

HISTORICIZING MODERNISM

**EZRA
POUND
AND HIS
CLASSICAL
SOURCES**

'THE CANTOS' AND THE
PRIMAL MATTER OF TROY

JONATHAN ULLYOT

BLOOMSBURY

Ezra Pound and His Classical Sources

Historicizing Modernism

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Ezra Pound and His Classical Sources

The Cantos and the Primal Matter of Troy

Jonathan Ulliot

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BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

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Cover design: Eleanor Rose

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-3502-6024-5
ePDF: 978-1-3502-6023-8
eBook: 978-1-3502-6022-1

Series: Historicizing Modernism

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Acknowledgments

This book grew out of an article I wrote for *Unattended Moments: The Medieval Presence in the Modernist Aesthetic* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2018). An expanded version of this article appears as the first chapter, “*The Spirit of Romance* and the Debt to Philology.” I am grateful to have received an Everett Helm Visiting Fellowship at the Lilly Library, Indiana University of Bloomington; a Research Fellowship in the Humanities to study at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas Austin; and an MSA Research Fellowship to study at the Beinecke Library, Yale University. The Modernist Research and Readings Group at the University of Toronto helped me clarify the argument of my early chapters. Others who offered significant feedback or helpful advice include Massimo Bacigalupo, Katarzyna Bartoszynska, Walter Baumann, Ronald Bush, Mark Byron, Marjorie Froula, Maud Ellmann, Michael Kindellan, Richard Sieburth, Leon Surette, Demetres Tryphonopoulos, and Robert Von Hallberg.

Abbreviations

Works by Pound

- ABCR *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1960).
- C *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1975).
- GK *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1970).
- LE *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1960).
- PT *Poems and Translations*, ed. Richard Sieburth (New York: Library of America, 2003).
- L *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907–1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: New Directions, 1951).
- SP *Selected Prose, 1909–1965*, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973).
- SR *The Spirit of Romance*, ed. Richard Sieburth (New York: New Directions, 2005).

Archives

- EPC Ezra Pound Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. I thank New Directions for their permission to publish excerpts of these materials. References to *EPC* are followed by box and folder number.
- EPP Ezra Pound Papers, YCAL MS 43, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. I thank New Directions for their permission to publish excerpts of these materials. References to *EPP* are followed by a folder number.

Introduction: *The Cantos* and the Matter of Troy

*Homeric scholars and comparative mythologists tell us that the stories with which the *Odyssey* is thick-strewn were not invented by Homer; that he took the folk-lore that lay ready to hand, and wove its diverse legends into an epic whole; that many of his myths are the common property of both Aryan and non-Aryan peoples.¹*

*I have thought of the second Troy
Some little prized place in Auvergnat²*

Late in 1934, Ezra Pound asked W. H. D. Rouse, the founding editor of the Loeb Classical Library, to undertake a plain prose translation of Homer's *Odyssey*. Rouse was a retired principal who had pioneered the Direct Method of teaching Latin and Greek to his ten- and eleven-year-old students, in which the target language is also the language of instruction. Pound wanted Rouse to resurrect Homer's clear and precise Greek from the Latinate style of George Chapman and the "King James fustian" of the Leaf-Lang translation.³ "The modern world has LOST a kind of contact with and love for the classics which it HAD, not only in the 18th. century, and in the renaissance (part snobbism) but throughout the middle ages, when in one sense it knew much less."⁴ Rouse's job was to present "Homer without a bustle. good, and without pantalettes."⁵ "No poppy cock / that is the Homeric quality." Pound's letters to Rouse illuminate both the role Homer plays in *The Cantos* and the role *The Cantos* might play in our understanding of Homer.

Rouse eagerly took up the task. He sent Pound a draft of books 1–4 of the *Odyssey*. Pound bombarded him with criticism. He objected to Rouse's clunky

¹ Jane Harrison, *Myths of the Odyssey* (London: Rivingtons, 1882), 1.

² *PT*, 298.

³ *LE*, 250.

⁴ Ezra Pound, December 30, 1934 Letter to W. H. D. Rouse. *EPP*, 1945.

⁵ Ezra Pound, April 10, 1935 Letter to W. H. D. Rouse. *EPP*, 1947.

diction. “Never have I heard the word ‘PLIGHT’ spoken.”⁶ He suggested that Rouse only translate what is essential. “I just don’t think you’ve yet got it. At any rate I’d like to see a ‘rewrite’ as if you didn’t know the WORDS of the original, and were telling what happened.”⁷ He demanded that Rouse invent new phrases for the Homeric epithets. “A LIVE phrase may get one out of dead epithet.”⁸ He reminds Rouse of Homer’s unique onomatopoeia. “What I hear in Homer with my three farden’s worth of greek, is the SOUND of the old mens voices, or the poluphloisboious [loud-roaring] swish/swash on the beach.”⁹ In Canto 2, Pound imagines a blind Homer hearing the cicada-like voices of the old men on the Skaian gate in *Iliad* book 3 from the sound of the waves on the coast of Chios.

And poor old Homer blind, blind, as a bat,
 Ear, ear for the sea-surge, murmur of old men’s voices:
 “Let her go back to the ships.”¹⁰

In Canto 74, Pound describes the “diminutive poluphloisboios [loud-roarings]” of Homer’s sea (74/447).

But Rouse wasn’t getting it. Nor did he get the whole business of modernism. “As for the modernists, Sitwells + Co, they are idiots, so far as I have managed to read, without either sound or sense, but I know little.”¹¹ Pound sent Rouse a copy of *A Draft of XXX Cantos* (1930). Rouse was puzzled. “Your cantos are like sketches for poems, is that not so? I have not followed them yet, so forgive me if I am stupid.”¹² When Rouse sent Pound his translation of book 5 of the *Odyssey*, Pound found it “just plain damn bad. Careless, frivolous, missed opportunities all over it.”¹³ Rouse had turned Odysseus into British gentlemen. Odysseus derives from the trickster of folklore, Pound argued: proud, lazy, impulsive:

born un po’ misero/ dont want to
 go to war / little runt who finally has to do all the
 hard work/ gets all Don Juan’s chances with the ladies
 and cant really enjoy ‘em/ Circe, Calypso, Nausika
 always some fly in the ointment/ last to volunteer on
 stiff jobs.¹⁴

⁶ Ezra Pound, February [?], 1935 Letter to W. H. D. Rouse. *EPP*, 1946.

⁷ Ezra Pound, March 18, 1935 Letter to W. H. D. Rouse. *EPP*, 1947.

⁸ Ezra Pound, April 10, 1935 Letter to W. H. D. Rouse. *EPP*, 1947.

⁹ Ezra Pound, February or March 1935 Letter to W. H. D. Rouse. *EPP*, 1947.

¹⁰ C, 2/6. Hereafter quoted parenthetically in the text.

