Painted Bride Quarterly

Number 44
The Painted Bride Quarterly is grateful for the support of
The Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and the City of Philadelphia.
We are also thankful for the assistance of Gerard Givnish, Gil Ott, and the
Painted Bride Arts Center. Also thanks to Bucks County Community
College and the Community Women’s Education Project.

The Painted Bride Quarterly is distributed free to inmates.
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Member of the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines

Indexed by the American Humanities Index and the

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Published four times a year The Painted Bride Quarterly is available by subscription:
$16 per year, $28, two years Libraries and institutions: $20 per year Subscriptions begin with
the next quarterly issue. We cannot guarantee the continuation of your subscription if we are not
informed of your new address before you move. Single issues are $5
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Cover: Skyline by Bill Sweeney
ARTIST’S STATEMENT

For the past fifteen years I have used visual artists books and paintings to develop work with narrative content. No doubt my interest in narrative developed from a childhood enjoyment of illustrations in the books that filled my parents’ home. These images, although often poorly drawn and overtly sentimental, were the beginning of my understanding that the power of an image lies not only in its physical presence, its form, but in what it is able to evoke. Art, I’ve come to believe, should change your mind, or break your heart.

The theme I am involved with most specifically in these images is the human relationship to the natural world. In Western cosmology [Genesis] we were placed in enmity with nature, and all other creatures as well. This struggle has brought us to the end of the twentieth century, in a world more dangerous for our abuses of it, than the world must have seemed to our first parents. Paradise lost, indeed.

For years I have read everything I could find on wolves. The more I learned about these beautiful creatures, the more I saw them as the perfect metaphor for our uneasy tenure on the planet. Wolves have traveled through our myths as the feared predator living in the “dark forests” of our childhood tales. They live now as a protected, vulnerable beast, having been close to extinction until recent interest in their preservation developed. As a highly intelligent predator, with a sophisticated social structure, wolves have been in competition with us for use of this world. We have clearly won. The wolf is at the door. He is ourselves.

Claire Owen
Philadelphia, PA
Transmigration

Fulton Creek was always thick with spawning carp in final June spring days, dancing their yang and yin in leafy shadows below the wild rose groves. Boys in ragged dungarees sang their lines about each swirling fin and tail that broke the dung-brown surface, slapping night-crawlers down before the mudsuckers’ cow-like snouts. Praying hard for fat ten-pounders, every Huck and Tom dreamed his watery dream: a giant fish to carry home to Mother. Then, with age, what seemed a heavenly gift to swelling boys became a breeding spree too foul to name. Come summer young fathers quit the local fishing, took trips away to colder country, for trout, bass, walleye—fish that don’t suckle the bottom. Nowadays in Fulton County carp don’t crowd the creekbeds every spring. And whether it was Atrazine or God or sewage or fertilizer that stopped their spawning, no one knows—except the bare-skinned ghosts who wade the inner banks, who whistle sometimes this mystery: there is another power no one names in the shallow strength of absent fathers. It steals away their boys’ best fishing, robs them of the gifts they need to court their mothers.
The Lost

Anywhere
the edges
find them,
words in a
once parallel
intriguing
symmetric
forced
rhythm
longingly
the confines of
fall
Passionate
infinite
finding
discipline in
chaos

Room

in the margins
of my notes
pieces of
rainbow.
columns in
ruins among
structural
formulas and
sonnets
composed on
a misty
morning.
Love among
lines of
an ordered
life. Vertical
romance.
Air and Water

8 a.m. Saturday

Later, after the fireworks,
and the guitar players hunched together, and that one trumpet,
we leave the night alone.
It gives us the wind, leaves ruffling against each other,
round beams of light diffusing in the air
and pooling unevenly on the grass, like puddles after rain.
It’s damp. Our conversation moves through water,
breath nearly visible, not mist but the ghost of mist:
it is almost cool enough. In the trees
the craggy muppet faces shift, and we guess their moods.

I like to hear you talk. Your words
seem solid, formed of air. They shape themselves,
not just your stories, as they travel.
I want to run my thumb over the consonants and vowels,
finding them smooth or sharp, testing their weight;
want to feel the spaces between, the pauses
like musical rests. The wind’s rhythms punctuate — that sibilant
drumming of leaf on leaf — as we share water,
handing the bottle back and forth, dividing it endlessly,
tonguing the last drops until there is only wetness left.

These nights I’ve stayed awake to listen to your voice,
measuring the way to morning as Zeno would,
or as it seems that words approach their meanings:
halfway there, and half again, and half again.
Holiday in Yuma

Every day I go farther west, closer
to the sun
who kicks my ass behind
rocks, makes me look for it

on the fourth of July: all America
is at McDonald’s.
Fights break out in the parking lot,
I know when I’m home
—drifting from tribe to tribe, tracking that one kiss
I gave up on. Circling in from
mountains & a big sky
a coyote skirts the highway & steals
everything. He’s a trick
to make me love children: scoop them up dirty
in a paper cup, take them to the bathroom—
drink them down hard.

This is the saddest time
to be halfway between places in a field
of weeds & cigarettes.
Stretched out on my brother’s
car, I watch him roll up
his windows: from deep inside he says
get off. There’s fur all over
my mouth & his baby’s riding on a
mangy back
into the sunset

& when that purple light kicks down I can
feel my jaw harden.
By the time night really comes
we’ll all be somewhere else
—police make a clean sweep & everybody’s conscience is fed. What’s been coming after me leans against my hands & smiles—

I’m falling off, I’m listening to that wailing call.
Fourth of July

Wednesday in
the mountains
it never gets
past grey no
bathing suits
no fireworks
I prefer pewter
anyway its
what's inside,
in the coffee,
blues in the
bread its in
the fog that
rises between
thunder when
hail and
rain gut
roads wash
away any
way out
July 7

40 years ago
a new baby cousin
photographs of her
as a baby stashed
in a box with
my mother, plump
with long black
frizzy hair
now tiny, 80
lbs but hanging
on gulping
fresh peaches
after months of
no food sure
she's cured and
I'm half believing
it, as she tells
me the nurse
just yessed her,
said it was
just demerol the
drugs but my
mother believes
she's better
and with the green
light and the
jade shadows
the room's
washed in
anything
seems possible
Island Days

for Herbert Chasis and
Barbara Parker

1
This light could have been honed
by our need to erase shadows, ghosts,
all the inexact mirrors of our lives,
and our need to feel density,
the hard weight of things, our own physical
resistance and the world’s to us.

