fictitious capital," michael-hudson.com (2010), accessed March 4, 2019, <https://michael-hudson.com/2010/07/from-marx-to-goldman-sachs-the-fictions-of-fictitious-capital1/>) Usurer's capital does not create nor does it define a mode of production, but on the contrary it 'exploits a given mode of production', as written by Marx. It has an inherent existential need to preserve the existing economic and political relations and to act as a parasite within the existing framework. A radical change in this framework blocks the vital nerves of *usuria*. Usurer's capital survived under the conditions of capitalist production, particularly in countries and economic sectors where capitalist commodity relations were relatively weakly developed: 'The more insignificant the role played by circulation in social reproduction, the more usury flourishes' (See Karl Marx, *Kapital*, Moscow: Izdatelstvo Politicheskoi Literaturi, 1975, 648-668). This is quite a Maltese situation and it is exactly this usury-culture that produces the characterlessness of Maltese (and not only) art.

In his famous *Canto XLV* Pound defined *usuria* as 'a charge for the use of purchasing power, levied without regard to production; often without regard to the possibilities of production. (Hence the failure of the Medici bank.)'<sup>200</sup>

Pound is singing that since the mode of sustenance determines the mode of thinking and creating, the non-production of material wealth cannot produce works of art. The economic structure qualifies and defines the artistic infrastructure. The deeply historically engrained usurious character of Maltese economy in history can help us to understand Malta's artistic status. With Pound's help, this gives a new dimension, albeit a debatable one, to the Maltese situation. Before going back to the main path of our present discussion one has to clarify this *usura*-art relationship by listening into Pound's *Canto XLV* psalm:

With Usura

With usura hath no man a house of good stone  
each block cut smooth and well fitting  
that design might cover their face,  
with usura  
hath no man a painted paradise on his church wall  
harpes et luz  
or where virgin receiveth message  
and halo projects from incision,  
with usura  
seeth no man Gonzaga his heirs and his concubines  
no picture is made to endure nor to live with  
but it is made to sell and sell quickly  
with usura, sin against nature,  
is thy bread ever more of stale rags  
is thy bread dry as paper,  
with no mountain wheat, no strong flour  
with usura the line grows thick  
with usura is no clear demarcation  
and no man can find site for his dwelling.

<sup>200</sup> Terrell (1993), 178-179; 229-230.

Stonecutter is kept from his tone  
weaver is kept from his loom  
WITH USURA  
wool comes not to market  
sheep bringeth no gain with usura  
Usura is a murrain, usura  
blunteth the needle in the maid’s hand  
and stoppeth the spinner’s cunning. Pietro Lombardo  
came not by usura  
Duccio came not by usura  
nor Pier della Francesca; Zuan Bellin’ not by usura  
nor was ‘La Calunnia’ painted.  
Came not by usura Angelico; came not Ambrogio Praedis,  
Came no church of cut stone signed: Adamo me fecit.  
Not by usura St. Trophime  
Not by usura Saint Hilaire,  
Usura rusteth the chisel  
It rusteth the craft and the craftsman  
It gnaweth the thread in the loom  
None learneth to weave gold in her pattern;  
Azure hath a canker by usura; cramoiisi is unbroidered  
Emerald findeth no Memling  
Usura slayeth the child in the womb  
It stayeth the young man’s courting  
It hath brought palsey to bed, lyeth  
between the young bride and her bridegroom  
CONTRA NATURAM  
They have brought whores for Eleusis  
Corpses are set to banquet  
at behest of usura.

When money becomes the objective of money, what Marx termed as financial fetish, that is money generating money without its organic reproductive link to material wealth and to the overall development of general wealth needed for society, then one cannot talk about art. Maltese economy has always been, particularly in the modern era, a usury economy, whether it takes the form of the fifteenth to eighteenth-century corsair-pirating ‘industry’, or the classical eighteenth to nineteenth-century import economy which established an internal multi-mutual

prising ‘usury’ domino-effect (an attempt to curtail this usury aspect was aborted in the 70s-80s), or the late twentieth and twenty-first-century eruption of financial services that sustained economic growth without there being any actual material production. Maltese usury structure is embedded in its genetic struggle for survival, as an island harbouring an ancient multi-culture which is also exclusively determined by a multi-geo-political international configuration.

The lack of *actual* production cannot provoke the production of *actual* art. Within this new context, one can debate and discuss anew Giovanni Cremona’s idea that the characteristic of Maltese art is its very lack of character, and my own concept of the country’s modern art as a façade art.<sup>201</sup> ‘Characterlessness’ elicits the process of *oubli*, and silence, via a superficial form of creation, as discussed in many previous publications.

Usury economy, due to its fictitious character, is not able to provoke a state that can contribute to the creation of art. On the contrary it is conducive to the creation of a status of lethal *oubli*, an *oubli* sustained by the fact that the ‘past is unwilling ever to speak with us’.<sup>202</sup> Ġoxwa’s provocation to force the past to speak in her paintings is her Poundian tragedy; by imposing on us the trembling actual and tangible presence of the past. Ġoxwa’s works attempt to confront all this by drawing out from our collective un/consciousness what has been erased throughout our being, thus reinventing human experience.

It is here that in her works, as well as in Catania’s and in Attard’s, I sense a fascinating confluence between the ideas of Pound and Florensky. Pound is harking

201 This concept is discussed throughout my publication *Metal and Silence* (2019).  
202 Swift (2018), 142.

back, against the culture of couture upholsteries, to the archaic ritual embodied in Eleusinian mystery so as to regain a lost world language, while Florensky, on similar grounds, believes that one must hark back to the mystery of ecclesia: ‘Modernity can be reproached not only for lacking an ecclesial world-understanding but also ... for thinking that a general world-understanding is a superfluous luxury’.<sup>203</sup>

Against what Pound calls the usury civilisation and Florensky’s western disintegration, as envisaged by Attard’s *Sleep* series (figs. 69-73), Ġoxwa is advancing the Florenskian religious-based philosophy of ‘a magical power to control the world ... through the theurgy of religious (ascetic) effort’<sup>204</sup>; a power which underlines the relevance of Vladimir Vernadsky’s (1863-1945) and Teilhard de Chardin’s (1881-1955) idea of the relevance of the biosphere-noosphere-pneumosphere to spiritual man. Ġoxwa goes back to where ‘art starts’, where ‘sensation glimmers at the edge of recall, almost known’.<sup>205</sup>

After the *oubli* of *Pisan Canto LXXX*, which is directed towards a *katabasis* process of memory recuperation<sup>206</sup>:

Or if a rational soul should stir, perchance,  
Within the stem or summer shoot to advance  
Contrition’s utmost throw, seeking in thee  
But oblivion, not thy forgiveness,

Plotinus from the realm of epopteia hands over our fate, in *Canto XVI*, into William Blake’s (1757-1827) hands, another of Pound’s epoptic figures. As defined by Terrell, Blake, ‘an English poet and visionary ... [was] ...[s]een by Pound as a genuine religious who made heroic efforts to escape from the hell around

203 Florensky (2014), 8.  
204 Avril Pyman, *Pavel Florensky. A Quiet Genius* (New York and London: Continuum, 2010), 120-121.  
205 Swift (2018), 17.  
206 Stephen Sicari, *Pound’s Epic Ambition: Dante and the Modern World* (New York: State University of New York Press, New York, 1991), 140.

him in his time; e.g. “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell”, “Proverbs of Hell”, “A Song of Liberty”, “London” and such ideas as “Is the Holy Ghost any other than an intellectual Fountain?” or “What are the Pains of Hell but Ignorance, Bodily Lust, Idleness and devastation of the things of the Spirit?” [“To the Christians”].<sup>207</sup>

And the running form, naked, Blake,  
Shouting, whirling his arms, the swift limbs,  
Howling against the evil,  
his eyes rolling,  
Whirling like flame cart-wheels,  
and his head held backward to gaze on the evil  
As he ran from it,  
to be hid by the steel mountain,  
And when he showed again from the north side;  
his eyes blazing toward hell mouth,  
His neck forward,  
and like him Peire Cardinal.

William Blake’s (1757-1827) *Cain Fleeing from the Wrath of God* (c. 1799-1809) can be contrasted with Lazzaro Pisani’s (1854-1932) work depicting the same event but quite bereft from any mystery (fig. 74). In fact, Pisani’s work albeit its enigmatic character manifests Pound’s forgetting of mystery and gods. The epopee-ic origin of humankind has been by Pisani transfigured into a particular one of fratricide.

Although Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos believes that we are now entering *Purgatorio*,<sup>208</sup> and Moody similarly underlines that the *Cantos* lead us ‘into a kind of Elysium ... ‘quiet air’’,<sup>209</sup> we are still situated in Hell. Hell and *Purgatorio* are fused and their boundary sometimes blurred.

207 Terrell (1993), 69.  
208 Tryphonopoulos (1992), 109.  
209 Moody (2014), 82.





Fig. 69. Caesar Attard, *Asleep*, 1991, sepia on paper, 29.7x42cm, MUŻA, Valletta (image courtesy: Caesar Attard)



Fig. 70. Caesar Attard, *Large Dormitory Scene*, 1991, pressed charcoal on paper, 70x100cm, private collection (photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Caesar Attard)





Fig. 71. Caesar Attard, *Self-Portrait with Closed Eyes*, 1993, oil on canvas, 57x85cm, private collection  
(image courtesy: Caesar Attard)



Fig. 72. Caesar Attard, *Sofa I*, 1999, oil on canvas, 85.5x109cm, private collection  
(image courtesy: Caesar Attard)





Fig. 73. Caesar Attard, *With Raised Arms*, 1995, oil on canvas, 98.5x145cm, private collection (photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Caesar Attard)



Fig. 74. Lazzaro Pisani, *The Death of Abel*, 1885, oil on canvas, 138x197cm, MUŻA, Valletta (image courtesy: MUŻA – the National Community Art Museum and Heritage Malta)

The Canto *Purgatorio* can be seen and experienced in Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's (1880-1938) works as one progresses from the 'implied and laughable scatology in Canto XII's little tale [which] becomes graphic and disgusting as we progress from bankers to prime ministers'.<sup>210</sup> We enter into an Elysium, one that Blake shares with Peire Cardenal (c. 1180-c.1278), the troubadour who was famed for his satirical *sirventes* and for his violent attacks against the clergy. It enacts a return to the Acoetes leitmotif and to the plight of the last surviving man in *Canto II*. The main theme resurrects the event in which sanity and madness of a living man amongst the dead is being challenged and repeatedly echoes the initial *katabasis path* for the *epoptic nekyia*.