¹¹ W. H. D. Rouse, February 8, 1935 Letter to Ezra Pound. *EPP*, 1947.

¹² W. H. D. Rouse, March 2, 1935 Letter to Ezra Pound. *EPP*, 1947.

¹³ Ezra Pound, April [?], 1935 Letter to W. H. D. Rouse. *EPP*, 1949.

¹⁴ Ezra Pound, April 17, 1935 Letter to W. H. D. Rouse. *EPP*, 1948.

Likewise, Rouse's portrayal of Homer's gods was all wrong. They are not rational decision-makers. They derive from ancient animal spirits (with personal totem animals) and the tricky deities of folklore.

GLAUX, owl / totem or symbolic bird / as stupid bitch HERA
 has her bull eyes / glare eyed, owl eyed Athene /
 gods connected with the divine animals
 The Apollo at Villa Giulis gives tip to
 mediterranean gods/ startling, sudden, non of that washy
 late stuff done by sculpting slave models/
 nor afternoon tea Xtian poetry. Gods tricky as nature.

Like Nietzsche, Pound champions the vitalism of archaic Greece over the decadence and rationalism of classical Greece. The “washy late stuff” of classical Athenian sculpture, such as the Apollo Lyceus, attributed to Praxiteles, epitomizes the decadent “gods in repose” style, modeled on naked slave boys.

Compare that to the Etruscan Aplu (Apollo) of Veii, a giant terracotta from the roof of a temple of Minerva (510–500 BCE), which “gives tip” to something more primordial. Apollo embodies the “startling, sudden” energy of the theriomorphic trickster god of metamorphosis and change. (See figure 0.2) Apollo strides forward to wrest the Ceryneian Hind from Heracles. Although the smile is a common feature of the archaic kouros, Apollo's smile feels exaggerated, almost demonic, like a laughing Zarathustra. The “miracle of Homer,” Pound explained, “is the raw cut of concrete reality/ combined with the tremendous energy/ the contact with the natural force.” Pound advised Rouse to read Ernst Fenollosa's *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* and study Dante's use of verbs. “The CHIEF impression in reading Homer is FRESHNESS. whether illusion or not, this is THE classic quality. 3000 years old and still FRESH. a trans/ that misses that, is bad. MUST get NEW combinations of words.”¹⁵

Rouse could not meet Pound's demands. Pound was not really asking for a translation but a kind of poetic adaptation that would emulate the techniques and discoveries he had already made in his first thirty cantos—discoveries which Rouse didn't understand. Rouse responded on July 2, 1935:

¹⁵ Ezra Pound, [May?] 1935 Letter to W. H. D. Rouse. *EPP*, 1950.



Figure 0.1 “Apollo Lykeios” type, Louvre Museum.

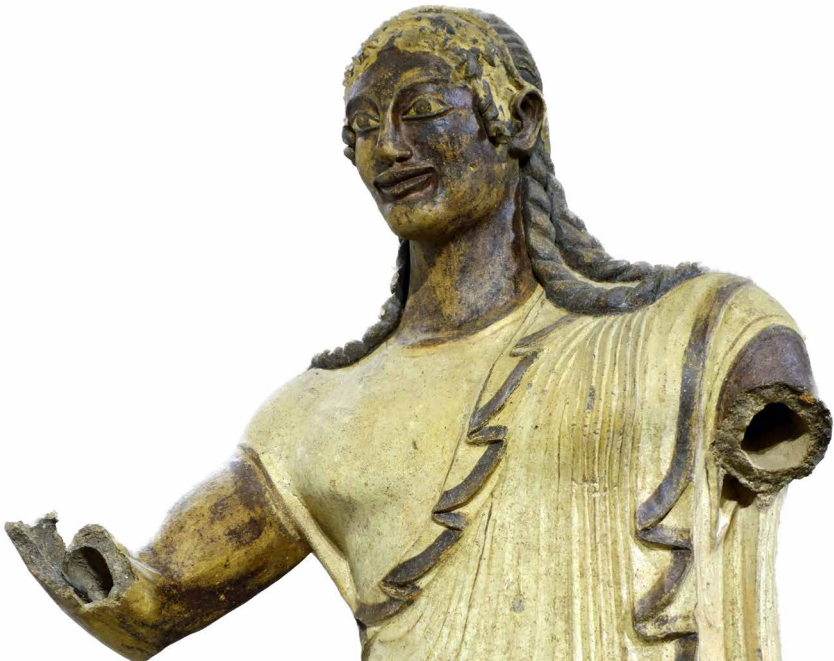


Figure 0.2 Vulca’s “Apollo of Verii,” National Etruscan Museum, Rome.

Translation was in my mind all the time, i.e. such a version that a reader of Greek could find any bit of Greek in the English. That was what I asked you at the beginning. I dare say it was clear in your mind, but you did not make it clear in mine. But experience has shown me that such a translation can't be done by me.

The question is how can it be done? And can it be true to Homer?

I expect the whole [would] have to be done again, but never mind.¹⁶

Rouse's point was that if Pound wanted the *Odyssey* done right, he should translate it himself. Pound responded, "if I tried to trans the *Odyssey* I wd. probably make a thing of shreds and patches, all out of shape and deficient in homogeneity."¹⁷ Pound's explanation for why he can't translate the *Odyssey* becomes a new set of demands.

when I do sink into the greek, what I dig up
is too concentrative,

I dont see how to get unity of the
WHOLE.

I suspect neither Dante or Homer HAD the kind of
boring "unity" of surface that we take to be characteristic
of Pope, Racine, Corneille.

The nekuia shouts aloud that it is OLDER than the rest/
all that island, cretan etc/ hinter-time, that is
NOT Praxiteles, not Athens of Pericles, but Odysseus,

I keep nagging you, because a trans/ of the *Odyssey* seems to
me so enormous an undertaking, and the requirements
include all the possible masteries of English

The FIRST essential is the narrative movement, forward,
not blocking the road as Chapman does. everything that stops
the reader must GO, be cut out.¹⁸

Pound first explains that his own method is too "concentrative." He can't find the unity of the whole. Then he concedes that Homer probably didn't have that unity anyway. (Meaning Pound can translate Homer.) Pound then condemns Rouse's translation of the nekyia or "questioning of the dead" in *Odyssey* 11. Rouse ought to spend more time studying Canto 1. Pound's opinion that the nekyia derives from a more primitive source than the rest of the *Odyssey* was

¹⁶ W. H. D. Rouse, July 2, 1935 Letter to Ezra Pound. *EPP*, 1950.

¹⁷ Ezra Pound, August 20, 1935 Letter to W. H. D. Rouse. *EPP*, 1950.