I watch my sons challenge the waves.
They run in and out, yelling, laughing
at perfect pace with the sea,
columns of a special light.

2
I dread the stars. Walking down the road,
my wife points out to them Orion,
Cassiopeia, the Dippers.

How do I tell them, when they are so much
smaller than me, that I am frightened
by the scale of things? That not even my heart
dares to reach to those stars.

3
Out on the rock jetty, my son gets the wrong
idea about fishing. With almost every cast
he pulls out a little snapper blue,
and at the end of his arm, the small glistening
shafts of silver have become
as commonplace as fingers.
4
Even though we are so fond of regret, its dim, gray clouds, we flourish in this clear light. It speaks of justice and its anchor at the base of things, of children born to grow strong and sturdy, unbroken, exact, lit.
Check “Other”

I am white,
standard-issue German
Celtic white as whalebone.
And I am Puerto Rican,
dark eyes, Spanish-Taino
rice & bean jibaro.

I am both.
“One of us” and
“One of them”
simultaneously
from either side
on alternating weekends.

I am feeling
very “other” this week,
since I wear a tie
and I really want to
wear a conga but
the conga blood thump
circling hips music is
out of goose-step
with clean cut ax
murderer Harrisburg.

I love
filling out job
applications.
I check
white
hispanic
other
or any combination
thereof and sometimes
I write NA
not applicable,
not white
not puerto rican
not other
and I will be satisfied
only when they make
a category called
"not knowable, but distinct."
Gabriel's Family

It would be easy to forget the church itself were it not for the stone creatures that inhabited its shadowed arches. The simple structure sits on the top of a hill that rolls off into a meadow on one side and is joined to a vast mountain on the other.

Before the church was built, the man who made these figures lived here between the mountain and the meadow. He came from a village far to the west where stone was harvested from a deep, fertile quarry. His name was Gabriel, and he was the son of a stone mason and a witch.

Gabriel's parents lived together in the harmony of those whose passions are spent in their work. In the jaws of the quarry his father worked hammering away at huge white slabs which were drawn from the earth like the molars of a giant. At night he returned home covered with a fine white dust, an animated statue whose kisses left a chalk-like grit across his wife’s wide brow. He would pour water over his head that ran down his face and over his chest, cutting the dust apart into wide bands of browned flesh. This evening transformation of stone to flesh seemed to delight his son, whose small mouth formed o’s of pleasure at the sight. When his hands were wide enough to hold a hammer Gabriel’s father gave him a set of cutting tools and began to teach him the complex code of blows and marks that draw language from stone.

His mother wore pale amber eyes that could read the ideograms pressed into the underside of leaves. She lived as an intermediary between an early science and superstition. She did not coo or fuss about her son as other mothers would. Her gestures of affection were as abrupt as they were tender. Passing by the child at play she would sweep him into her arms, pressing her face to the soft folds of his neck, and just as suddenly would lift him back to whatever he was about. It was as if her need of him sprang from some distant place
within herself. Although she moved about them with this odd detachment, neither son or husband ever doubted her love for them.

Her profession however, was to be her family’s doom, for in their time superstition was the older, stronger brother and science was jealous of any woman’s knowledge. Within the folds of one murky night, she was dragged from their home to the village square. The crowd in which all cowards live heaped bundled wood at her feet and struck it with a torch. Gabriel was held screaming in his father’s arms, as they witnessed her ceremonial murder.

Tears had drawn red flesh lines down her soot blackened face, where Gabriel saw a smile flicker before the flames split the flesh from her form.

Her bones had yet to cool when Gabriel’s father packed him on a mule with his cutting tools and the family’s few remaining possessions. Walking ahead on foot he led them far outside the village to a road that traveled eastward: here he stopped and turned to his son.

Across his father’s once handsome face lay the imprint of that foul night’s work. Hair that only yesterday had gleamed a rich walnut hue was now grey as ash. Worse yet were his eyes that lay in his face like cinders, reflecting nothing. With one callused hand he stroked first one, then the other side of Gabriel’s small face. Neither one spoke. Turning, he walked slowly back, toward the ragged mouth of the quarry. Gabriel was left on the cusp of maturity, the vault of his childhood thoroughly plundered; an orphan with the freedom of undirected choice, and the burden of being the sole survivor of his own history.

He entered the world with the single compelling need to see all that had been made in stone. This desire led him through most of the ancient world. Along the red clay shores of rivers he found ruined gods in deserted temples; the fossilized visions of divinity left by an earlier race. He climbed his way through the walls of tombs, ignoring the threat of
curses that would befall such trespassers.

Few of the images he found were as they had been completed, but had been reformed over the years by countless other hands. The once deep whorls of a Buddha’s skirt were worn smooth by centuries of caressing devotees. Some figures had lost their heads or limbs to the vandal’s axe; dismemberment was a lucrative trade. Simple neglect had washed the faces from so many goddesses and demons alike, they seemed to crouch within the same anonymous bulk. In dusty villages Gabriel found masons and sons of masons who remembered the older methods of carving stone. He learned to use a bow drill and gouge, and was taught never to strike a stone at a right angle, for this would break its crystalline structure. He stayed in each place long enough to learn whatever skills the resident stone cutter had to offer, then would move on.