Peire Cardenal describes a rainstorm which drives everyone it falls on to madness. The only person, an alter-ego of Cadmus and Acoetes from *Canto II*, or No-man/Last Man, to escape the disaster does so by accident, through being indoors at the time. In Cardenal, the sane man is set upon by the mad, believing him to be insane<sup>211</sup>. The troubadour as the 'last man' living amongst the dead is transfigured into Gaudier-Brzeska's: '*Je reviens d'un enfer d'où peu échappent*',<sup>212</sup> '... 800 Germans dead on the ground, unburied and unburiable',<sup>213</sup> '... with dead Germans lying about like bloody waxworks'.<sup>214</sup>

HUMAN MASSES teem and move, are destroyed  
and crop up again.  
THE BURSTING SHELLS, the volleys, wire

entanglements, projectiles, motors, the chaos of battle DO NOT ALTER IN THE LEAST the outlines of the hill we are besieging. A company of PARTRIDGES scuttle along before our very trench<sup>215</sup>

A Vorticist Hell is sung by Pound:

And Henri Gaudier went to it  
and they killed him  
And killed a good deal of sculpture.

Another contemporary account, this time Fernand Leger's (1881-1955) account of Verdun (1916)<sup>216</sup> – responding to Wyndham Lewis's (1882-1957) autobiographical *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937) and his painting of the living among the dead, *Battery Shelled* (1919), which was supposed to have formed part of Antonio Sciortino's (1879-1947) *Temple of the British Empire to the Unknown Soldier* (1915-1917) (fig. 75) – sustains this Vorticist belief in hell.

Pound continues:

And Wyndham Lewis went to it  
With a heavy bit of artillery  
and the airmen came by with a mitrailleuse  
And cleansed out most of his company  
and a shell lit on his tin hut  
While he was out in the privy  
and he was all there was left of that outfit.

According to Moody:

Pound hadn't allowed for a real war. When it came, seemingly very suddenly, at the beginning of August 1914, it quite overshadowed all his furious propaganda for art to go to war. His artists, Gaudier and Lewis, Hueffer and Hulme too, became infantrymen and artillerymen, killing and being killed with actual



Fig. 75. Antonio Sciortino, *Model for the Temple of the British Empire to the Unknown Soldier*, 1915-1917, plaster, 235x130x50cm, MUZA, Valletta (image courtesy: MUZA – the National Community Art Museum and Heritage Malta)

<sup>210</sup> Bush (1989), 251.

<sup>211</sup> See Andrew Breeze, "Two Bardic Themes: The trinity in the blessed Virgin's womb, and the rain of folly," *Celtica* 22 (1991): 1-15, accessed July 24, 2019, <https://www.dias.ie/wp-content/uploads/webstore/celt/pubs/celtica/c22/c22-1.pdf>.

<sup>212</sup> Pound (1970), 55.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>214</sup> Moody (2009), 327.

<sup>215</sup> Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, "Vortex," *Blast: Review of the great English Vortex*, ed. Wyndham Lewis, London: John Lane, 2 (July 1915): 33. See *ibid.*: 235-236, 244, 278-279, 249-250, 271, 259-260, 256, 327.

<sup>216</sup> Moody (2014), 58.



bullets and shells. He had called for slaughter in a war without truce meaning it, metaphorically. The real thing seemed to him the final stupidity of the world he had wanted to destroy, a mindless murdering contest between detestable 'teutonic atavism' and 'unsatisfactory Democracy', the latter characterized by the 'loathsome spirit of mediocrity cloaked in graft'. But there was evidently more force in that loathsome spirit than in the art he had opposed to it. His Imagiste movement and the Vorticist movement would be swept away in the general mobilization for war.<sup>217</sup>

Without denying Pound's contradictory and even enigmatic attitude towards war and violence, I am not sure about Moody's assertion of how his war exuberance was just a metaphorical one for the poet. I do believe that Pound believed in slaughter and war as a purge in humankind's evolutionary élan *vital*, as did Heraclitus, Marinetti, and all the Futurist and Futurist adaptations burgeoning around the beginning of the twentieth century. He believed in violence of language, thought, *and* action and this violence cannot, I believe, be separated from his view of the world, that life and art are one, and art with life is and has to be violent. According to Moody;

When Pound ... reviewed a showing of Lewis's 'war paintings' in February, he looked for the former 'revolutionary inventor of forms' and of abstract 'forms in combination', and saw instead a 'narrative painter' of the realities of war. He looked for the savage and violent satirist of 'smugness and hypocrisy and stupidity' but found studies of men and machines of war charged with tragic emotion. Still, he insisted, in Lewis's drawings there was, 'from the purely aesthetic point of view, a calm pleasure to be derived from clear tones, the cold air, the desolation of the Ypres Salient, with the pyramidal arrangement of three men in the wilderness'. That showed that Lewis was still the artist,

that his paintings had not simply 'come out of the war', but had 'come a good deal more out of art'; out of art's resistance to war.<sup>218</sup>

The last concluding statement does provoke doubt. *Purgatorio*-Hell, War-Waste, Blake-Cardenal, Vorticism-Elysium, Wyndham-Brzeska-Chinese Calligraphy, the Living among the Dead, and war killing 'a good deal of sculpture', transforming it into the 'war waste'... these seep into Attard's *et in arcadia ego* (1987) (fig. 76), that shows a dog tearing at human entrails.<sup>219</sup>

This Attard work poignantly reflects the other side of war, and it probably would make more sense to link Pound with Kirchner at this point of our discussion. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938) from the other side of the trenches offers a similar view but with a drastically different accent from that of his contemporary Gaudier-Brzeska hailing the beauty of purging massacre. Like Gaudier, Kirchner knew that he would be shot dead as soon as he arrived at the front, and unlike Gaudier he openly manifested his *fear of death*,<sup>220</sup> confronting Gaudier-Brzeska's exuberance in death (fig. 77).

When comparing and dialectically juxtaposing Kirchner's, Gaudier's, and Attard's works on the same theme, one senses Bakhtin's idea of heteroglossic *surplus-seeing*. This implies a polyphonic perception of the world 'through the time/space of the self and through the time/space of the other',<sup>221</sup> mutually 'perceiving those things one sees but the other cannot'.<sup>222</sup> Bakhtin's surplus seeing is thereby

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>219</sup> Joseph Paul Cassar, *Caesar Attard: A Bank of Valletta Exhibition* (Valletta: Bank of Valletta, 2008), 6.

<sup>220</sup> Magdalena M. Moeller, Günther Gercken, *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner --- Peter Schlemihl's Wondrous Story* (Munich, London and New York: Prestel, 2014).

<sup>221</sup> Holquist (1990), 35.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 36.

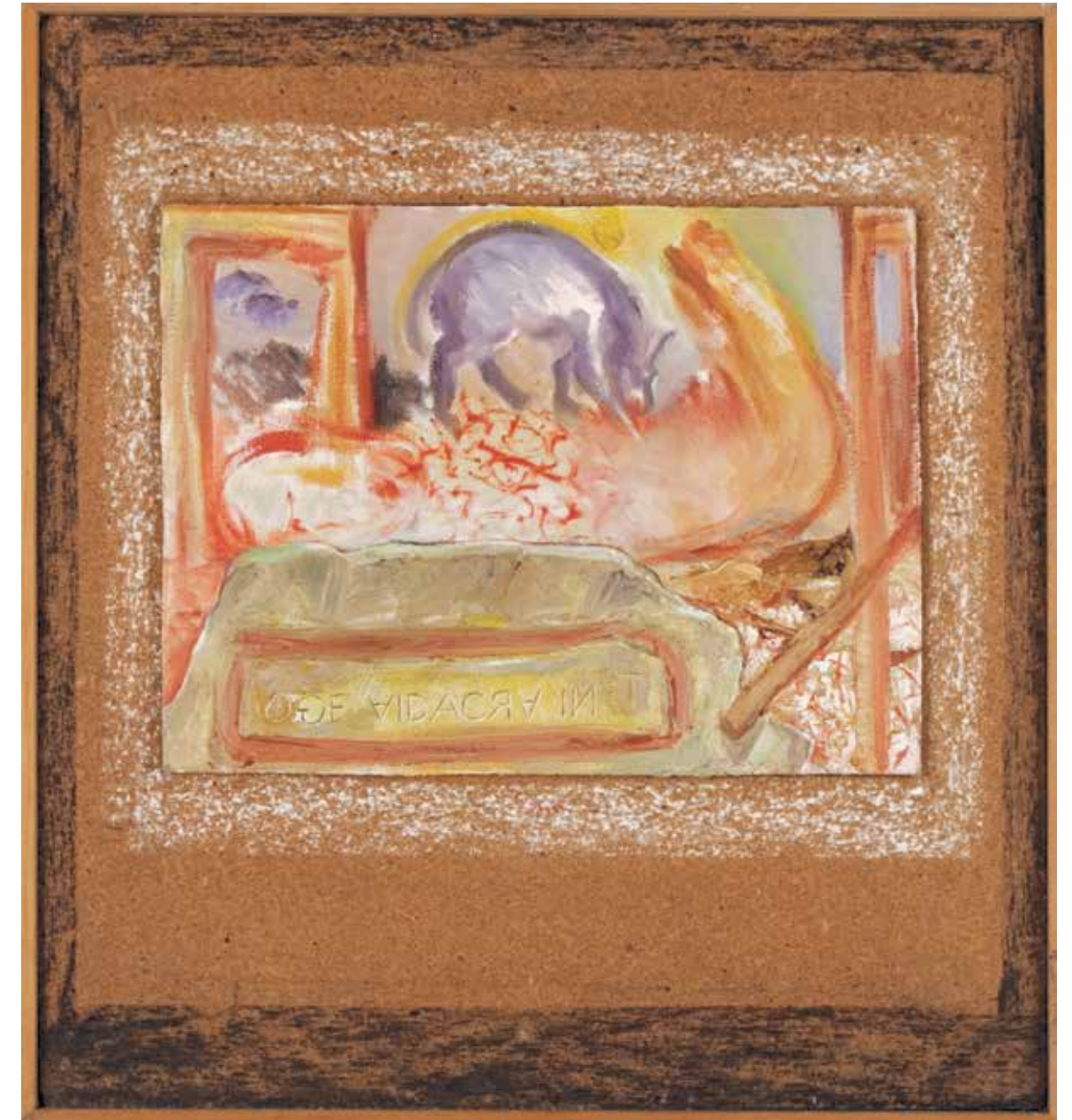


Fig. 76. Caesar Attard, *et in arcadia ego*, 1987, oil on canvas mounted on board, 49.5x45.5cm, private collection (photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Caesar Attard)