¹⁸ Ezra Pound, August 23, 1935 Letter to W. H. D. Rouse. *EPP*, 1950.

shared by many. Jane Harrison, Johann Wilhelm Adolph Kirchoff, Andrew Lang, Albert Dieterich, Walter Leaf, and J. A. K. Thomson had argued that the *nekyia* reflects a more primitive religion than is found elsewhere in Homer: a cult of the dead and a goddess-based religion of fertility rituals.¹⁹ Given that the *Odyssey* itself is made up of different layers reflecting different compositional periods, a proper translation requires all possible “masteries” of English. Pound finally suggests that Rouse not be faithful to Homer’s words, but to the narrative movement forward. “Dichten = condensare.”²⁰

Rouse didn’t reply. He was not about to translate, for example, the *nekyia* differently than the Circe section because it originated from an earlier source. (Pound did: Anglo Saxon English in Canto 1 and drunken Latinate English in Canto 39.) Rouse was not trying to contend with Joyce’s “Oxen of the Sun.” (Pound probably was.) Rouse was not going to cut whole sections out of the text, or drop or modify the epithets. (Pound did: Canto 1 condenses 140 lines of Homer into 48; his Helen has “bitch eyes” [103/750].) That would only cause confusion for those reading his translation alongside the Greek. Rouse’s goal was to produce “a version that a reader of Greek could find any bit of Greek in the English.”

In September of 1935, Rouse sent Pound the first few books of his completed translation. “Please say at the same time if you wish for any more. I am afraid they must bore you to criticize.”²¹ Pound had little to say, and their correspondence turned to the subject of Homeric color words.²² By 1936, Pound’s politics trumped what remained of their friendship: “I am so fed up with your FILTHY and disgusting government that I have to take a pull at myself to write to any Englishman who isn’t out trying to prevent European war / to kill the ditch Eden and get rid of the stink of sanctions.”²³ (Anthony Eden was the junior minister of the League of Nations.) Pound eventually suspended communications.

¹⁹ Albert Dieterich, *Nekyia* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1893), 46–50, 75–7, 150–9; Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908 [1903]), 333–50, 601–11; Andrew Lang, *Homer and the Epic* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1893), 309–15; Walter Leaf, “Appendix L: Homeric Burial Rites,” in *The Iliad*, 2nd edition, vol. 2, ed. Walter Leaf (New York: Macmillan, 1900), 618–22; J. A. K. Thomson, *Studies in the Odyssey* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), 24–30, 85–97; and Johann Kirchoff, *Die homerische Odyssee* (Berlin: 1859), 224–34. See chapter 2.

²⁰ *ABCR*, 36.

²¹ W. H. D. Rouse, September 16, 1935 Letter to Ezra Pound. *EPP*, 1950.

²² See chapter 3.

²³ Ezra Pound, December [?], 1936 Letter to W. H. D. Rouse. *EPP*, 1951.

A year later, Pound came across Rouse's *The Story of Odysseus* and read the dedication: "Mr. Ezra Pound is the onlie begetter of this book. He suggested it, and he read the first part with with Odyssean patience; his trenchant comments, well deserved, gave me the courage of my convictions."²⁴ When Pound wrote to thank him, Rouse mentioned that he had nearly finished a translation of the *Iliad*. Pound's fury rekindled:

If you have ALREADY finished the Iliad and sent it to press you deserve NO pity, and are a purely frivolous character. [...] It will take you FIVE years at least to rework the subtler parts of the Odyssey. NO man or god can do more than one masterpiece or two.²⁵

Rouse never mentioned his intention to "rework the subtler parts of the Odyssey." Pound is only reminding him of his failure. Rouse had mentioned an interest in tackling Pindar. Pound's response: "I do NOT believe Pindar was the 67th part of Homer. All right as diletantism for a bloke that knows Homer backwards by heart ... But I wd. rather you spent the next decade REVISING yr/ Odyssey and yr Ilead."

This literary exchange is amusing for its many deadlocks. Rouse was no T. S. Eliot. Pound could not play midwife to his modernist adaptation of Homer. Rouse's intention was to produce an *Odyssey* that a young reader could enjoy. It did not require half a lifetime's rumination or a mastery of alliterative verse. Like many others, Rouse appreciated Pound's poetic insight and talent as an editor while doing his best to ignore his megalomania and crackpot politics. Pound and Rouse both agreed that Homer needed to be liberated from the high poetic English style of Chapman. Homer's stories are the stuff of folklore: rapid, fresh, and funny. But they couldn't agree beyond that. Rouse produced an *Odyssey* that anyone could read, and which greatly contributed to the popularity of the text today. His literary talent was close to null. Pound produced an *Odyssey* of shreds and patches buried within an epic that most readers find needlessly difficult and disordered.

Pound's letters to Rouse summarize, in raw form, the key features of his own translations and adaptations of the *Odyssey* buried within *The Cantos*. These include: a translation which emulates the medieval mind's love of the classics; a translation that reflects the primordial (archaic, Etruscan, "primitive") roots of Homer's gods; a translation that sacrifices literalness for freshness ("Been to

²⁴ Homer, *The Story of Odysseus*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1937), unpaginated front matter.

²⁵ Ezra Pound, October [22 or after], 1937 Letter to W. H. D. Rouse. *EPP*, 1954.

hell in a boat yet?” asks Circe; “my bikini is worth your raft” bargains Leucothea [39/195, 91/636]) and dead epithets for new combinations of words (“ΟΥ ΤΙΣ [OU TIS, ‘no one’] / a man on whom the sun has gone down” [74/450]); a translation that uses different styles of English to reflect the historical stratification of Homer’s text; a translation that does not impede the narrative movement forward, summarizing the action when necessary (“And he sailed, by Sirens and thence outward and away / And unto Circe” [1/5]); a translation that accentuates Homer’s polyphony and his onomatopoeia, even at the cost of incomprehension or “dumping” Greek words into the text (“Thinning their oar-blades / θίνα θαλάσσης [*thina thalassēs*, ‘shore of the sea’]” [98/704]); and, at least implicitly, a translation which stages its very struggle to translate Homer (“Lie quiet Divus. I mean, that is Andreas Divus,” [1/5]), both celebrating and despairing of itself as “deficient in homogeneity.”

The Matter of Troy

The Cantos engages with the *Odyssey* in numerous ways: it translates it; puzzles over it; interprets and misinterprets it; adapts it; critiques it; trivializes it; allegorizes it; “ritualizes” it; personalizes it; and “anthropologizes” it. There are more references to the *Odyssey* and Homer in *The Cantos* than any other text or author. *The Cantos* begins with an alliterative translation of Odysseus’s visit to the underworld to visit Tiresias. Canto 2 weaves the story of Tyro from Homer’s catalogue of heroines with the teichoscopy (“viewing from the walls”) in *Iliad* 3. Canto 20 imagines the Lotus eaters in a chthonic paradise condemning Odysseus’s selfishness. Cantos 39 and 47 recount Odysseus’s sex vacation on Circe’s island. Odysseus’s shipwreck anchors Pound’s lyrical ruminations on the destruction of Europe and his own hubris in *The Pisan Cantos*. *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones* retell Leucothea’s rescue of Odysseus and his arrival in Phaeacia in sixteen fragments.