Gabriel became weary of traveling. The need grew for a place to settle, a home where he could use his acquired skills to bring his vision into stone. This place he found between the mountain and the meadow pleased him. The mountain yielded a fine grained granite for his work, and the meadow would feed his mule. A few goats could be kept, from whose milk he could cure a sharp brittle cheese. Gabriel never ate meat, the smell of burning flesh convulsed his throat.

But what pleased Gabriel most was the steady breath of the wind as it bent the tender meadow grass. He knew that stray, broken bits of history were carried in the wind, and having keen senses he could read these shifting chronicles. From the Aegean world the smell of cinnamon and blood would drift together with vows made in this world of an earlier messiah. Here was a place where he could work far away from all that had to do with other men, and being a misanthrope, this pleased him too. The hill became his home.

Everything about Gabriel’s body was solid, with flat planed surfaces not unlike the stones he carved. The demands of his work had knit his limbs together with thickened cord.
His neck, pulled wide appeared short, upon which sat a strangely delicate skull. There was nothing extraordinary about Gabriel's face, except his eyes, that like his mother's were the same pale gold as those of a timber wolf. They were more striking yet placed as they were in a face long darkened by the sun. Within the movement of his work Gabriel shed solid form in a loose easy grace; hammer to chisel, chisel to stone, he worked in artful rhythm.

Gabriel's father had lived to cut stone into the service of structure and adornment. These temporal demands meant nothing to Gabriel. Nor did the invisible world as it was defined by faith and prayer. He slept without guilt. Only within the physical realm of stone could Gabriel articulate his soul. And so he began to populate the hill with images spawned in the chambers of his heart.

Some of these forms seemed to be demons or beasts, and were horrors in every respect from scaled limbs to curled lip. Yet each gruesome image was given some small place of beauty. A beast with a wide hideous grin would clutch its breast with a delicately fingered hand. Or the scaled face of a demon would wear the sweetly curved ear of an angel. Gabriel also struck forms of beauty. Noble creatures from which perfect gestures of grace would fall, denying the solidity of their substance. Folded into each of these forms there would be some small horror. A wing of perfect line would spring too soon from the back of an angel's head. Hair swept back from the neck of a goddess would expose the pointed ear of a fox, and figures of saints, lips pulled back in prayer, often revealed a sharpened fang.

While he worked shards of stone fell around him, thin and white like the unhinged bones of those long dead. It was as if his work reversed the morbid process. By peeling away the bones he exposed the flesh. Still stone forms spread across the meadows. Gabriel moved among them the only animate creature; a fleshy revenant among this community of stone.
As years passed, with the clear ring of his hammer melding with the ever moving voice of the wind, Gabriel grew to need a group of souls to join his own. This need generated not from want of human presence, but from some internal demand to complete himself. He had brought to the hill four stones he had gathered from the ancient world, broken slabs of limestone and marble. From these cherished stones he would fashion his family, each one whole and perfect to nature.

From the piece of blue limestone, once part of the Acropolis, Gabriel made a wolf. The great stone predator was made true to its natural size and form, with richly textured fur and creased maw. The head was held upwards, with mouth drawn back from long sharp teeth. One paw was held forward, frozen in an eloquent moment of grace. Gabriel’s wolf denied the legend of the lycanthrope, for no man could wear this form as guise for human treachery.

Using the grey limestone he gathered from the ruined temple of Zeus, Gabriel carved a knight. He laid upon his face the same wide planes of his own. A fine grey son, remote within his stone armor; drawn of sweat not expended in the flesh. This warrior carried no emblem, nor wore any embellishments of creed. Here was the perfect virgin hero, who would wait forever for the maiden’s awakening kiss.

In this age demons were believed to be the cause of most everyday calamities, from the souring of milk, to barren hens. Being empowered with such credibility, they were as common as cats in most communities. One had found its way to Gabriel’s hill slipping between the stone figures and tormenting the mules’ tender ears with its raucous cries. Gabriel plucked this annoying creature from the wind and placed it into the safety of stone, a piece of green marble brought from Karysos. He gave it the scaled wings of early flight and a wide squat face, with thick heavy lips that were drawn back exposing several rows of needle sharp teeth. This green faced menace was, however, mute. The mule snorted his contentment into Gabriel’s callused palm.
The last of the pilfered stones was a fine white marble from Skyros. It was small, one meter square, and through it flowed veins of red crystal. From this piece Gabriel made an angel. He brought into this realm of clay an unspeakable beauty of stone and blood. Through the exacting demands of his hammer he struck out a being of love, his bride.

She was luminous. Her face was simple in its perfection, a beauty of aboriginal innocence. Her chin was lifted from her chest as if waiting some heavenly communication. From her fragile shoulders swept two perfect wings, a pair of crescent moons, that one might imagine taking flight into a darkened sky. As with the rest of his family, Gabriel imparted no disfiguring feature to his angel bride, each and all of her limbs were given a wholesome symmetry. The red crystal threads that ran through her stone, when caught in the sun would gleam as if wet in imitation of veined flesh. They ran most vividly across her face, falling as tears would from her eyes, curving downward, over her cheeks and chin, settling back into the stone at her breast. Of all his family Gabriel was most pleased with his angel.

Having completed the rendering of his stone clad progeny Gabriel assembled them close about his house so he could hear the wind’s incessant breath move over them, blowing as it did here from all four directions. The wolf he placed facing north where the wind swept down the mountain carrying the scent of snow. On the southern side he sat the knight so that the sun touched his grey face most of every day. Grinning into the setting sun, he left the squat faced demon. At his very door, Gabriel placed his angel, where at the first light of day she wept in bloodied rapture.