<sup>217</sup> Moody (2009), 257-258.

transfigured into Pound's seeing the unseeable, by seeing Kirchner's Hell through Gaudier's Heraclitan force, and seeing both in Attard's idiosyncratic response. This Bakhtinian category is deformed when one is not able to perceive the 'surplus' due to one's becoming the uncharacteristic de-individualised Heideggerean 'they', a crowd of fodder in which 'all traces of the individuality ... have been erased; they are now just numbers, cannon fodder to be expended in battle', as Kirchner's artillerymen, and the 'they' to be allowed to perish, as in Heidegger's thought.

Fighting and wounded on the Western Front in France, just like Gaudier-Brzeska, , Eric Kennington (1888-1960) another Pound contemporary counter-attacked with his 'Agustin' anthropomorphic-zoomorphic Mussolini-God of War (1933-35).<sup>223</sup>

Very much in parallel to his other two contemporaries, Le Corbusier and Ozenfant, Pound characterised Hell by a lack of form and coherence, demanding thereby the re-establishment of order when the order and coherence being offered at the time was the order of Fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism, three angels of death from which a Chernobylesque *anabasic* ascent back from Hell to purgatory, at least seemed to be completely impossible. Nonetheless, I am still not sure whether this finds its realisation in the Cantos. Paradoxically, at this point, Pound's own world is characterised by an absolute lack of form which has lost all coherence, pointed out later in his *CXVI*, and it finds itself in the darkness of ignorant passion:

tho' my errors and wrecks lie about me.  
And I am not a demigod  
I cannot make it cohere.  
If love be not in the house there is nothing.



Fig. 77. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Self-Portrait as a Soldier in his Studio*, 1915 (image source: Vera Lluch)

## 14. Canto XVII

Whereas in *Canto XV* and *Canto XVI* Pound finally reaches the Dantesque *anabasis* stage for his own ascent from the Odyssean Hell of contemporary society that began in *Canto I*, accompanying one on the path towards purgatory in *Canto XV*, *Canto XVII* is one's ascent to purgatory, via ritual initiation. It is an *hieros gamos* (ritual copulation), passing through several stages: that of *katabasis*, *stillness*, *light*, *nymph choir*, all evolving around the mystical number three. As indicated by Tryphonopoulos, one follows the *katabasis* as manifested in the path 'down to the creek's mouth', surrounded by 'the stillness and absolute lack of sound and the other-worldliness of the light' which is 'not of the sun in the presence of deities'.<sup>224</sup> This implies the formation of form, *dromena*, through light 'not of the sun' that takes us away from the darkness, and as already discussed, away from its corresponding formlessness. As Tryphonopoulos asserts, this is associated with the *dromena*, that is the taking on of form, the formation of form, which is in itself a kind of metamorphosis – a sign of the proximity of the world of the gods<sup>225</sup>: '... So that the vines burst from my fingers' is the outward sign of *epopteia* '... to "bust into the permanent world" of the gods'.<sup>226</sup>

Formlessness which, according to Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) in 'On the Problem of Form' (1912), the artist being another of Pound's contemporaries, cannot really exist since it is in continuous process towards form. It necessitates this permanent formation of form, *in continuum*.

This endless path from formlessness into form is described by Plotinus, one of the fundamental mentors of Josef Kalleya, whose works in fact epitomise this very endless path of transformation. The Greco-Egyptian philosopher propounded the idea that 'matter in itself is measureless and formless, and that form is imposed upon it, without ever uniting with matter. In that sense, matter is indeterminate nonbeing, it is "a mere abstraction, a name for the bare receptacle of Forms."' What becomes fascinating here is the moral dimension given to the formlessness of matter, that is, according to Plotinus: 'Consequently, matter lacks goodness, and therefore may be said to be the principle of evil'.<sup>227</sup>

This reverberates back to *Canto II*'s Picasso-Proteus's 'formlessness-forming'. This porpoise 'taking any shape', as chanted in *Canto II*, finds its enlightened transmission already in *Canto XXIII* as the Neoplatonic *Et omniformis omnis Intellectus est*, that is, every *intellectus* which is recognised as light

<sup>224</sup> Tryphonopoulos (1992), 109.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>226</sup> Terrell (1993), vii.

<sup>227</sup> Liebrechts (2004), 141.

<sup>223</sup> Louis-René Nougier, *L'Art de la Préhistoire Encyclopédies d'Aujourd' Hui* (Paris and Turin: La Pochothèque, 1993), 442-449.



is capable of assuming every shape. Thus, whereas formlessness is a negative force, it is light that gives it form, thus its soul. It is light that informs formlessness into form, that is, into soul. To lose sight of this soul as a divine form, is precisely to lack the ability to see the unseeable, sung all throughout *the Cantos*. This is also Plotinus’s idea of going down to the darkness of hell,<sup>228</sup> as the path of *katabasis*. The *Canto* sings precisely this loss of sight into darkness and, again quite fascinatingly, is localised by the poet into a specific geo-space. To create such spatial actuality Pound chants ‘the difference between the mind that is ever at the interpretation of the vital universe and the mind (such as that of Venice) in which the universe is not alive’.<sup>229</sup>

However, soul-seeing requires some kind of tangibility. The sight of the soul as divine form can only be manifested tangibly through a particular perspective that has to combine Florensky and Pound’s concept of intelligence with the Pythagorean ritual. This is humankind’s relationship and position within the cosmos, as a measure to be manifested, as *logos*.

By integrating ‘sensible’ geometry, that is a form that is tangible to human senses which register empirical and technical ‘recognised’ structures, with what is known as ‘intelligible’ geometry which is capable of echoing and reflecting a divine structure of the cosmos, one reaches the unseeability of knowledge. ‘To see’ regains its equation with ‘to know’. The origins of all origins spiral around this *verbum dei caro factum est*. The tangible-intangible dichotomy, the seeing-unseeable, demands a certain potential

to be ‘sensed’, to become flesh – leading us to what is termed as intellectual-spiritual ritual art praxis, which in many cultures is deemed to be ‘the root to all knowledge’.<sup>230</sup> Several are the diverse cultural forms giving this opening onto the seeing of the unseeable. Florensky’s Icon inverse-perspective philosophy echoes, amongst other ancient thoughts, the Islamic concept of the ‘Door-Way’ - *da ira ‘ala* - that is the door threshold, Liu Che’s lintel leaf, described earlier in this essay as Poundian Elysian door-cave-gate sacredness. This directly confronts the materiality of the *quattro* and *cinquecento* frame-window aesthetic, through which an abstract eye belonging to an abstract *ego* looks passively through an illusionary window, a virtual space. Radically differing from this European aspect, the door-threshold-sacredness offers a spiritual perspectival path ‘*created by sensible geometry to affect man’s perceptual awareness of the experience on entering another state of consciousness*’.<sup>231</sup> By means of an intelligible and spiritual geometry, one enters the Sufi idea of Bakhtinian experience.

Fascinatingly enough, this immediately recalls Malevich’s *Black Square* and his Suprematist paintings and architectonics, all imbued with their interactive geometrical forms. Malevich holistically defined these architectonic Suprematist works as a ‘door to a world parallel to our own’,<sup>232</sup> which demands, similarly to what Florensky says, a different state of consciousness. This was probably and consciously enough developed by Mark Rothko (1903-1970) with his simple linear asymmetrical-

symmetrical minimalist octagonal Houston chapel.<sup>233</sup> Barnett Newman (1905-1970), probably unaware of any link with Florensky or Panofsky, proposed his own inverse-reflective *Broken Obelisk* (1963-1967) that opens up the path towards the chapel space.<sup>234</sup>

The Rothko octagon is the form universally adopted by all religions and ancient philosophies: the octagonal Islamic Dome of the Rock as God’s divine presence in Jerusalem, where according to Jewish tradition the Rock’s dust was the dust from which God created Adam, the octagonal labyrinth at the Christian Reims Cathedral, the San Vitale Basilica in Ravenna, the Florence Baptistery, and several others. It is also found at source in Ancient Greece, as in the The Tower of the Winds. The octangular idea formed an integral part of Johannes Kepler’s (1571-1630) polyhedric *Harmonices Mundi* in which work he attempted to give a rational structure to the Universe and Mankind’s position within an existence of transcendental geometric relations. Rothko’s octagonal axial and radial formations and their asymmetrical mosaic structure transforms his Chapel’s space into a sacred *mushrabbiya* cosmic relationship, formalised in the mesmerising façade of the Institute de Monde Arab, in Paris. The cobwebbed *mushrabbiya* manifests the form of dew-like creation, begotten from formlessness *via specular refraction-reflection* through light’s creative function as intelligence. Such a *mushrabbiya* form imposes itself on matter ‘before ever dew was fallen’ (*Canto III*). This is the soul’s ‘prenatal condition before it enters the world of matter’<sup>235</sup> so as to bring in light.