Similar to Joyce’s use of a different “technic” (from τέχνη, *technē*, meaning both “craftsmanship” and “art”) in each chapter of *Ulysses*, Pound uses different styles or “masteries of English” to translate Homer: an alliterative translation of the nekylia; an Ovidian *carmen perpetuum* or “endless song” of Tyro and Helen; a delirious and “doped” vision of the Lotophagoi; an erotic and ecstatic account of Odysseus and Circe’s *hieros gamos* or “sacred marriage”; a lyrical and chaotic invocation of Odysseus’s shipwreck; and a mystical, anagogic, and metapoetic translation of Leucothea.

Both Joyce's *Ulysses* and Eliot's interpretation of it illuminate Pound's use of the *Odyssey*. In "Ulysses" (1922), Pound describes the Homeric correspondences of *Ulysses* as "Joyce's medievalism": "a scaffold, a means of construction, justified by the result, and justifiable by it only. The result is a triumph in form, in balance, a main schema, with continuous inweaving and arabesque."²⁶ In "Ulysses, Order and Myth" (1923), Eliot identifies a "mythical method" in *Ulysses* which has replaced narrative method and represents "a step toward making the modern world possible for art."²⁷ The mythical method borrows developments in psychology, ethnography, and works like Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890–1915) in order not to adapt a canonical text but to lay bare its anthropological roots. However, the mythical method illuminates Eliot's own technique in *The Waste Land* better than Joyce's technique in *Ulysses*. Inspired by the philological technique of Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), Eliot fragments and rearranges the motifs and episodes from the Grail romance in order to reveal the primitive vegetative rituals behind them. (At least, in theory: it is difficult to make the case that *The Waste Land* fully commits to this methodology or actually achieves this.²⁸) "Eliot's *Waste Land* is I think the justification of the 'movement,' of our modern experiment, since 1900," Pound explains to the Elizabethan scholar Felix Schelling in 1922.²⁹ "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" declares Eliot's narrator, or perhaps Fisher King.³⁰ Pound's version is less elegant: "These fragments you have shelved (shored). / 'Slut!' 'Bitch!' Truth and Calliope / Slanging each other sous les lauriers" (8/28). The fragmentation of the mythical method sows discord between the muses of epic poetry and eloquence.

The Cantos combines the mythical method of *The Waste Land* with the epic scope, "medievalism," and "continuous inweaving and arabesque" of *Ulysses* in order to translate or adapt the *Odyssey* not as a coherent epic but as a compendium of fragments pointing back to a primordial ritual. To put it bluntly: *The Cantos* does what Eliot (erroneously) argued Joyce had already done, and what Eliot pretended to be doing in *The Waste Land* (with Pound's help).

²⁶ *LE*, 406.

²⁷ T. S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 178.

²⁸ See Jonathan Ullyot, "Jessie Weston and the Mythical Method of *The Waste Land*," in *The Medieval Presence in Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 47–81.

²⁹ *L*, 248.

³⁰ T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, vol. 1, ed. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), line 430.

Certainly, this simplification would have made Pound cringe. It only tells part of the story. This book attempts to tell the rest. Pound's engagement with medieval classicism and nineteenth-century philology eclipsed that of Joyce or Eliot. Pound's readings of medieval literature in *The Spirit of Romance* (1910) are inspired by the pioneering philology of Gaston Paris, Joseph Bédier, and Walter Ker. *The Cantos* is (among so many other things) Pound's own modernist vision of the Matter of Troy, a term used by medieval authors to designate the cycle of texts based on the Trojan War and its aftereffects.³¹ Specifically, *The Cantos* presents itself as a modernist *translatio studii* and *imperii* of Homer's *Odyssey*.

The medieval *translatio studii* ("transfer of knowledge and learning") is the translation and revision of classical Latin text (or Latin translation of a Greek text) to reflect contemporary tastes, morality, and truths. These include: the medieval obsession with exotic (often Eastern) affluence, early paradises, and *merveilles* ("marvels"), like the magical pavilions and automata in the *Roman d'Enéas* (c. 1160); the rules of courtly love as set forth in Ovid's *Amores* and the hero's refinement through "fine amor," a central theme of Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie* (c. 1155–60); the importance of *courtoise*, or the superiority of French knighthood and learning, as evident in Chaucer's *Troilus and Cryside* (c. 1385); and the "truth" of Christian values and eschatology, exemplified in *L'Ovide moralisé* (c. 1317–28) or Dante's *Divina Commedia* (1320). The *translatio imperii*, meaning a transfer of *imperium*, or the authority to command, involves attaching a ruling family to an ancient Greek or Trojan hero. Virgil's *Aeneid* establishes the Trojan hero Aeneas as the mythic founder of Rome. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1136) and Layamon's *Brut* (c. 1190–1215) link the founding of Albion (Britain) to the arrival of Brutus of Troy, the son of Aeneas.

In Canto 1, Pound translates a Latin translation of Odysseus's *nekylia* into medieval alliterative English verse: an outright declaration of his medieval classicism. Like a medieval author, Pound thanks his source, Andreas Divus. Like a medieval author, Pound presents the classical hero as a lover who epitomizes *courtoise* rather than as a brilliant tactician or doughty warrior.

³¹ The Old French poet Jean Bodel classified the legendary themes and literary cycles into Three Matters: the Matter of Britain, including the legendary history of Britain and the Arthurian cycle; the Matter of France, particularly texts concerning Charlemagne and his associates; and the Matter of Rome, texts concerning Greek and Roman mythology and historical figures like Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. The Matter of Troy was later identified as a subset of the Matter of Rome. It included any texts about the Trojan War and its aftermath, including the story of Aeneas.