Although a city had grown around the bottom of Gabriel’s hill, none of its mud and cinder roads had been built to travel upwards, to pass the stone cutter’s door. Tales had been told of a madman who lived there and cut stone into unholy creatures. Some were certain his skill came from Satan himself. The origins of these stories were the few pilgrims and fewer
still wealthy men who found their way to Gabriel's door. The former travel weary souls had come on the misinformed mission of meeting with a holy man, there being many such self proclaimed oracles living in remote places at this time. That Gabriel was not one of them became apparent soon after their arrival. Surrounded by the motionless forms, Gabriel's saints and demons, the travelers were offered bread from a reluctant and silent host. Gabriel had long since forgotten the simple art of conversation. The constant, restless wind that hissed its way through the meadow grass seemed to stir an uneasy illusion of movement among the silent forms. No visitor stayed long after their meager meal, nor would they had they been invited. When later asked about the stone cutter's work, most spoke in vagaries of sweet limbed demons or clawed saints. Others murmured of being held in terror, or shamed into desire.

Wealthy men came in hope of gathering more unique treasures into their already cluttered lives. These bejeweled men whose faces were slackened by appeasement of their physical appetites had eyes that burned a hunger that had not been fed. Gabriel tried in halting phrases to explain his denial of their need. Nothing here could be sold he would say, because stone was not meant to embellish a single lifetime of flesh. The mountain has spent centuries gestating this perfect substance and so objects of stone could belong only to the centuries themselves. These men did not in fact see what the mountain had to do with their desire for some unusual statuary, but they did know that they had not become wealthy by doing business with madmen. Like the pilgrims before them, they left with empty hands and calumny on their tongues.

In the city below the hill there was a bishop whose long held ambition it was to have a church built upon the hill above the town, the hill where Gabriel lived. The stories
of the stone cutter's possible demonic involvement eased his troubled conscience about evicting a man from his home. No one could blame him for removing such a man from the area, thereby protecting his devoted, if simple-minded flock. And so Gabriel was feared but held in no esteem; what was his was to be taken. A messenger was sent on behalf of the bishop. A single scripted page with carefully phrased references to armed villagers, and armored soldiers made clear that no man alone could refuse the bishop's demand.

Staring at the red wax seal on the bishop's letter, Gabriel decided to make the man a simple offer. He wanted only to finish his life here, not so many years left, and then they could come and build anything they wanted on the hill. Believing he could convince the bishop personally, he started down towards the city, the wind picking up his beard, waving it as a grey flag before his face. The land about him changed as he descended, from loosely woven meadows into the sharper edges of farmers' plowed fields. The smell of the city's crowded human life assaulted his nostrils long before the mud slickened streets pulled at his feet.

It had been many years since he left the dust laden cities of the East, yet even these memories could not have prepared him for the humid labyrinth of sounds and smells that one could enter only with a strong stomach or a firm purpose. The wind did not move the air down these cavernous stone avenues. The heavy, odoriferous atmosphere hung about the narrow streets and courtyards in layers, bringing tears to the eyes and burning the throat with every breath. Gabriel wandered through the streets, red sealed letter in his hand, asking those few who would listen where he could find the bishop. Some were curious about this strangely accented man who had such pale eyes, but soon they shrugged him off, laughing at his ignorance. Some pointed vaguely at a high stone wall that rose above the house roofs and surrounded by a still higher stone church. Winding his way towards these structures Gabriel found himself finally at
the bottom of wide stone steps that led to a walled church-
yard. Spread about the entrance were the carts of peddlers,
crammed with gaudy relics of saints. Several street musicians
worked their instruments into music, and food vendors
tended small blazing pits over which various animals roasted
on spits. Gabriel recognized this structure as the skeletal
remains of a much earlier temple. The cut of the lower stones
were made by a hand that was trained in the old methods.
The gate itself was flanked by columns that had been reassem-
bled from an earlier portico. Along the wall were carved
niches that held the figures of saints which, to Gabriel’s eyes,
were clearly impostors. Their faces still wore the graceful
angles of a race which had idealized human beauty. The
Christian abhorrence of human flesh, however, had chiseled
through the exposed breasts and buttocks of these proud
figures, pulling around their forms the creases and folds
of crude but chaste garments. These mutilations left them
with heads too large for their now fleshless forms, a grotesque
distortion of their once perfect proportion.

Before a mutton vendor’s cart there stood the form of a
woman saint whose wide brow and deep set eyes seemed
to draw Gabriel’s gaze. As he moved closer, the din of the
activity around him muted until he could hear only the snap
and hiss of flames. The heated air caused a mirage of move-
ment, the saint’s face waivered and as he stared, her eyes
opened. A pale amber gaze shone across the flames and
smoke, meeting his eyes in loving communion. The image
waivered for a moment longer, then cleared. The figure
retreated into stone.

The vendor was waving a joint of singed meat before
Gabriel’s face, fat dripping over his hand and down his sleeve.
Music plucked from the strings, the screeches of animals,
and the calls of merchants returned to his ears in one pound-
ing moment. With the sounds came the stench of burned
flesh, which filled his nostrils and pulled his throat tight,
doubling him over in a gagging cough. Dropping his letter, Gabriel turned and ran, slipping on the mud, falling often but moving always away from this haunted place.

Back across the fields and through the open meadows Gabriel fled, until at last he felt the wind from his hill pull at his hair and face, whipping away the smells and sounds that seemed embedded in his flesh. In the days that followed his return, the sound of spade to earth was all that was heard across the meadow. A funeral had begun, a mass burial. Small mounds of earth began to appear across the meadow. Gabriel worked in silent grief, hand to spade, spade to earth, in the same steady rhythm that had moved his hammer to stone.