Such form imposes itself on us and provokes the long-forgotten state of awe, a *child’s awe*. Pound prompts a return to this, from the Balthus-Goxwa path of lust (figs. 78, 79).<sup>236</sup> That is the *paradiso terrestre* that *Canto XVII* is ultimately about, and which Pound victoriously disowns at the end<sup>237</sup> of his *katabasis epic*. This brings the poet’s epic down what is essentially a one-way hill of *katabasis* – a path towards Hades, with no possible *anabasis*:

I have tried to write Paradise  
Do not move  
Let the wind speak  
that is paradise.

Let the Gods forgive what I  
have made  
Let those I love try to forgive  
what I have made.

But for the time being the poet still believes that to regain the losing sight of the soul, one has to remake and reconnect humankind to his being, one must somehow grow into the role of Zagreus-Dionysus, lord of life in the world of the dead.

Between them,  
Cave of Nerea,  
she like a great shell curved,  
And the boat drawn without sound,  
Without odour of ship-work,  
Nor bird-cry, nor any noise of wave moving,  
Nor splash of porpoise, nor any noise of wave moving,  
Within her cave, Nerea,

228 See: Sharon Mayer Libera, “Casting His Gods Back into the Nous: Two Neoplatonists and The Cantos of Ezra Pound,” *Paideuma: Modern and Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* 2 (1973): 355-377.

229 Moody (2014), 88.

230 Keith Critchlow, *Islamic Patterns* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 70-102.

231 Ibid., 102.

232 John Milner, *Kazimir Malevich and the Art of Geometry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 127-128.

233 In fact, I can define Rothko’s chapel as a Malevichean response to what I termed in previous publications as Malevich’s Chapel, that is his *The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings, 0,1* (December 1915-January 1916).

234 Jacob Baal-Teshuva, *Rothko* (Cologne: Taschen, 2003), 73-75.

235 Liebrechts (2004), 144.

236 The Rothko Chapel harbours axial and radial formations within the design that display a number of consistent geometric relationships, and the most significant relationship is between the axial symmetry and the specularity due to the main axis of the chapel (Sheldon Nodelman, *The Rothko Chapel paintings: Origins, structure, meaning* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 250). The diagonal axes formed by the four angles wall panels are perfectly specular and generate an asymmetrical sequence which parallels and confronts the formalist linguistic philosophy of Saussure.

237 Pound, *Cantos*, 822.



Fig. 78. Ġoxwa, *Aletheia (Dressing)*, 2003, oil and wax on canvas, 150x50cm, private collection (image courtesy: Ġoxwa)



Fig. 79. Ġoxwa, *Watching*, 2011, oil and wax on canvas, 146x114cm, private collection (photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Ġoxwa)



she like a great shell curved  
 In the suavity of the rock,  
 cliff green-gray in the far,  
 In the near, the gate-cliffs of amber,  
 And the wave  
 green clear, and blue clear,  
 And the cave salt-white, and glare-purple,  
 cool, porphyry smooth,  
 the rock sea-worn.  
 No gull-cry, no sound of porpoise,  
 Sand as of malachite, and no cold there,  
 the light not of the sun.

Here Pound is, under his next epoptic escort, guided by Aphrodite, the goddess of *eros*, Botticelli's (1445-1510) *Nascita-Venus* 'like a great shell', pictured as "between them" [the Nerea or sprites] in a "not-of-this-world" scene.<sup>238</sup> Holding *Aeneid's* golden bough, which guarantees the hero's safe passage to and from the world of the dead, he is able to go back as Odysseus to his four 'caves': 'four specific islands that can be said to have given Odysseus insight into the divine, namely, Calypso's island Ogygia, Circe's island Aenea, the Phaeacian island Scheria, and the king's own island Ithaca',<sup>239</sup> intermeshed by Pound into one space. As much as heroes, narratives, cultures, events, and language find an interweaving structure, so do the four caves 'suffer' from similar inter-transfigurations. The Cave of the nymph Nerea becomes the Cave of Calypso, which is not only the actual Ithaca Cave but also Circe's dwelling.<sup>240</sup> The sacredness of the cave is in a zone filled with ancient unknown-unknowable wisdom. It offers itself as the very source of the cosmos generated out of matter. Caves are believed to be mystical signifiers of the descent of the soul into an inferior nature and its

corresponding ascent into the higher intelligible world. In order to gain access to this higher world, one must pass through the Naiads' sexual desire and the desire of coition. This is the reason why the Naiads preside over the caves as seductive nymphs provoking the soul's attraction to the flesh.<sup>241</sup>

Pound's journey meets Goxwa's earlier works in which the cave is solidly substituted with a wall, later with doors, generating a power that prohibits entrance. She equates the sacredness of the gate-cave to a closed wall-door, paradoxically symbolising the impossibility of the seeable. It short-circuits the poet's *katabasis* journey, demanding a pass by calling for Charon.

Through the caves and the Pound-Odysseus, who is himself 'the symbol of man passing through the successive stages of genesis',<sup>242</sup> we are again transported into the *katabasis path*, this time with Charon's craft as the epoptic light in darkness. The motif of 'boat sailing' is recurrent and important in bridging not only some of this Canto's tangential developments but also the whole evolution of the *Cantos*. Throughout this mystical passage, Nerea's cave becomes Venice. The warm dampness of the cave is transfigured into the marble coldness of stone Venice: 'The katabasis motif begins with someone sailing "down to the creek's mouth", entering the Cave of Nerea on a boat, and, in the Canto's penultimate passage, being "shipped thence/to the stone place" which can be variously taken as the Cave of Nerea—that is, the place of the transmigration of the soul's, rather like Yeats's Byzantium—or Venice'<sup>243</sup> (figs. 80, 81).



Fig. 80. Anthony Catania, *Charon's Craft 2*, 1999, oil on canvas, 60x80cm, private collection (photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy, Anthony Catania)

238 Terrell (1993), 73.

239 Liebrechts (2004), 167.

240 Ibid., 176.

241 Tryphonopoulos (1992), 112-113.

242 Robert Lamberton quoted in *ibid.*, 111.

243 Ibid., 123.





Fig. 81. Anthony Catania, *Charon's Craft 5*, 2003, pastel, 28.5x42cm, private collection  
(photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy, Anthony Catania)

From the Mediterranean pastoral *paradiso*, vines bursting and 'bees weighted with pollen' and 'birds sleepily in the branches', together with the 'green slope' landscape, unlock the Canto's 'pale white' Venice – which is configured as the Ithacan cave, fused with all three others (fig. 82).

At this initiation point, images echoing Igor Stravinsky's (1882-1971) rites carry profound associations with Egypt: "'Zothar" ... the orgiastic or frenetic sounds of the "sistrum", and the description of the equatorial sun at dawn ("the sun fulvid") rising as a lion lift(s) over sand-plain ...'<sup>244</sup> These are mosaicked into 'Zagreus, feeding his panthers, Hermes and Athene and sylvan nympharum' together with the paradisiacal Borso d'Este (1413-1471) and the Carmagnola 'invitation to lunch'-execution amidst the Eleusinian mysteries and Persephone's descent to the underworld. The latter goes back to *Canto I*, until we flow towards the 'wreck in Dalmatia. Sunset like the grasshopper flying' is reached.

As the ritual initiation of descent proceeds together with 'Zothar and her elephants' we assist 'the sistrum' with Dionysus as Dendrites, tree spirit, and end with the Dionysus-Zagreus ritual shriek explaining the creation of humankind out of the ashes of the Titans.<sup>245</sup> This is followed by Artemis, again, as the mistress of nature leading Pound through a dreamscape of other-worldly calmness, a dreamscape mistakenly Venetian<sup>246</sup>: 'an autobiographical reminiscence of Venice metamorphosed into a petrified landscape' from the preceding funereal seascape,<sup>247</sup> 'when a boat came and the hypnotic drift under the hulls in the night'.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 115-116.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 126.



## 15. Cantos XVIII-XIX

**C***anto XVIII* and *Canto XIX* juxtapose the mysteries of *paradiso terrestrea* with financial accumulation, with the ‘mysteries’ of who controls the economy and the ‘mysteries’ of who benefits.<sup>248</sup> Both Cantos give us an epic Florentinian *polycentredness* which deeply underscores the relationship between money, banks, armaments, oil, and war. There is also special emphasis on the evil of usurious destructive wealth, which unbolts all winds of aggressiveness against the ‘positive direction of the will in search of paradise’.<sup>249</sup> Against the positive direction of the will, this aggressiveness finds its successful realisation with the alliance of *oubli* and *abouleia*, meaning the blinding act of forgetting together with lack of will, two forces which compromise and frustrate ‘the melopoeietic power of poetry’.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Moody (2014), 84.

<sup>249</sup> Liebrechts (2004), 178.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.



Fig. 82. Goxwa, *Calypso Cave - Venice (Lights at Evening)*, 2010, oil and wax on canvas, 195x194cm, private collection (photo: Jean-Louis Losi, image courtesy: Goxwa)

# 16. Canto XX

Such frustration now meets its challenge by: ‘Si  
no’us vei, Domna don plus mi cal/ Negus vezer  
mon bel pensar no val’ (even not seeing you cannot  
match my beautiful thought of you).<sup>251</sup>

The unseeing is again being placed in juxtaposition  
with seeing. This brings us back to the *arras* episode  
that bridges *Canto XX*’s ‘Parisina-two doves from an  
altar at the window’ with *Canto XXIII*’s ‘Fa-Han and I  
at the window’.

With Pound repeating *arras* twice in the same  
line in *Canto XXIII*, another link besides the hypnotic  
link with Fa-Han is that the viewer is made to feel  
the link with Niccolò d’Este (1383-1441) ‘who, as  
in earlier Cantos, is in a “sort of delirium”’.<sup>252</sup> The  
repetition enhances the concealing function of the  
rich tapestry usually used to hide an alcove. Repeated  
twice for two times in two Cantos introduces a  
rhythm of disaster, which also repeats as a subject  
rhyme linking adulterous lovers Francesca and Paolo/  
Parisina and Ugo.<sup>253</sup>

Agostino, Jacopo and Boccata.  
You would be happy for the smell of that place,  
And never tired of being there, either alone,  
Or accompanied.  
Sound: as of the nightingale too far off to be heard.