Homer's Odysseus is a military hero who fends off monsters and clingy goddesses by cunning. Pound's Odysseus is a "po' misero": a passive hero who accepts the guidance of goddesses and becomes an initiate in their mysteries. He emulates what Pound calls the medieval "cult of Amor" of Ovid and the troubadour poets.³² Like the medieval author, Pound amplifies the classical text with elaborate descriptions of earthly paradises, marvels, and exotic processions. The *Roman d'Enéas* expounds upon the dye-producing mollusks of Tyre and the magnetic fortifications of Carthage. Benoît devotes 300 lines to the alabaster Chambre de Beauté where a wounded Hector is tended: a utopia of idolatry and *courtoisie*, complete with dancing statues and an automaton that explains how a knight ought to behave.³³ Pound describes statuesque figures in marvelous floating cars passing through a Venetian jungle of crystal columns and the "Shelf of the lotophagoi, / Aerial, cut in the aether" (20/93). He turns Circe's "house of smooth stone" into a sensuous paradise of "fucked girls and fat leopards" (39/193), amplifying in over a hundred lines in Cantos 39 and 47 what Homer describes in two: "So there day after day for a full year we abode, feasting on abundant flesh and sweet wine."³⁴

Pound also links Odysseus to the present day by what he calls "subject rhymes": an *imperium* of enlightened Odysseus-equivalents ("factive" personalities, or doers of the world³⁵) throughout history—adventurers, entrepreneurs, lovers, scientists, patrons of the arts, and devotees of non-doctrinal religions that syncretize the best elements of paganism and Catholicism. These include Apollonius of Tyana, Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Cunizza da Romano, Sordello da Goito, Gemistos Plethon, Niccolò III d'Este, Martin Van Buren, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benito Mussolini. The House of Este receives special attention. They traced their lineage all the way back to Troy: "And that was when Troy was down / And they came here and cut holes in rock, / Down Rome way, and put up the timbers; / And came here, condit Atesten" (20/90–91).

Traditionally, the medieval *translatio* updates the material to reflect the present, or at least to a more contemporary version of what the classical heroic age should have looked like. Benoît's Greeks and Trojans fight on horseback with axes and crossbows; they play backgammon in the off hours and worship

³² SR, 97.

³³ Benoît de Saint-Maure, *Le Roman de Troie*, ed. Léopold Constans (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1904–12), lines 14631–958.

³⁴ Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. A. T. Murray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 10.467–8. Hereafter quoted parenthetically in the text.

³⁵ GK, 194.

in Gothic churches; and they seem familiar with the Bible. Inspired by authors like Jane Harrison, J. A. K. Thomson, Gilbert Murray, and James Frazer, Pound updates Homer's Olympian patriarchal pantheon "backward" to its primordial, chthonic roots: female deities and dying-and-resurrecting gods associated with mystery religions and vegetative rites. He turns Odysseus from a war hero into a solar hero and fertility daimon, changing the plot of the *Odyssey* from a teleological nostos quest to a cyclical solar myth.

The Cantos is a hyperliterary translation of the *Odyssey* that demands that the reader engage with it on multiple levels: as an attempt to translate Homer; as an attempt to adapt Homer so that he is relevant today; as an attempt to emulate the way that Homer was adapted by the best medieval authors; and as an attempt to recover the *Ur-Odyssey* via the mythical method—to excavate the folklore, solar myths, and mystery rituals upon which the *Odyssey* was originally based, long before it was unified from its "confusion" by Pisistratus according to Cicero, or "anthologized" according to Pound, and long before it was expurgated and interpolated by classical and medieval scholars.³⁶

Pound's ambition to excavate the primordial source of the epic was an obsession of nineteenth-century philology. Joseph Bédier had tried something similar in his hypothetical reconstruction of the putative *Ur-Tristan* in the second volume of *Le Roman de Tristan par Thomas* (1905), a work which Pound enthusiastically recommends in *The Spirit of Romance*. He also told Joyce to read it, and it became the hypotext of *Finnegans Wake*. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche argues that a primordial Dionysian lyric lurks behind the Apollonian tranquility of the Greek drama and epic. Vestiges remain in the "drunken" verse of Aeschylus's choruses. Nietzsche's description of the poetry of folk song, "straining to its limits to imitate music," can be read as a gloss on the seemingly chaotic, haphazard, and "sketchy" (as Rouse puts it) poetics of *The Cantos*:

the melody, as it gives birth again and again, emanates sparks of imagery which in their variety, their sudden changes, their mad, head-over-heels, forward rush, reveal an energy utterly alien to the placid flow of epic semblance. Seen from the point of view of the epic, this uneven and irregular image-world of the lyric is something which must simply be condemned.³⁷

³⁶ Before Pisistratus, writes Cicero, the books of Homer were "confusos": mixed, mingled, confounded, or "poured together" (Cicero, *De Oratore*, 3.137). "Every great culture has had such a major anthology. Pisistratus, Li Po, the Japanese Emperor who reduced the number of Noh dramas to about 450; the hackneyed Hebrew example; in less degree the Middle Ages, with the matter of Britain, of France, and of Rome le Grant" (*GK*, 394). See chapter 3.

³⁷ Frederic Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Ronald Speirs (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 34.

“I tried a smoother presentation and lost the metamorphosis, got to be a hurley burley,” Pound explains Ford Madox Ford, who read an early draft of Canto 2.³⁸

Applying the mythical method to Homer means turning the placid flow of epic semblance back into a primordial, Dionysian, melopoetic, and lyric disorder, reflecting what J. J. Bachofen identifies as matriarchal-based religions of dying-and-resurrecting gods: goddess worship, fertility rites, and mystery religions,³⁹ or what Jane Harrison identifies as the chthonic cults and deities that predate the “cut flowers” of Homer’s Olympians:

the Olympian gods—that is, the anthropomorphic gods of Homer and Pheidias and the mythographers—seemed to me like a bouquet of cut-flowers whose bloom is brief, because they have been severed from their roots. To find those roots we must burrow deep into a lower stratum of thought, into those chthonic cults which underlay their life and from which sprang all their brilliant blossoming.⁴⁰

Pound’s paradiso is chthonic, especially in Cantos 17, 20, and 21. In order “to write Paradise” Pound must burrow into the roots of Homer’s gods (119/822). *The Cantos* is therefore a nekylia into the *Odyssey* itself. It restlessly and repeatedly summons a mythical “hinter time,” long before Hades became a place of punishment like Virgil’s Avernus, long before the gods were anthropomorphized, allegorized, moralized, and finally exorcised by the logic of enlightenment.

The undeniable tradition of metamorphosis teaches us that things do not remain always the same. They become other things by swift and unanalysable process. It was only when men began to mistrust the myths and to tell nasty lies about the gods for a moral purpose that these matters became hopelessly confused. When some nasty Semite or Parsee or Syrian began to use myths for social propaganda, when the myth was degraded into an allegory or a fable, that was the beginning of the end. And the Gods no longer walked in men’s gardens.

(LE, 431)

Pound’s ideas are very much in line with *fin-de-siècle* intellectual school that revolted against rationalistic individualism, positivism, and democracy in favor

³⁸ Ezra Pound, March 21, 1922 Letter to Ford Madox Ford. *Pound/Ford: Story Of Literary Friendship* (New York: New Directions, 1981), 65.

³⁹ See J. J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 132–4.

⁴⁰ Jane Harrison, *Themis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), xi.

of emotionalism and vitalism. The ideological roots of fascism (“some nasty Semite or Parsee or Syrian”) are found here as well.