Sounds of approaching carts could just be distinguished from the murmuring of the wind. They had come to remove Gabriel from his place where he had lived for so many years. Grey light washed over the hill and the air was cut with the sharp smell of clay. He was alone when they arrived, except for a single figure. At first it seemed that he was asleep with his great arms around the small white angel, a profanely inverted pieta. There was a rope binding her small frame to him, which wound around his chest and ended in his one free hand. His face had begun to grey in death. In the thin pre dawn light the face of flesh and the face of stone so pressed against each other were indistinguishable in substance. At this moment the sun reached over the lip of the earth, and touched the face of the angel. Bright red tears sprang to her eyes, glistened down her face, and settled into the hollow of her throat. The crowd parted before the apparition. Some made gestures against evil, some wept. Most fled backwards down the hill.

Gabriel was buried on the meadow, the angel placed at his grave. For a long time it was hard to keep workers on the hill. Gabriel's ghost was said to still live here, the blows
of his hammer were heard around the wind. Creatures that he had made appeared and disappeared among the shadows. Often men had dreams of angels with perfect faces and clawed hands, and they awoke in terror, stiff with desire. But as the years passed and the walls of the church rose to meet its roof, the stories of Gabriel’s demons, and the madman who worked in stone, were carried only in the toothless mouths of old men. It was in one rain soaked spring a few seasons after the church was completed that Gabriel’s name became woven into quite another story.

Most of the village had made its way up the hill for an early mass. Although the wind still cut with the chill of winter, they gathered in small groups to exchange what little news there was before starting the long walk home.

A disquiet penetrated their friendly chatter however as some began to notice that the stones breaking the surface of the meadow this spring were not random leavings of the mountain, the annual frost heave. These were the very creatures that had haunted the dreams of the early builders. Gabriel’s creatures had risen in an unholy harvest. A wing was seen here slicing its way through the early meadow grass. The open maw of a beast broke forth there in a silent cough of mud. Whispers of fear hissed through the crowd as people drew close together.

The bishop who had evicted Gabriel had long since died, the new prelate was a practical man. No stone mason of any talent had been found to adorn the church with the creatures that usually inhabit the roofs and archways. He was well acquainted with the powerful fascination that is the sister of fear, having seen the rapt faces of those attending public executions. These figures installed on his church would bring more to its door than any simple faced saint ever could. He knew the stories of the man who had lived on the hill before the church was made. Tales of the stone angel who wept blood still rippled through the village on certain wind roughened days. But the bishop also knew that the truth once spoken
was wrapped and re-wrapped in half truths along the way to becoming what is finally believed. He smiled thinking that it would not be the first time that a madman had been credited with divine communion.

Among the many stones unburied that morning there were three smaller ones made without any misplaced or perverted features. Together with the small angel found in the meadow, they were used to complete the bell tower. The wolf was placed on the north where it lifts its mouth to the winter wind, the knight gazes south. To the west the demon grins into the setting sun, and on the east there sits the small white angel, who still weeps each sunlit dawn. The wind moves over them from all four directions.
Anacostia Woman in a Red Frame

*(through Williams)*

I was reading a poem: a light weaving pinpoints of intelligence where Love grows in the shadows, "alive by reason of the sun shining" through the window frost and the red ivy webbing the oak tree.

But my eyes caught
in the curtains sailing
lightstorms over the wall:
the shadow of a woman
torn in the morning rain
of dust against the window.

The insistent bent
of the head presumes
"a world taken for granted,"
unslipped in the shadows.

She is not the poetic figure for Beauty through Displaced Witness.
Which is to say, I saw —
that summer night,
eyes branded in a light
web before they shut, her face.

She bent to her little boy who lay face down in the street. His blood mapped,
in sirens flashing, a mistake
the mind would not hold
or release — why
she called him, *You hear?*
falling
into the street,
the room, *You hear?* into
slips of fall light
burned shut
under his body.
So that a definite world
   exists by reason
      of the sun rising
over Anacostia.
    The great white dome
       sears in the distance
definitely —
      "the big crystal in the sky."
       The children die
by reason of its reflection  where
    I lose the broken-open
       world of things

for Something Else
      the I must stop to see.

Quotations taken from Williams' "The Descent," and
"Shadows."
Disappearances

Love has something to do with another dimension. Two people, eating dinner, not talking as the sky outside gives in to darkness, and the invisible birds chatter the nonsense of the day, until someone, also unseen, claps, once, and the birds worry themselves into silence, quickly, so nothing is seen or heard. And the couple smiles.

See how their lips rise in unison, how their lips glisten with oils. It’s not that they’re just full. Leaving themselves behind as they rise and fall to the bed as they forget the couple eating, as the birds forget fear, as the singing begins, as the world rocks on its hips, as night opens like a flower, black petals bending, as night allows what it allows and the bed falls away and the birds fall away and falling falls away till there’s nothing. Nothing but this.
Circus of the Stars

This just in from the inspirations:
tactics, like clowns, pour from the Volkswagen
in my mind and I don’t see them climb back
in the other side. The equilibrium
of entertainment: the two masks so like
Siamese twins, forced to live with each other.
Like your lover, who cries when she’s happy.
You’re trying to figure out what sad means.
And that letter, today, that says life isn’t
always exciting, which is the knowledge
we come to know. Leave it to bad humor,
bad mood, bad food—sshhh, the clowns are coming,
trying to be beautiful, in their big shoes,
and big smiles that never leave their faces.
Three

I had a dream that Rebecca and H.G. were kissing madly in a dark forest. The sight of forked tongues flashing. The sound of ardent hissing. Rebecca and H.G. curled into each other, their fingers interlocked, their clothed knees linked. Envyng their peculiar union, I jumped from behind a tree to the spot where they kissed, and entered their coupling. I felt a prickling warmth and the cold wetness of their lips on my cheeks. "Rebecca!" H.G. moaned; "Harold!" cried Rebecca, and I vanished into nothing between their limbs.