Sandro and Boccata, and Jacopo Sellaio;  
The ranunculae, [buttercups genus] and almond,  
Boughs set in espalier, [wall tree-shrub]  
Duccio, Agostino; e l’olors [smell]  
The smell of that place d’enoï ganres [wards off boredom].

As already stated, this is linked to *Canto XX*, in  
which Francesca and Paolo’s murder is subject-rhymed  
with that of Parisina and Ugo: “‘Este, go’ damn you”  
between the walls, arras/ Painted to look like arras.’

This evolves into *Canto XXIII*’s:

[... while I slept ...]  
And the rose grown while I slept,  
And the strings shaken with music,  
Capriped, the loose twigs under foot;  
We here on the hill, with the olives  
Where a man might carry his oar up,  
And the boat there in the inlet;  
As we had lain there in the autumn  
Under the arras, or wall painted below like arras,  
And above with a garden of rose-trees,  
Sound coming up from the cross-street;  
As we had stood there,  
Watching road from the window,  
Fa Han and I at the window,  
And her head bound with gold cords.

Pound here proposes a multiple choir of visual  
voices: Agostino di Duccio (1418-c.1481), Jacopo  
da Sellaio (1422-1493), Giovanni Boccata (1435-

251 Translation of Bernart de Ventadorn’s poem *Can par la flors*.  
Terrell (1993), 81.

252 Tryphonopoulos (1992), 133.

253 Terrell (1993), 83; 60-66.



1480), and Botticelli,<sup>254</sup> together with a whole choir-surplus of parallel events and voices of which Pound makes us all aware.<sup>255</sup>

Picasso, porpoise-like as in *Canto II*, and as reiterated in *Canto XVII*, transfigures Sigismondo Malatesta’s form into his own, and Pound-like transposes chronotopically different events onto one. This has the result of creating a visual subject-rhyme which is disturbingly overlaid onto that of Raphael and La Fornarina. In the final etching in the series, Raphael is depicted having sexual intercourse with La Fornarina while Picasso, re-transforming himself now into a Michelangelo, watches, hiding under the bed. The *arras* here has been grotesquely changed into the underbed space.

254 Ibid., 81.

255 Agostino di Duccio was an early Renaissance Italian sculptor who worked with Matteo de’ Pasti, at the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini from 1449 to 1457. The decorations were supposed to be a sort of mediaeval encyclopaedia, with reliefs of zodiacal and other allegorical and mythological figures. Jacopo da Sellaio, a Florentine painter, sometimes known as Jacopo di Arcangel, was an eclectic Italian painter from the early Renaissance and studied under Fra’ Filippo Lippi (1406-1469) and Sandro Botticelli.

# 17. Canto XXI

*Canto XXI* links Vannozza dei Cattanei’s (1442-1518) nakedness, mistress of Pope Alexander VI (1431-1503) and mother of Lucrezia Borgia (1505-1509), with the third son of Niccolò d’ Este III. This has the effect of bridging both *Cantos XX*’s ending calling for ‘Peace! Borso ..., Borso!’ with *Canto XXI*’s opening: ‘Keep the peace, Borso!’

The central fugue of Midas’s gold, money, banks, credit, power, and wars, re-flow into the epic. Bakhtinian *surplus-seeing* is confronted with the dawn of the Eleusinian mysteries’s *fire of vision* and the *sacrum inluminatio coitu*, the death of Dionysus-Tammuz-Adonis-Christ, as one.

The Medici are noted, rather cursorily and very pointedly,<sup>256</sup> as quasi-creators of loan capitalism, high finance, credit control, and a new rule of money, which demands a total de-sacralisation and de-ritualisation of all values. Just as with Goxwa’s walls and doors (but for radically different reasons), all doors to some form of visionary revelation are shut. The unseeable remains unseeable. In other words, as correctly indicated by Bush, according to Pound it is in the hegemonic economic interest of the modern to devalue the sacred. War as a result of financial usurious interest cannot co-exist with the value of the sacred. The modern usury tract is ‘heedless to the

256 Moody (2014), 85.

treasure of ancient wisdom and mystery’, as heedless as Breughel’s old man’s indifference to the rape of Persephone. Midas’s war is based on one heedless of value, just as ‘the old man who closes the *Canto XXI*’s beating his mule with an asphodel is [heedless] to the flower’s Elysian potency’.<sup>257</sup> He beats the donkey, blind all the while to the flower’s paradisial power. *Canto XXII*’s closing line: ‘And the old man went on there/ beating his mule’, beautifully interweaves with the Canto’s opening lines:

An’ that man sweat blood  
To put through that railway  
And what he ever got out of it?

257 Bush (1989), 118.

# 18. Cantos XXII-XXIII-XXIV

Challenging the de-sacralisation of the previous Cantos is the ‘potent force and source of visionary revelation linked to the intellect, namely, Love, that which leads man to go in search of knowledge contained in the Nous’.<sup>258</sup> This Canto deals with *hieros gamos* or ritual copulation,<sup>259</sup> with ‘ritual’ being understood here as the Bakhtinian concept of communal ‘authoring of one another’.<sup>260</sup> In Pound, this takes the form of an erotic sacramental ceremony. It involves a process whereby through the empathic projection of the self onto the other, one returns to one’s self, thus becoming a unique self, which as Pound continuously poetically asserts and Kierkegaard underlines, is impossible in a usury context; impossible amidst the hegemonic spreading of industrialisation and urbanisation.<sup>261</sup> This co-authoring path that would lead to self-authenticity is realised and consumed by what Bakhtin terms the ‘surplus of my own seeing’<sup>262</sup> – that is, *seeing* as a collective dialogic-act which changes the narrow idea of uni-focal seeing into one of *knowing*. This *knowing* however inherently and inevitably requires the act of *unknowing*, as much as seeing implies

the unseeing. Thus, the *unknowing* can be re-qualified as *surplus-knowing*, according to Pound’s reformulation of Bakhtin’s idea of seeing-as-knowing: self-discovery and self-awareness ‘begins when one has “forgotten-what-book”’.<sup>263</sup>

A difference integrally linked with the above discussion, and also a parallel complementary echo of this Bakhtinian ‘surplus-seeing’, can be sensed in Pound’s idea of ‘residue’:

With the real artist there is always a residue, there is always something in the man which does not get into his work. There is always some reason why the man is always more worth knowing than his books are. In the long run nothing else counts.<sup>264</sup>

Pound’s *residue* is Bakhtin’s *surplus-seeing*. ‘Nothing else counts’ explicitly underlines Pound’s ‘residual seeing’, and Bakhtin’s ‘surplus-seeing’ is metamorphosed into ‘residual knowing’. For the former, this transmutation established the long-sought Eleusinian ritual of mystery whereas for the latter, paradoxically enough, it established the subversive ritual of carnival by which ‘official institutions and definitions of the sacred are

258 Liebrechts (2004), 187.

259 Tryphonopoulos (1992), 104.

260 Bakhtin quoted in Haynes (2013), 14.

261 Terry Eagleton, “A Long way from Galilee,” *London Review of Books* 41:15 (August 1, 2019), 20.

262 Haynes (2013), 17.

263 Nadel (2007), 99.

264 “Patria Mia” in John Tytell, *Ezra Pound: The Solitary Volcano* (New York: Anchor Press, 1988), 11.



intermittently transcended or inverted'<sup>265</sup>: *eleusia* and carnival. In Pound, as in Bakhtin's thought, both play a radical subversive role, yet for different reasons.

For Pound, in contemporary modern capitalist society based on usury and aggression, Eleusinian sacred mysteries and ritual played the same subversive role as that played by their own negation in a different context, where Bakhtin's carnival was a threat to the sacred. It is this role that Catania (fig. 83), Attard (fig. 84), and Goxwa are attempting to re-member (fig. 85). With Catania's *Don Quichotte* (figs. 86, 87, 88) and *Pied Piper* series (figs. 89, 90, 91), both *eleusia* and carnival find themselves in symbiosis. In Catania's works one encounters such symbiosis as borders on the macabre. In Goxwa's Fayum-Byzantine *aura*, one senses Pound's Aphrodite emerging from the sea as a theophonic revelation, the desired tangibility of divinity in its visible manifestation. Attard envelops all this in the Baudelairean silence of darkness. In these visual works one senses Pound's idea, as analysed by Tryphonopoulos, of how 'theophany represents the *mystes*'s ability to break through to a vision of the gods, ... the image of crystal wave is a formula for the ecstatic moment ... the present theophanic moment with the Eleusinian mysteries'.<sup>266</sup> This is preceded by a *katabasis* to the realm visualised by Attard, where natural light is barred from entering, and it is further consolidated by a *lucus a non lucendo* without its original absurd paradox – since twentieth-century atrocities did in fact manifest the visibility of darkness. Such tangibility of darkness is henceforth fugue-

like defied by a Plotinus-like 'dense shaft of light', that '[his] eyes might see from amid the mournful gloom'<sup>267</sup>: *Nothing else counts*.

The visibility and tangibility of darkness can be sensed in Attard's Heideggerian idea of the 'unsharedness of death', which, in my opinion, heralds a death that includes the death of the soul, the soulless souls in torment, and thus recalls Pound's *Canto III*. This 'unsharedness' is voraciously grained in Attard's Goyaesque eroticism, which depicts the 'death-of-other' as 'death-of self'. Despite depicting the 'other', Attard is in fact qualifying his own death through a rather captivating relationship – a Poundian-Venetian misty relationship between the twin brothers Hypnos (sleep) and Thanatos (death). Attard succeeds in depicting a Bakhtinian utterance with the Thanatic siblings, including: Suffering, Deception, Strife, Doom, Old Age. These are juxtaposed dialectically and also beautifully, with the Hypnotic sleep of forgetfulness together with its own siblings: Dream, Nightmare, Illusion.

Thus, the Dantesque-Poundian suffering, deception, strife, doom, old age, dream, nightmare, and illusion are all mosaicked and woven into a Bakhtinian polyphony of death-in-creation, a heteroglossic Hamlet-esque sleep:

[...] to die: to sleep –  
No more, [...]  
[...]  
[...] to die: to sleep –  
To sleep, perchance to dream [...]