Like Proust’s paradise, Pound’s paradise must be written. Almost every canto reasserts a world of renewal, confusion, magical metamorphoses, and mystery. Almost every canto seeks to restore a lost mythical way of thinking which will clear the ground for a “return” of the primordial gods. Babelic melopoeia, disorder, and confusion are the prerequisites to recovering a mythical “primitive” consciousness of endless renewal: “Broken, disrupted, body eternal, / Wilderness of renewals, confusion / Basis of renewals” (20/91–92).

Pound’s attempt to excavate the solar myths, fertility myths, and mystery rituals on which the *Odyssey* is based often involves the paradoxical practice of “reading” or interpreting Homer through the authors that preceded him. Pound’s innovation of the medieval *translatio* by combining it with scientific philology and comparative anthropology continues to confuse readers and critics to this day. Pound’s “adapting forward” is in the service of resurrecting something much older. A few lines of Catullus or Bernart de Ventadorn restore a conception of love between Odysseus and Circe that was “expurgated” from the *Odyssey* of today. Similarly, Pound’s borrowing of Neoplatonic imagery does not mean that he ascribes to the Neoplatonic philosophy of the transcendent One and the world-soul, any more than their reductive allegorical readings of Homer. Rather, Neoplatonic philosophy preserves aspects of ancient solar worship. Pound also admired their mystic reverence for Homer and their conviction that fragments of paradise were visible on earth. Likewise, Pound believed that Orphism and the Eleusinian Mysteries reflected primordial mystery religions of the dying-and-resurrecting gods that emerged from matriarchal religions.⁴¹ Pound had no interest in the Orphic, proto-Christian, and very Unhomerian division of soul (*psyche*) and body (*soma*), nor in Orphism’s rampant misogyny, asceticism, or belief in reincarnation.

The Cantos engages with the text of the *Odyssey* on at least four different levels: as a collection of ancient myths, folklore, and rituals; as an oral text composed in some mythical hinter-time, recited by bards around 850 BCE, “anthologized” by Pisistratus in 540 BCE, and edited for over a thousand years by librarians and

⁴¹ “Whenever we encounter matriarchy, it is bound up with the mystery of the chthonian religion, whether it invokes Demeter or is embodied by an equivalent goddess” (Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right*, 88).

scribes; as the foundation of Western literature adapted and translated by poets like Virgil, Dante, Chapman, and Joyce; and as an artifact interpreted by the scientific philology and anthropology of Pound's day. Keeping these many layers in mind contextualizes the very deliberate disorder and polyphony of Pound's *translatio*. It also makes it a lot more pleasurable to read. For all its seeming disorder, *The Cantos* is remarkably consistent in its naive (if not romantic) attempt to resurrect a primordial poetic world of paradise and involve the reader in its mythical method.

The *Odyssey* in *The Cantos*

A brief summary of the *Odyssey* plot in *The Cantos* will illuminate the main features of Pound's *translatio*. This includes the emphasis on Odysseus as a passive hero and devotee of fertility goddesses rather than as a cunning tactician; the focus on primordial deities rather than Olympian ones; the representation of Odysseus's wanderings as cyclical rather than teleological; and the fragmentation of the Homeric text into a series of "luminous details," translation problems, and even trivia.⁴² Although Pound's Homeric scaffolding is not as deliberate or as consistent as Joyce's, it is far more coherent and intricate than readers have given him credit.

The Cantos begins with a translation of the nekyia episode of *Odyssey* 11.1–112. Odysseus and his crew leave Circe's island, arrive in the land of the Kimmerians, and perform the rites to call up and question the dead. Odysseus talks to Elpenor and Tiresias, and the translation ends abruptly after Tiresias informs Odysseus that he will "Lose all companions" (1/5). Odysseus sails "outward and away / And unto Circe" in order to bury Elpenor and continue his quest. Pound briefly resumes his translation of the nekyia in Canto 2 to recount the story of Tyro's rape from *Odyssey* 11.235–59.

Canto 17 describes a Dionysian procession through a Venetian landscape at night, past "cliffs of amber" and the "Cave of Nerea," which echo Homer's description of Calypso's cave in Ogyia and Circe's cave in Aea (17/76). The procession continues in Canto 20 through a verdant jungle past the "shelf of the Lotophagoi" (20/93). The "Lotophagoi of the suave nails" lament the fate of the mariners Odysseus forcibly removed and "chained to the rowingbench." They

⁴² "A REAL book is one whose words grow ever more luminous as one's own experience increases or as one is led or edged over into considering them with greater attention" (GK, 317).

“died in the whirlpool” after leaving Thrinacia, the island home of the Cattle of Helios. They didn’t have “Circe to couch-mate, Circe Titania, / ‘Nor had they meats of Kalüpsō,” nor heard they the “Ligur’ aoide” (“clear, sweet song”) of the Sirens, nor were buried with honors like Elpenor (20/94).

In an early typescript of Canto 20, Pound ends with a description of Odysseus and his men returning to Aeaëa, with “sacks over their heads, / landed their empty casks / brought sea-gear ashore here; / here bur[]ied Elpenor / here faced again Circe.”⁴³ Pound reworked the material and added it to Canto 23. Odysseus and his men arrive “in the morning, in the Phrygian head-sack / Barefooted, dumping sand from their boat / ‘Yperionides!” (23/108). Odysseus’s return to Aeaëa from Hades is linked to the return of the solar deity, Helios Ὑπεριωνίδης (*Hyperionidēs*, “son of Hyperion”) as well as the Egyptian solar deity Ra who rises over the Phrygian (eastern) desert and gains buoyancy by dumping sand from Atet, his sun-boat.

In Canto 39, Elpenor (in Hades) muses on the long year when he lay in Circe’s ingle among “fucked girls and fat leopards” (39/193). Elpenor, whom Homer describes as “not over valiant in war nor sound of understanding” (10.552), confuses the order of events of *Odyssey* book 10, repeats lines from Homer in English, Greek, and Latin like jazz refrains, and lingers on the dirty bits: “kaka pharmak edōken” (“she gave them evil drugs”); “Discuss this in bed said the lady” (39/194); “es thalamon / Ἐς θάλαμόν” (“into the bedroom”); “I think you must be Odysseus... / feel better when you have eaten...”; “Been to hell in a boat yet?” (39/195). Elpenor’s satyr song climaxes with the “sacred marriage” of Odysseus and Circe: a rite of spring replete with schoolboyish innuendoes: “Fac Deum! ‘Est Factus” (“Make god! It is made,” but sounds like, “Fuck God; Is Fucked”); “Beaten from flesh into light / Hath swallowed the fire-ball” (39/196); “His rod hath made a god in my belly.”