* * *

I awoke this morning with the feeling that something was going to happen. Perhaps the feeling was due to the nausea that had snarled the nerves in my stomach. The sweat on the back of my neck had completely saturated the roots of my hair, and I was breathing like a conked out car.

I sat up in bed and peeled the sheets off my skin. It was already late morning but there was barely any light in the room because of the dark color of the wallpaper and the heavy velvet curtains that hung over the windows. Dry heat was predicted for the day, so I dressed in something linen, which hung over my shoulders like a tablecloth and covered the pockets of fat that belted my waist.

I was perspiring as I pushed my hair (a depressed shade of brown, short and brittle), into a tight braid and cleaned my teeth. My face was red and chapped from the scorching weather. I thought of Rebecca and the exotic goldenness of her body. The skin on my lips cracked and I tasted my blood.

* * *

Jealousy is human. Envy is obsession. To be obsessed is to be possessed. To be possessed is to be nonhuman.

I am not jealous of Rebecca. I am envious of Rebecca. I am obsessed with Rebecca. I am possessed. I am nonhuman.
I think of Jews in concentration camps when I see this man, Harold Gold. He is too skinny. I can see the shape of his bones through his clothes. He is too scarce. Still, I love him, this Jewish man, who stands taller than some trees do, with big smart eyes and stylishly yellowed teeth.

At one time we were all friends. We took the train to various places in town together. We read the same novels and had literary discussions of agreement. Of course, I loved H.G. then. He fit like a bookmark between Rebecca and me, equally shared, equally loved. But then one day Rebecca bought a car and left us on the train platform. She started reading different books. We had developed a dependency on her and felt the symptoms of withdrawal.

H.G. began to desire her physically. He put his hands on the empty passenger seat on the train and tried to recall the warmth of her body. He began to lust her. He no longer wanted to spend time with me. He spent many hours alone, alone with his sickly lust for her.

We were having a picnic on a field, the three of us. We were dressed like children. I wore linen embroidered with flowers. I tied a ribbon at the end of my braid. Rebecca wore a short, ruffled dress. H.G. wore shorts. His delicate bony knees knocked together like maracas. We ate chicken and mounds of potato salad seasoned with thyme. H.G. sunk his teeth into a chicken breast and I watched with my mouth dropped open. "Let's play Hide-And-Go-Seek," said Rebecca, and ran into the forest. "Okay!" shouted H.G., and followed her behind the trees with the chicken breast still in his mouth. I sat alone on the field and looked down at myself. It was then that I noticed that I had grown feathers.

This dream must have been two months ago. I can't go on with nights like these. I was once a third of a whole, and then a half of a whole. Now I am not even a fraction.
Those monologues, those long, awful monologues. Rebecca was everything, said H.G. She was beautiful, absolutely exquisite, her eyes, cheekbones, the tip of her tongue, the curve of her belly, everything. She was brilliant, intelligent, wise. Earthy, sensual, sexual. I said, H.G., you ought to go into the advertising business. He looked at me for a moment, saw the repulsively masculine edge to my envy, and continued his monologue, his long, awful, monologue.

The nights were getting worse. I began seeing a shrink. “What are you saying to yourself in these dreams?” said the shrink, whose name was Dr. Walcott.

“I’m saying that I want things to be the way they were. I want to stop them from having sex so we could all be friends again.”

“Wrong,” said Dr. Walcott. “Try again.”

I thought for a moment. “I want to have sex with H.G.,” I said.

Dr. Walcott beamed. “Very good! And what about Rebecca?”

“I hate Rebecca,” I said.

“Wrong,” said Dr. Walcott. “Try again.”

Today was the day that it happened. Rebecca called me on the telephone (I was vacuuming the drapes) and told me she had won a contest. “And I get to pose nude before the entire country! I had the largest breasts of all the contestants,” she bragged. I switched off the vacuum cleaner. “So what did you win?” I asked her. She said nothing. “Rebecca?”

“Nothing. It was a lie. I’m leaving the country.”

“Fine,” I said, turning the vacuum cleaner back on. “Leave. But you’ll never know how much H.G. and I will miss you.” (I was a heartless liar.)

“Yes, I do,” my beautiful, bitchy friend said. “And I’m glad to be free.”
This is H.G.'s dream:
"We are climbing up a mountain, you and I. We sing childish songs. Then we reach the top of the mountain. Rebecca, completely nude, stands at the top of the mountain like a statue. I pray to her. I make love to her. And when it is over, I look around and find myself alone. Rebecca returns to her inanimate state, and you are nowhere to be seen."

I read in a woman's magazine that obsession is a disease. I disagree. Obsession is a household appliance. Obsession is a vacuum cleaner.

The contents of my body are sterile like the steel operating tools they use in hospitals. All I know is a clean, uncomplicated pain that vibrates until I am dazed.

I have fed on the contents of H.G.'s mind. I have left him pure and wanting.

He is mine now. He was a sickly robin with a mutilated wing, and I stole him and bedded him in a shoebox. I fed him what I wanted him to eat: my breasts, my small, nonhuman breasts. I have raped the man I love.

We have slept together many nights since the day Rebecca left us. He closes his eyes as he makes love to me. With blind hands, he touches my face as if I was his lover.

And now again, we are three.
Lot's Wife

In turning, you are turned: one
continuous movement which folds in
upon itself like a Mobius strip, as if
the hand of God, catching
your momentum, continued the sweep
into salt.

You kiss and part — on a corner, before
a doorway — and walk
in opposite directions. In
the newness of your separation, somewhere
in the transition from we to I, over
your shoulder, you turn
and are turned by
the sight of his back.