Fig. 83. Anthony Catania, *Wood of the Lustful*, 1999, pastel, 75x110cm, private collection (photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)

<sup>265</sup> Haynes (2013), 74.

<sup>266</sup> Tryphonopoulos (1992), 137-138.

<sup>267</sup> Liebrechts (2004), 137.





Fig. 84. Caesar Attard, *Portrait of a Family*, 1983, charcoal and pastel on paper, 62x71cm, private collection (photo: Kevin Casha, image: Caesar Attard)



Fig. 85. Goxwa, *Fresco*, 2013, oil and wax on canvas, 120x60cm, private collection (image courtesy: Goxwa)





Fig. 86. Anthony Catania, *Quixotic Road to Neverland 2*, 2019, pastel, 10x29.5cm, private collection  
(image courtesy: Anthony Catania)





Fig. 87. Anthony Catania, *Quixotic Wilt 2*, 2019, pastel, 29.5x21cm, private collection  
(image courtesy: Anthony Catania)



Fig. 88. Anthony Catania, *Quixotic Wilt 3*, 2019, pastel, 20.8x23cm, private collection  
(image courtesy: Anthony Catania)





Fig. 89. Anthony Catania, *Bubonic Blues*, 2008, mixed media on canvas, 80x60cm, private collection  
(photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)

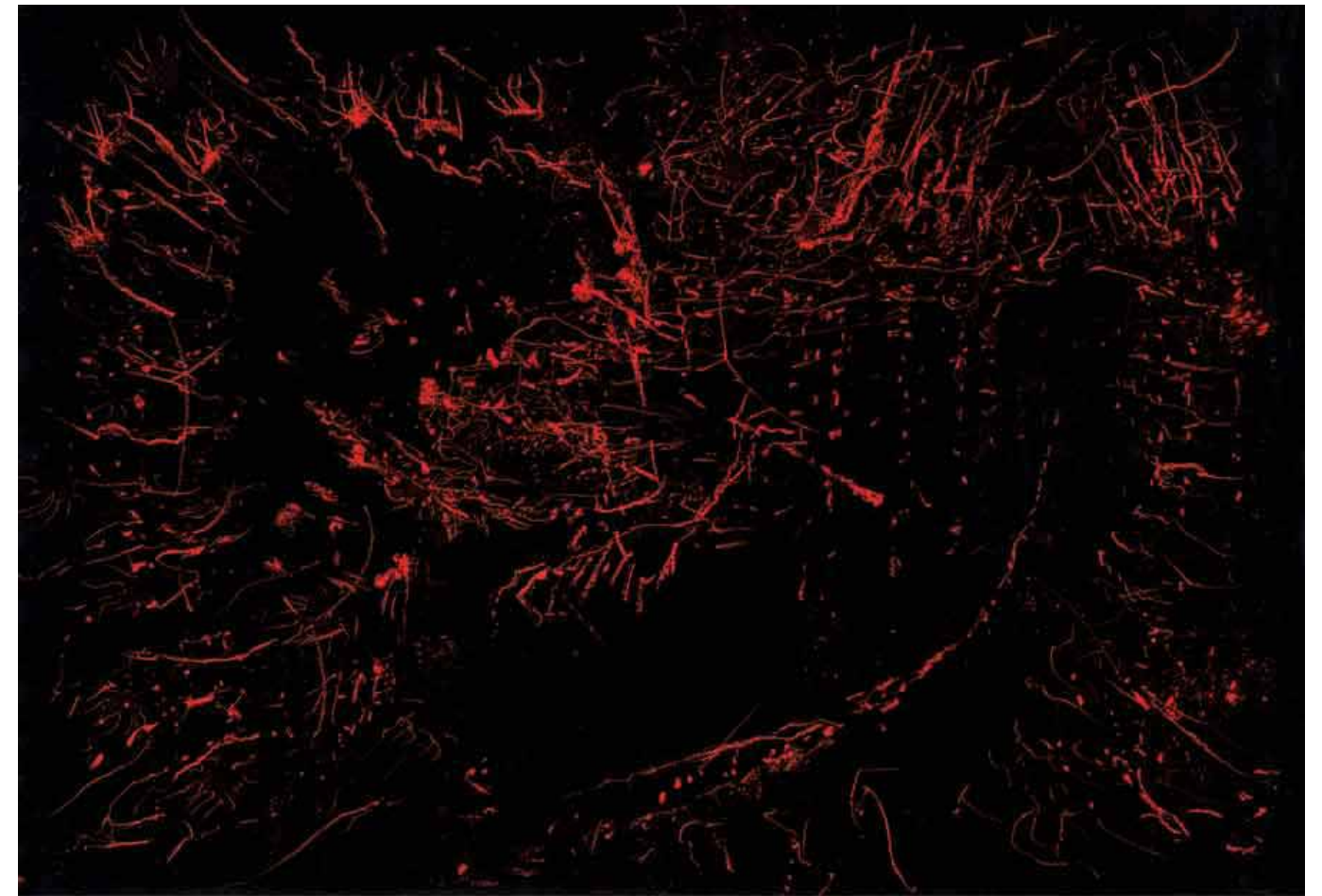


Fig. 90. Anthony Catania, *Charon Piper*, 2008, pastel, 28.5x42cm, private collection  
(photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)



Fig. 91. Anthony Catania, *Bleeding Adagio*, 2008, oil on canvas, 60x80cm, private collection (photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Anthony Catania)

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil  
Must give us pause[.]<sup>268</sup>

Attard's corpus is the very unearthing of the corpse with all its material pungency, the 'ugly' soiled acerbity, and its desolate scent – the natural consequences of this very unearthing. The Maltese artist manages this without failing to sustain a deep aesthetic relationship with death. His corpses are Vincent van Gogh's (1853-1890) *Schoenen* (*Shoes*) (1886) and Gustave Courbet's *La truite* (*The Trout*) (1873). His corpses are the flaked leprous remnants from Hamlet's graveyard, without however gaining the Shakespearean-Hegelian comic sublation into existential tragedy, without therefore the Heideggerian *aufheben* of Death. That which Pound *melopoeitically* transforms into *phanopoeia*, Attard reverses. Attard's 'unsharedness' also provokes its negation, the Baudelairean 'collective-shared graveyard voice', uniting all voices beyond the grave as in his *Le Tir et le cimetière* (*Shooting and the Graveyard*) (1869).

Attard's corpus of a collection of 'unshared' deaths brings about a collective polyphony of a 'shared' Baudelairean death voice: the non-relational character of Death becomes relational at the cemetery as a collective voice (fig. 92). The only possible shared experience in the 'unsharedness' of Death is played out in the cemetery space, which becomes hence the voice of 'the indiscriminate death' – the voice of the depersonalised collective dead; Heidegger's perishables and Kirchner's fodder (figs. 93, 94, 95, 96).

Along the path from Alfred Chircop's (1933-2015) (fig. 97) formlessness to Attard's shadowed souls, Pound becomes Charon and takes us through the evolution of forms from Hell, where hell for the damned is one 'in which forms, words, and concepts have lost all trace of the energies that created them, and loom as deadly shadows over a valley. Tradition, Pound implies, is a danger unless it is continually renewed, as the ghosts are renewed by the blood rite in Canto I ... The shape occurs'.<sup>269</sup> Language itself is damned in hell, and craves its own *katabasis*. Catania offers his visual alternatives. His *Selve Oscure* series reaches towards the Chinese-Poundian ideograms, paradoxically revealing a phono-semantic compound in his *One Fell Swoop* series. Ideogram-hieroglyphic form comes into shape as a regenerative force. Such regenerative energy is needed to continuously renew essence: 'The god is inside the stone', Pound writes, and through regeneration 'shape occurs'.<sup>270</sup>

Shape, the essential reality of form-ation,<sup>271</sup> appears as a category stemming from the Bakhtinian concept of *unfinalisability* integrated with that of Florensky's *polycentredness*. Both concepts converge in Pound's new creative synthesis for a novel heterogeneous *style* that will take us forward to ancient times for Pound, and to Medieval times for Florensky. With this objective in mind, Florensky and Pound yearn for the clarity of medieval form, that might renew the energies of a renaissance. This is in spite of their not being 'primarily spiritual or intellectual but [rather] begotten from the raw basis of life',<sup>272</sup> as is Lucrezia Borgia's (1480-1519) and Lorenzaccio de

<sup>269</sup> Froula (1983), 157.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Florensky (2002), 182.

<sup>272</sup> Moody (2014), 90.

<sup>268</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden Shakespeare, Bloomsbury, 2006), III. i. 59-67.





Fig. 92. Caesar Attard, *Cemetery*, 1995, mixed media on paper, 8.7x18.2cm, private collection  
(image courtesy: Caesar Attard)





Fig. 93. Caesar Attard, *In Bed II*, 1993, oil on canvas, 83.5x140cm private collection  
(photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Caesar Attard)