Canto 47 retells the story more soberly from the focalization of Circe and Odysseus. Circe (or a voice that represents her perspective) warns Odysseus of the perils to come: “Scilla’s dogs snarl at the cliff’s base” (47/236). She likens Odysseus’s arrival to her cave to the natural compulsion of the beast to be sacrificed: “The bull runs blind on the sword, *naturans* / To the cave art thou called, Odysseus, / By Molü has though respite for a little” (47/237). She compares his nekylia to the entrance into her (literal and figural) cave: “Hast thou found a nest softer than cunnus / Or has thou found better rest / Hast’ou a deeper planting, doth thy death year / Bring swifter shoot?” (47/238). She extols

⁴³ Ezra Pound, “Canto XX: Typescripts.” *EPP*, 3189.

the Hesiodic virtue of *aidōs* (prudence): work hard, worship the gods, and reflect on your insignificance, for “so light is thy weight on Tellus.” Odysseus closes the canto with an ecstatic celebration of his sacred marriage: “By prong have I entered these hills: / That the grass grow from my body, / That I hear the roots speaking together.” He links his “death” to Adonis’s: “By this door have I entered the hill. / Falleth, / Adonis falleth. / Fruit cometh after.” He lauds Circe as a chthonic feminine goddess of mystery religions “that hath the gift of healing, / that hath the power over wild beasts” (47/239).

The China and Adams Cantos drop the Odyssean material save one reference in 166 pages. Pound was occupied with a sustained revision of Chinese and eighteenth-century American history in light of the monetary theories of Alexander del Mar, the ethnography of Leo Frobenius, and ethnology of Thaddeus Zielinski (to name but a few). Pound “goes on a holiday” from his *Odyssey translatio* just as Odysseus does from his homeward quest in Aea. However, *The Pisan Cantos*, *Rock-Drill*, and *Thrones* reprise the *Odyssey*-material with renewed fervor, the material now arranged more “horizontally” than “vertically” as fragments that repeat and develop over multiple cantos.

The Pisan Cantos (Cantos 74–84) roughly recount Odysseus’s journey after he leaves Calypso’s island of Ogyia until he is shipwrecked and washes up on the coast of Scheria, the island of the Phaeacians from *Odyssey* 5.269–493. Pound-Odysseus clings to his raft “with the mast held by the left hand” (74/463). He reflects on his great hubris, “the folly of attacking that island [of the Cicones] / and of the force ὑπὲρ μόρον [*hyper moron*, ‘beyond what is destined’]” (80/532). Eventually, “the raft broke and the waters went over me” (80/533). With nothing to cling to, Odysseus-Pound swims in the “fluid ΧΘΟΝΟΣ [*CHTONOS*], strong as the undertow / of the wave receding” (82/546). He washes up on Scheria, the island of the Phaeacians, prays to “GEA TERRA,” the Earth Goddess, and falls asleep as he is “drawn” into the earth (82/546).

There are over a hundred seemingly random and scattered references to the *Odyssey* in *The Pisan Cantos*, from Homer’s color-words to the four winds to Odysseus’s many epithets, with particular emphasis on Odysseus *outis* or “no man”: the name Odysseus uses to trick Polyphemus. Odysseus (who often stands in for Pound) reflects on his past, recalling Elpenor, Tiresias, Athena, Nestor, Circe, Nausicaa, Scylla, Charybdis, the Sirens, the Cicones, and Tyro. In Canto 83, Pound re-imagines the nekya in his Pisan tent by describing a baby wasp being born from “a squat indian bottle” that falls to the earth and

descends “to them that dwell under the earth, / begotten of air, that shall sing in the bower / of Kore, Περσεφόνηια [*Persephōneia*, Persephone] / and have speech with Tiresias, Thebae” (83/552, 83/553).

Rock-Drill (Cantos 85–95) and *Thrones* (Cantos 96–109) narrate the Leucothea episode from *Odyssey* 5.333–353 in sixteen fragmentary sequences. After Odysseus’s raft is wrecked by Poseidon, Leucothea emerges from the water in the form of a seagull. She instructs Odysseus to strip off Calypso’s heavy garments, abandon his broken raft, swim to shore holding her magic veil (*krēdemnon*), and then return it back to the sea. “As the sea-gull Κάδμου θυγάτηρ [*Kadmou thygatēr*, ‘daughter of Cadmus’] said to Odysseus / KADMOU THUGATER / ‘get rid of parp[h]ernalia” (91/635). *Rock-Drill* ends with a description of Odysseus being thrown from his raft and Leucothea taking pity on him:

And he was drawn down under wave,
 The wind tossing,
 Notus, Boreas,
 as it were thistle-down
 Then Leucothea had pity,
 “mortal once
 Who now is a sea-god:
 νόστου [*nostou*, “to reach”]
 γαίης Φαιήκων, ...” [*gaiēs Phaiēkōn*, “the land of the Phaeacians”]. (95/667)

Thrones begins with the image of Leucothea giving Odysseus her veil and disappearing into the water: “Κρήδεμνον [*Krēdemnon*, ‘veil’] ... / κρήδεμνον ... / and the wave concealed her, / dark mass of great water” (96/671). Odysseus returns her veil to the sea in Canto 100: “and he dropped the scarf in the tide-rips / KREDEMNON / that it should float back to the sea, / and that quickly / DEXATO XERSI [‘she gathered it in her hand’] / with a fond hand / AGERTHE [‘gathered back’]” (100/736–37).

Rock-Drill and *Thrones* are also full of arcane and trivial *Odyssey* allusions. For example: “A cargo of iron / lied Pallas” refers to Athena, disguised as Mentès, claiming to have a ship full of iron from *Odyssey* 1.184 (102/748). Pound also intentionally conflates the story of Leucothea with Leucothoe from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 4, who “rose as an incense bush” after she resisted Apollo (98/705). Pound even imagines the Phaeacians “after 500 years / still offered that shrub to the sea-gull,” as though these stories were connected (102/748).

Pound's *Odyssey*

Pound's compliant to Rouse seems to summarize the *Odyssey* within *The Cantos*: "What I dig up is too concentrative, I dont see how to get unity of the WHOLE"; "if I tried to trans the *Odyssey* I wd. probably make a thing of shreds and patches, all out of shape and deficient in homogeneity." However, *The Cantos* (minus the China and Adams sections) does tell a version of Homer's story. Pound's Odysseus arrives in Kimmeria, questions the ghost Tiresias, and learns that he is going to lose all his companions. He returns to Circe's island. The narrative jumps back to Odysseus's earlier visit with Circe. Odysseus's men are turned into beasts; Odysseus spends a year with Circe; and receives instructions about how to reach Tiresias. Odysseus's adventures with the Lotophagoi, the Sirens, Scylla, Charybdis, the Cicones, the Cattle of Helios, Nausicaa, and Calypso are mentioned in passing. Odysseus is eventually shipwrecked after leaving Calypso's island. Leucothea intervenes. Pound's story ends with Odysseus's arrival in Phaeacia in Canto 100, followed by a few scattered references to the Phaeacian worship of Leucothea/Leucothoe 500 years later. Although this is barely a retelling of the *Odyssey*, *The Cantos* does fulfill its promise to tell the story of how Odysseus will "lose all companions" and end up destitute (1/5). Pound also roughly follows the chronology of Odysseus's wanderings, unlike Homer, who begins with Odysseus's shipwreck and arrival in Phaeacia in books 5–8 and has Odysseus recount his earlier wanderings to the Phaeacian court in books 9–12.