The woman has
no name, is
remembered best as
a pillar of salt, is caught
in the act.
On Discovering Your Father Has Alzheimer's

(for Timothy)

Now the doctor is seventy-five and stands
before trees, searching his chest pocket, scratching
through to his skin until the red welts turn him
to philosophy, the bulbous shape of the word
lodged in his mouth by some persistent synapse
always bleating the names of beasts he made.
Exist. He coughs up the word, holding
a twig as though he might divine the source.
The first fall leaves break off of the branches
grazing his field of vision and cutting another
thinning rope of thought while still in the twining.

Leaving his room in the morning, he moors on memory's loss
the image of a man who could change his own pants
and clutches at the light, wandering through his vast
vocabulary to prompt his hands to do the action of hands.
His fingers play upon the sunstream, close and open,
locate a perch on which he might rescue his attention
if only he could pitch a thought and watch it land
safely in the confines of the world.
Someone interrupts his drowned-man's brief seizure
of shore to re-locate him to a stoop, where he is
looking up at you, naked and in front of neighbors,
with words hanging from his mouth like prey.
Hymns against our silences

"Exclamation is the principal means to move the affections."

John Playford

Each of my
fingers contacts each
of yours as if skin
were a melody
from another star

*

Camano Island zephyrs
bow your hair
across your face

Warm music rises
from your shoulders

*

Upon yours my lips
cry a halloo
shining their torch
into the cave
for the child
wandered off

Waiting for an echo

*

I can say no
more about your eyes
than that they exclaim
*  
A war song flows
from our palms against
the blindness of fists

*  
My whole
body is shouting
at the top
of its lungs
to shake alive
the sleeping
break
through

Propagandas of the blood

Red book the heart
proclaiming what
it is certain of
Impotence

Outside it's 70 and still
heat whirs in this cold house.
Shower-wet, I stretch across month
old sheets, too tired to slip
a finger in, rub
what's missing: the word
wrapped around your tongue, pink.

The less I miss you, the more I say I do.

Your voice loose in the phone —
how your best friend disappeared a week
to love, moves away at pool
finds his thumbprint in her back
before he shoots. That place:

the fist we took turns making,
shakes with you, but you're looking
the other way, not at
your mouth, my hair; fingerprints along my spine
you didn't press when someone else was
there, racking the balls. In your ice,
you said, you heard them: boys laughing,
ready to tell.
Variations On A Theme

1.
A melody
haunts the room
like a shadow.

The miniscule
and the large
coalesce.

The inescapable
is everywhere.

2.
The lamplight
is nothing,
bends in
the overturned glass.

A scent lingers
longer than a sound.
Cultivated Strip
Mourning Line
The Cacodylatic Eye: Figures of Designed Desire in Surrealist Film

At the crossroads between structuralism and semiotic systems, between discourse theory and rhetoric, and between all of those and recent psychoanalytical implications of infusing cinematic signifiers with ideology and spectator gazes with desire stands the figure. Ten years ago, within the framework of studying cinematic codes and conventions, the figure was often dismissed as embellishment, as relish on the study of narrative strategies. Today, figural operations occupy a dominant place in film theory, especially as they provide detours and gaps, displacements and condensations, the fundamental Lacanian lack-in-being "which marks all entrance into the symbolic and which structures all desire."¹

One of the most famous figures in film is the cutting of the eyeball in Un Chien andalou (1930, Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali). The figural operation, described in the final version of the screenplay, is as follows:

Cut to a man, seen in medium close-up, looking up at the moon. The next shot is of a night sky lit by a full moon in the left-hand corner of the frame. A very thin cloud is moving towards the moon. Cut back to medium close-up of the man thoughtfully looking at the sky and smoking. Dissolve to close-up of a woman’s face. A hand opens her left eye with thumb and index finger. Another hand, holding the razor, comes into shot. We can make out the man’s striped shirt, as well as the striped tie he now wears. Shot of the sky: the cloud passes across the full moon, as though bisecting it. Very large close-up of the razor slicing the eye lengthwise. Matter runs out of the eye onto its lower lid.²

This sequence of the cutting of the eyeball is contained within the Prologue and further sandwiched between two intertitles: "Once upon a time" and "Eight years later." Much has been written about the figure and whether it is metonymic or metaphoric in nature. The shock of this sequence is allayed
both within the film and over time. The man, played by Bunuel, himself, disappears after the Prologue and never reappears in the film. The woman reappears almost immediately, both eyes intact. The animal eye, substituted for the woman's eye, also reappears in the form of a donkey carcass, strapped to a grand piano. And over time, in the fifty-seven years since the film was made, the figure has been shown so many times, gained so much notoriety and received so much scrutiny, that it has almost ceased to be expressive. It has become shorthand for Surrealism in general, flattened-out and one-dimensional, like a billboard.

I prefer instead to look at two other figural operations in the same film, both involving exchanges of sexual identity between the cyclist and the woman. My interest in these exchanges is not in terms of whether their processes are essentially metonymic or metaphorical nor in terms of their psychoanalytical implications (whether or not they suggest the fear of castration by trying to deny it). My interest is in the figure itself, and in the generative function of the figure; more generally, in non-referential figures, which seem to lack a connotative function; in the syntagmatic connection of shots in the discourse; in the ways in which cinematic codes not only convey the figure but actually become part of the "viewed," the figure itself; in the implications for temporality and point of view of such figures; and, finally, in the way such figures continue to attract, intrigue and have allure, precisely because they remain enigmatic, resisting interpretation.

In the first sequence in question, the cyclist is in the room with the woman.

The man pays no attention to her and continues to stare at his hand in fascination. He finally turns his head towards her and looks at her briefly, as though waking up from a dream.

Large close-up of the hand full of ants.

The shot of the crawling ants dissolves into a close-
up of a woman’s armpit. The woman is sun-bathing in a field; the edge of the frame shows that she has a white bonnet over her face as she lies on the grass.