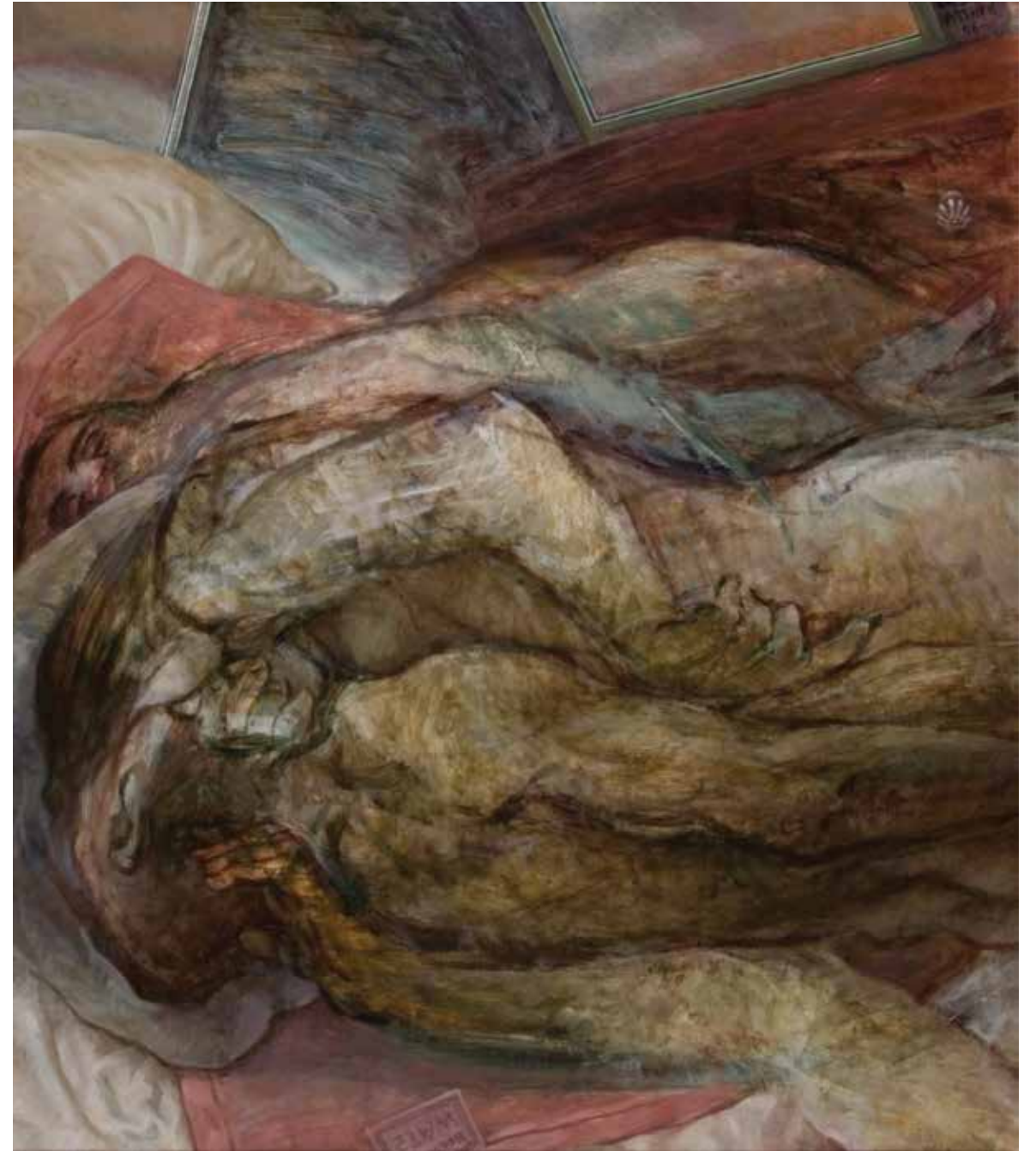


Fig. 94. Caesar Attard, *I Love you in...*, 1995, oil on canvas, 85x74cm, private collection  
(image courtesy: Caesar Attard)





Fig. 95. Caesar Attard, *Figures and Sofas*, 1995, mixed media on paper, 8.7x18.2cm, private collection (photo: Kevin Casha, image courtesy: Caesar Attard)



Fig. 96. Caesar Attard, *Sofa II*, 1999-2000, oil on canvas, 85.5x109cm, private collection (image courtesy: Caesar Attard)





Fig. 97. Alfred Chircop, *Abstract*, 2000, oil on board, 46x62cm, private collection  
(image courtesy: Nikki Petroni)



Fig. 98. Goxwa, *Sun Over Venice*, 2008, oil on canvas, 60x120cm, private collection  
(image courtesy: Goxwa)



Medici’s (1514-1548) crude power. The American poet and the Russian philosopher crave for this order and clarity, a sort of nostalgia for the coherent worldview shattered by the aggressive advent of Modernist relativism, of which latter the two may be considered founders despite their differences. Both re-enacted (in Pound’s own case rather unsuccessfully), the coherence provided by Christian theology, which grounded thought and language upon absolutes no longer available to the modern mind, since ‘our cosmos is not theirs’.<sup>273</sup> Pound and Florensky strove for the return of order. This position finds succinct expression in Florensky’s rather Poundian words: ‘Aphrodite in a farthingale would be as insupportable as a seventeenth-century marquise in an aeroplane’.<sup>274</sup> For this very reason, instead of the farthingaled Aphrodite, Pound introduced Venetian decadence: Pound’s vision of the (Venetian) palace with its new hall appearing to hang ‘baseless’ in the dawn mist could also accord with Florensky’s statement. The image is to be read as not just a fine aesthetic effect after Turner, but as declaring that the culture and government of Venice had no foundation, no *virtù*, and no enlightened vision. This also accords with John Ruskin’s (1819-1900) view that Venice had already lost its creative energy by 1423<sup>275</sup> (fig. 98).

Decline and decay can produce only ‘dead concepts, cautious intrigues, and prosperous commerce’, and will ultimately find death and a ‘few pictures’<sup>276</sup> that would solely testify to the final demise of culture and art. All this boils down to the fact that *Canto XXIV* tells of the beginning of the end of the d’Este family, with

the role played in this historical period by Tura Cosimo (1430-1495), ‘Italian painter of murals; a leader of the Ferrarese school and court painter to Borso and Ercole d’ Este; one of the Schifanoia muralists’:<sup>277</sup> ‘Albert made me, Tura painted my wall/ And Julia the Countess sold to a tannery ...’

Palaces of pleasure are accompanied by beheadings, which repeatedly echo the dark polyphony of previous Cantos. Renaissance Palazzo Schifanoia (1469-1471), one of the many d’Este palaces of pleasure, possessing a rather Caligulan aura, was used to *schivar la noia* (escape from boredom), and is filled with allegorical frescoes depicting time, months, zodiac symbols, portraits, and idyllic carnival floats. Other similar palaces are the Delizia di Belriguardo (Voghiera), Delizia di Mesola (Mesola), Delizia del Verginese (Portomaggiore), Villa della Mensa (Sabbioncello San Vittore), Delizia di Benvignante (Argenta), and Palazzo Belfiore, which latter no longer exists today.

The Ugo, Parisina, and Niccolò personages are woven together within a tapestry that includes the intermarriage incidents of the d’Este and Malatesta families. These are further interwoven within *dove fu Elena rapta da Paris*, which is ultimately juxtaposed with the Madonna Laodamia delli Romei, who was executed publicly amongst ‘several noble Ferrarese ladies who were notoriously serving their husbands as Parisina served him [Niccolò d’Este] - executed ‘in order that his wife should not be the only one to suffer’.<sup>278</sup>

This mosaic of decay is reflected in the next Canto’s disbelief.

# 19. Canto XXV

Pound reinforced this lack of enlightened vision through a reference to Venice’s fetishistic self-interested relationship with Titian in *Canto XXV*: all petty ‘baseless Venice demanded of its greatest painter Titian --- was to paint in the “fourth frame from the door on ...the picture of the land battle”; and when he hadn’t fulfilled the commission after twenty years the Council asked for their money back’.<sup>279</sup>

... side towards the piazza, the worst side of the room  
that no one has been willing to tackle,  
and do it as cheap or much cheaper ...  
(signed) Tician, 31 May 1513  
It being convenient that there be an end to  
the painting of Titian, fourth frame from the door on  
the right of the hall of the greater council, begun  
by maestro Tyciano da Cadore since its being thus  
unfinished holds up the decoration of said hall on  
the side that everyone sees. We  
move that by authority of this Council maestro Tyciano  
aforesaid be constrained to finish said canvas,  
and if he have not, to lose the expectancy of the  
brokerage on the Fondamenta delli Thodeschi  
and moreover to restore all payments recd. on account of  
said canvas.  
Ser Leonardus Emo, Sapiens Consilij:  
Ser Philippus Capello, Sapiens Terrae Firmae:  
In 1513 on the last day of May was conceded to  
Tician of Cadore painter a succession to a brokerage  
on the Fondamenta dei Thodeschi, the first to be vacant  
In 1516 on the 5<sup>th</sup>. of December was declared that  
without further waiting a vacancy he shd. enter that

which had been held by the painter Zuan Bellin on  
condition that he paint the picture of the land battle  
in the Hall of our Greater Council on the side toward  
the piazza over the Canal Grande, the which Tician after  
the demise of Zuan Bellin entered into possession of the  
said Sensaria and has for about twenty years profited by  
it, namely to about 100 ducats a year not including the  
18 to 20 ducats taxes yearly remitted him it being  
Fitting that as he has not worked he should not have  
the said profits WHEREFORE  
be it moved that the said  
Tician de Cadore, Pictor, be by authority of this Council  
obliged and constrained to restore to our government all the  
moneys that he has had from the agency during  
the time he has not worked on the painting in the said  
hall as is reasonable  
ayes 102, noes 38, 37 undecided  
register of the senate  
terra 1537, carta 136.

Venice is no longer ‘moved to serve the larger  
life of the spirit and its famed Renaissance ... was no  
renaissance at all’.<sup>280</sup>

273 Froula (1983), 158.

274 Florensky (2002), 106.

275 Moody (2014), 86.

276 Ibid., 87.

277 Terrell (1993), 99.

278 Ibid., 98.

279 Moody (2014), 87.

280 Ibid., 88.

## 20. Canto XXVI

The confrontation with Venice’s sumptuous *luxuria* (fig. 99) culminates in *Canto XXVI*, with the end of the Este story<sup>281</sup> and the loss of the money-making Medici family’s tie with nature.<sup>282</sup> At the same time however, this Canto recalls the Plethonic dream.<sup>283</sup> The Council of Ferrara-Florence’s attempt to save civilisation,<sup>284</sup> *sive* classical Greek civilisation, is ‘played’ out through Matteo da Pasti’s adventure (harking back to *Canto X*) involving, as one may recall, his arrest as a Turkish ally by the Venetians, when on a Malatesta mission to paint the Sultan’s portrait.

11<sup>th</sup>. December 1461: that Pasti be let out  
With a caveat  
‘caveat ire ad Turchum, that he stay out of  
Constantinople  
‘if he hold dear our government’s pleasure...’