The Cantos is populated by Homeric characters associated with ecstasy, inspiration, sex, water, and the underworld. Women outnumber men by six: Circe, Tyro, Alcmene, Proserpine, Anticlea, Helen, the Sirens, the nereids, Phathea, Scylla, Charybdis, Leucothea, Calypso, Nausicca, Aphrodite, Athena, and Leucothea; compared to Odysseus, Aeolus, Perimedes, Eurylochus, Elpenor, Tiresias, the Trojan elders, Proteus, Nestor, Helios (*Hyperionidēs*), and Zeus. Of the major divine agents in Homer's *Odyssey*—Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, Circe, and Hermes—only Circe figures significantly in *The Cantos*. Pound pairs Athena with Hermes, Dionysus, and the "*choros nympharum*" (17/77); and invokes her owl-like form, "Athenae / γλαυξ, γλαυκῶπις [*glauk, glaukōpis*]" (74/458). Zeus is represented only in connection with primordial gods: as a version of Ammon, or "Zeus ram" (74/450); as paired with the god of agriculture: "Zeus lies in Ceres' bosom" (81/537); and as linked to the six-winged seraphs the fly around the throne of God in *The Book of Enoch* and the *Book of Revelation*: "Zeus with the six seraphs before him," and "Zeus, six bluejays before him" (90/627, 104/761).

The Cantos excavates Homer's pantheon back to its chthonic, primitive, shifting, and matriarchal origins. Pound's Homeric divinities are associated with grain rites and the mystery religions: Helios, Aphrodite, Demeter, Persephone, Dionysus, Circe, Leukothea, and many nameless naiads, water-nymphs, and river goddesses. A passage from J. A. K. Thomson's *Studies in the Odyssey* (1914) summarizes Pound's pantheon:

Helios, on the other hand, is simply the personified Sun, and he, together with Dionysos and Demeter and Persephone and certain minor divinities such as Aiolos, who has charge of the winds, Kirke, Proteus, Leukothea, and the many nymphs, river-gods, and the like, including Okeanos himself, belong to a primitive nature-religion older than Homer's Olympianism and plainly irreconcilable with it.⁴⁴

Pound emphasizes Odysseus's role as a nomadic wanderer who performs rites, follows directions, worships goddesses, suffers under the elements, and is occasionally rewarded with a bit of terrestrial paradise. As Thomson puts it,

Odysseus never loses the counsel and guidance of some goddess, Athena or Kalypso, Kirke or Leukothea; and when we consider that Penelope, too, was a goddess to begin with, we must conclude that the story of the *Odyssey* grew up among a people very observant of goddess-worship, among a people also very reverent of women, as the *Odyssey* uniformly is.⁴⁵

Homer's Odysseus outsmarts Circe by eating the magical herb μῶλυ (*moly*). Pound turns *moly* into an initiation drug of their *hieros gamos*: "To the cave art thou called, Odysseus, / By Molü hast thou respite for a little" (47/237). Pound makes little to no reference to Odysseus's most memorable feats of cunning: resisting Circe's magic; outsmarting the Sirens; escaping Polyphemus's cave; navigating past Scylla; and saving himself from sucking Charybdis. Even Leopold Bloom, hardly the paragon of an active hero, successfully escapes the clutches of an anti-Semitic (monocular) Cyclops and repeatedly dodges humiliating encounters with Blazes Boylan, suitor to his wife.

Homer delights in recounting stories of Odysseus the cunning (πολύμητις, *polumetis*) tactician and teller of tales. Pound, by contrast, defines *polumetis* as a kind of well-roundedness and intelligence close to godliness:

The things that the *polumetis* knew were the things a man then *needed* for living.
The bow, the strong stroke in swimming, the how-to-provide *and* the high hat,

⁴⁴ Thomson, *Studies in the Odyssey*, 153.

⁴⁵ Thomson, *Studies in the Odyssey*, 167–8.

the carriage of the man who knew how to rule, who had been everywhere [...] And as Zeus said: "A chap with a mind like THAT! the fellow is one of us. One of US."⁴⁶

Pound also associates *polumetis* with quick thinking and the ability to endure suffering with "hilaritas" or cheerfulness. Pound takes the epithet *outis* ("no man") out of its original Homeric context as Odysseus's ruse to escape Polyphemus's cave ("Noman blinded me!"), and uses it instead to reflect on the destitute and shipwrecked Odysseus: "ΟΥ ΤΙΣ / a man on whom the sun has gone down" (47/450).

Pound also rejects Homer's condemnation of Odysseus's comrades as weak, ungrateful, and ultimately deserving of their deaths. Homer introduces the idea in the proem: "Yet even so he saved not his comrades, though he desired it sore, for through their own blind folly they perished—fools, who devoured the kine of Helios Hyperion" (*Odyssey* 1.6–9). By contrast, Pound's Lotophagoi condemn Odysseus for selfishly dragging his comrades from one adventure to the next and hogging all the glimpses of earthly paradise for himself: hearing the Sirens's song, eating Calypso's meats, and sharing Circe's bed. In the *ABC of Reading*, Pound argues: "His companions have most of them something that must have been the Greek equivalent of shell-shock."⁴⁷

Pound also suggests that Odysseus deserves his shipwreck for using a "force ὑπὲρ μῶρον" ("beyond what is destined") in sacking Ismaros—an incident which did not trouble Homer or later classical and medieval authors (80/532). However, Pound's Odysseus is not sinfully arrogant like Dante's Ulysses, who sails past the Straights of Gibraltar in pursuit of "del mondo senza gente" ("the world where no one lives"), nor is he restless like Tennyson's hackneyed Ulysses, "always roaming with a hungry heart."⁴⁸ Pound's Odysseus atones for his former arrogance and learns *aidōs* by following the directions of Circe and Leucothea.

Another striking feature of Pound's *Odyssey* is the absence of the nostos theme. The word appears only once in Canto 95 in order to call attention to this lack: "νόστου / γαίης Φαιήκων ['to reach the land of the Phacaians']" a quotation of *Odyssey* 5.344–45 (95/667). "Nostos" here does not mean "return home" but merely "arrival." Pound's Odysseus is not trying to get home to his wife or son or his native land: a motif that Homer repeats *ad nauseam*. Pound's

⁴⁶ GK, 146.

⁴⁷ ABCR, 44.

⁴⁸ Dante, *Inferno from the Divine Comedy*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam, 1982), 26.117; Alfred Tennyson, "Ulysses," in *The Major Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 82.