Deepening the Constantinople connection, we are here introduced by Pound to ‘Vittorio Carpaccio (1455?- 1525?), famous Venetian painter, pupil to Lazaro Bastiani and follower of Bellini’:<sup>285</sup>

To see a Jerusalem I have made, ...  
In the first place illustrious m.lord, I am  
that painter to the Signory, commissioned to paint the  
gt.hall where Yr.Lordship deigns to mount

on the scaffold to see our work, the history of Ancona,  
and my name is Victor Carpatio.  
As to the Jerusalem I dare say there is not another  
in our time as good and completely perfect

Pound ends this with the internal feeling of Mozart’s (1756-1791) *inter lineas* openly expressed by Pound, ‘as is the sonata’.<sup>286</sup>

One is today living Pound’s epoptic prophetic reality. Dostoevsky’s ‘beauty saves the world’ makes sense only if humankind saves beauty, as Salvatore Settis writes in his *Se Venezia Muore*. Venice’s demise is today drowned in policies stemming from Pound’s doge-fetishism re-transfigured as the *trahison des clercs*, exemplified by philosopher-mayor Massimo Cacciari’s B&B Venice programme, and by the former Rector of Ca’ Foscari University Paolo Costa’s gigantic dredging cruise ships policy, according to Anna Somers Cocks.<sup>287</sup> Both would confirm the concerns found throughout Pound’s *Cantos*.

<sup>286</sup> From the Antonio Pisanello (1395? -1455) employed by Sigismundo for his *Canto VIII tempium aedificavit*, an ‘apex and in a verbal sense a monumental failure’ partially destroyed by the Allied bombing during WWII (Terrell (1993), 41). We meet Pisanello again in this *Canto XXVI*, this time, as a horse agent for Alessandro Sforza who at the time was allied with Sigismundo Malatesta through his marriage with Polissena, daughter of Sforza. Other painters figuring somewhat in this Canto are Lorenzo Leonbruno (1485-1537) and Zuane Zamberti (?), Giovanni Giamberti da Sangallo (1482-1530).

<sup>287</sup> Anna Sommers Cocks, “The uglification of Italy is a moral failing,” *The Arts Newspaper* 264 (January 2015), 64.

<sup>281</sup> Tryphonopoulos (1992), 133.

<sup>282</sup> Moody (2014), 86.

<sup>283</sup> Tryphonopoulos (1992), 139.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>285</sup> Terrell (1993), 108-109.





Fig. 99. Goxwa, *Venice (Wedding)*, 2010, oil on canvas, 116x89cm, private collection (image courtesy: Goxwa)

## 21. Canto XXVII

Lacking the actual presence of any painters, *Canto XXVII* acts as some kind of *intermezzo*, invoking Cavalcanti's '*Formando di disio nouva persona*' (forming a new person from desire). This continues weaving the dominant theme of formation from formlessness: 'if all my life be but some deathly moving',<sup>288</sup> until

The air burst into leaf.  
'Hung there flowered acanthus  
'Can you tell the down from the up?'

Man's formation and evolutionary source decreed to be, by Jean-Pierre Brisset (1837-1919), a frog parodied by Pound.

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<sup>288</sup> Terrell (1993), 110.

## 22. Canto XXVIII

Two painters here enter the scenario created by *Canto XXVIII*. One is Mr Lourpee, a name which was probably ‘a pseudonym for an unsuccessful French painter Pound saw at a pension in Madrid in 1906’.<sup>289</sup>

And Mr Lourpee sat on the floor of the  
pension dining-room  
Or perhaps it was in the alcove  
And about him lay a great mass of pastels,  
That is, stubbs and broken pencils of pastel,  
In pale indeterminate colours.

The other painter is William Brooke Smith (1884-1908), ‘a young painter Pound knew in Philadelphia, ca.1905; Pound dedicated A Lume Spento, 1908, to him’.<sup>290</sup> ‘And one day in Smith’s room/ Or may be it was that 1908 medico’s’

Theirs is one of the most understudied relationships in the literature on Pound. Smith died of tuberculosis in 1908, an event that devastated Pound who found in Smith a love intertwined with mysticism, Sufism, wine, beauty, pantheism, and painting: ‘tall, graceful, with a butterfly bow tie.’

Pound changed the title of his poetry collection *La Fraisne* (Ash Tree) to *A Lume Spento* (With Tapers Spent), from Dante’s *Purgatorio*. The following is the dedication to the collection:

... sith one of has gone out from amongst us it [is] given  
A LUME SPENTO  
(WITH TAPERS QUENCHED)  
in memoriam eius mihi caritate primus  
WILLIAM BROOKE SMITH  
*Painter, Dreamer of dreams’*

Even after thirteen years: ‘I haven’t replaced him and shan’t and no longer hope to.’

Smith returns in *Canto LXXVII*, a reiteration which shows that ‘Pound was unable to put the ghost to rest.’<sup>291</sup>

<sup>289</sup> Terrell (1993), 112.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>291</sup> Moody (2007), 45. Strangely enough Moody bypasses this relationship between Pound and Smith in spite of the dedication: ‘to such as love this same beauty that I love, somewhat after mine own fashion’.



## 23. Canto XXIX

No painters accompany the

Pearl, great sphere, and hollow  
Mist over lake, full of sunlight  
Pernella concubina

in the opening of *Canto XXIX*.

This Canto includes: Count Aldobrando Orsini's mistress, *concubina*, Count Pitigliano's (1452-1510) murder of his cousin Penelope for murdering his brother, Alberico's witnessing of his family's massacre, a jazz band with 'our mulberry leaf' of the eternal female,<sup>292</sup> and Charles Darwin's (1809-1882) *nel ventre tuo, o nella mente mia* (in your womb, or in my mind). These all culminate in Eliot's fear of death *nondum orto jubare* (with the clear light of Phoebus not yet risen), and 'trees melted in air'. This is the tapestry that Pound offers here, inviting us to the final scene of *Canto XXX*.

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292 Bush (1989), 261.

# 24. Canto XXX

I gnez de Castro majestically re-enters in *Canto XXX*. ‘Time is the evil. Evil.’ This time she enters as a corpse, with:

Came the Lords in Lisboa  
a day, and a day  
In homage. Seated there  
dead eyes  
dead hair under the crown  
The King still young there beside her.

We are made to re-experience and re-witness the same happening and the same utterance: on the one hand, Ignez’s macabre episode,<sup>293</sup> and on the other hand the grotesque homage exacted for ‘governaunce’ that is dead and rotten,<sup>294</sup> recalling many of Francisco Goya’s (1746-1828) *Capriccios*, and subject-rhymed in Attard’s *Sleep* series. In the beginning of this final Canto, Artemis re-enters with Chaucer’s *Complaint unto Pity* and is juxtaposed against Lucrezia Borgia, *Madame Hule* (wood, material, slime, shit, matter as a principle of being), ‘clothed with light of the altar’, having received the Pope’s blessing. Finally, the scheme devised by Pope Alessandro Borgia and others to poison Cardinal Adriano Castellesi is divulged, which, as though by fate, beautifully backfired against them. This halted the ambitions and plans of the Borgias for the advancement of art, the

spread of Renaissance culture, and the unification of Italy, bringing them ‘to a quick and dramatic end’,<sup>295</sup> an end that demands a return to self-answerability for one’s actions.

Here the mood created is one demanding contemplation and meditation on one’s actions, a sort of ‘reality check to that feeling for energies in action’.<sup>296</sup> In this manner, *Canto XXX* reflects Bakhtin’s category of *answerability*:

the unity of an act and its account, a deed and its meaning, if you will, is something that is never a priori, but which must always and everywhere be *achieved*. The act is a deed, and not a mere happening ..., only if the subject of such a *postupok*,<sup>297</sup> from within his own radical uniqueness, weaves a relation *to* it in his accounting *for* it.<sup>298</sup>

*Canto XXX* travels on a cyclical journey back to *Canto I*. It is now Madame YAH - Nature herself, Being itself – ‘who turns from bountiful goddess into nemesis when men disregard her rituals and her power’.<sup>299</sup> Such disregard leads to the ultimate downfall, as already sung earlier during Dionysus’s revenge on his kidnappers excepting Acoetes, the only one who recognised and ‘saw’ into the god. Such

<sup>293</sup> Bush (1989), 191-192.

<sup>294</sup> Froula (1983), 160.

<sup>295</sup> Terrell (1993), 119.

<sup>296</sup> Moody (2014), 89.

<sup>297</sup> An action or deed.

<sup>298</sup> Michael Holquist, “Foreword,” in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, trans. Vadim Liapunov, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov (Texas: University of Texas Press Slavic Series, 1993), xii.

<sup>299</sup> Bush (1989), 298.



disregard of the divine warning was also the cause of King Pentheus’s downfall. The King finds himself, as did Acteon by his own dogs, torn limb from limb by the bacchanalian Theban women, in more recent times recalling Mussolini’s fate for not reading into Diana’s Lake Nemi.

Disregarding rituals results in Bakhtin’s *answerability*, which in fact is ‘the fundamental goal of creativity i.e. a concrete response to actual persons in specific situations’,<sup>300</sup> a creativity which claims answerability to life and to existence. From the initial *katabasis*, one arrives either at Florensky’s ‘connectedness of Being’<sup>301</sup> and Bakhtin’s ‘grounded peace’, a term signifying an interpenetration of the religious-ritualistic with the aesthetic,<sup>302</sup> or ultimately to Heidegger’s *holzwege*, a path leading to nowhere: a conclusion that is finally met in one of Pound’s last Cantos, wherein he asks for forgiveness; ‘I have tried to write Paradise ... Let the wind speak’ (*Canto CXX*) in silence. And in silence are Goxwa’s, Catania’s, and Attard’s works read, just as ‘Canto XXX can only be read with uneasiness, presenting as it does a fantasy of destructive power’<sup>303</sup> in which Pity, and all other ‘virtues allied with it ... have lost their value’.<sup>304</sup>

*Il Papa mori*  
*Explicit canto*  
*XXX.*

300 Haynes (2013), 42.  
301 Jakim (2014), 43-47.  
302 Haynes (2013), 13.  
303 Froula (1983), 160.  
304 Ibid.

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