Dissolve from the armpit hairs to close-up of a sea-urchin’s apines as it lies in the sand.

Dissolve to a head seen directly from above as though through the iris of an eye. The iris opens slowly to reveal an extremely masculine-looking young woman, dressed like a man and with a man’s haircut. This young androgyne is holding a stick with which she moves a hand, severed and bleeding, lying on the ground, vaguely giving the impression that she is trying to force the tip of the stick between its fingers so that the hand can climb up the stick. Cut to the androgyne, seen further from above. Iris out to show her surrounded by a milling crowd. ³

In essence, both the figural operation and the sequence that contains it are completed in four shots: close-up of ants crawling in the cyclist’s hand; armpit of a woman; the spines of a sea-urchin; and the iris of the top of the androgyne’s head. Interpretation does not arise, and cannot arise, from any translation into speech or paraphrase of the sequence. What do ants in a hand have to do with female underarm hair? What do both have to do with the spines of a sea-urchin? The four shots “hold up,” feel complete and exert a force by way of their visual similarities (their roundness, their clump of blackness against white backgrounds), by their spatial contiguity (there are no mediating shots between), and by the similarities in structural presentation (all are in close-up and attached by dissolves to each other). We can surround these shots with discursive commentary, we can say how they function even, and still they resist interpretation, as, I would argue, do all figures that endure.

The screenplay is more provocative than the film, in that it suggests with the phrase, “as though waking up from a dream,” that the trigger for these associated shots is a trance state, emanating from the cyclist, but the suggestion proves
to be more fiction than truth, especially in the hands of a humorist like Bunuel. Dali has written in his diaries that the image of ants crawling out of a hand is a symbol for masturbation, but Bunuel instead chose to treat the image as a conduit to more plastic, more formal, more ironic concerns. Irreconcilable contextually, the ants crawling out of the hand are given neither a reason nor an aftermath in the film. Still, the shot belongs to the diegesis in a way that the next two do not. The shot of the woman’s underarm, less charged but more representational, is at this point extra-diegetic, an insert, which causes a rupture in the narrative, for the spectator’s gaze is no longer in the room nor attendant to the cyclist and woman. The sea-urchin, visually similar to the armpit, seems to serve no other function beyond that of surprise contiguity or “convulsive beauty.” And yet, within the context of the overall film, it delineates a progression of petrification that is duplicated elsewhere, from the animate to the inanimate. Both inserts put the spectator at the beach, where the end of the film indeed takes us. These inserts are pre-emptive at the time they appear, but they are also time-disjunctive and, finally, “recuperated” by the end of the film.

Inserts are often the vehicle for figural operations in film, especially in silent films. The enjambment of a shot of Kerensky at the Winter Palace with that of a peacock in Eisenstein’s October (1928) is one example. An insert of a bug caught in a spider’s web separates two shots of seduction involving the dandy Phoebus and poor Esmeralda in Wellesley’s The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1928). And inserts of animals at the slaughterhouse are likened to workers in both Eisenstein’s Strike (1924) and Chaplin’s Modern Times (1936). But the inserts of armpit and sea-urchin in Un Chien andalou differ from these other inserts, because they are enigmatic inserts, not explanatory inserts. They elongate the narrative, complicate the narrative rather than explicate it, and, in fact, they seem to be privileged shots, there for themselves, contaminating contiguous shots. And, while they create a diegetic rupture, they neither restore temporal continuity nor point of view. The one is more surprising than the other,
for, while inserts are by nature atemporal, explanatory inserts usually privilege one character over another in contiguous shots. These don’t. They tell us nothing about either the cyclist or the woman in the room.

Shots #1 and #3, the ants and the sea-urchin, appear to be enjoined, because both shock, both represent visceral objects which carry a taboo to the touch. Shots #2 and #4, the woman’s armpit and the head of hair of the androgyne, seem enjoined by the fact that both are of hair. But this fourth shot is deceiving in its similarities, which are all visual. In fact, the shot is quite different from all the rest. In the first shot of the hand, the close-up obscures the fact that the camera has come closer by the magnification of the hand, itself. And the dissolves that punctuate the next three shots are not seen as a lab process, the interruptive influence of editing, because once again there is magnification through condensation. Two shots are overlapped, physically melded so that they cannot be taken separately. But in the fourth shot the iris dominates the frame. Film punctuation, itself, creates the last rounded resemblance to the other three shots. And the iris denotes, not a magnification, but a reduction, a miniature. There is only hair on a head, which is separated from the rest of the body, both through framing (the iris) and vantage point (the aerial view).

When the iris opens, there is ironic disclosure. The head belongs to an androgynous figure, poking a severed hand with a stick. The severed hand mirrors the close-up of the hand with ants crawling in it (the close-up accomplishing a kind of severing of its own in the frame). The mannish woman mirrors our effeminate cyclist, and both have striped boxes. The crowd forming a circle around the hand from an aerial view forms not only a bull’s eye, with the androgyne as the target for the car to hit, but also a literal mirror image (everything reversed) of the original shot of the sequence: where before the hand contained the ants, now the “ants” surround the hand.

In the next shot, we are back in the room, and the cyclist and woman are both at the window. With this shot we realize
that there is a more connotative reading possible for shot #4 of the figure: the iris is an "eye" looking down, the aerial view an extension of that eye. A camera angle (high angle down), which was first a technical strategy, is now recuperated contextually as a point-of-view shot. If author intentionality counts for anything here, then I suspect an elaborate Surrealist joke in the figural operation, which discourages me from caring too deeply, in terms of rhetorical tropes, whether we're dealing with metonymy or metaphor, and in terms of psychoanalysis, whether these exchanges of sexual identity derive from castration anxiety or serve to deny sexual difference. If there be denial of sexual difference, then surely that denial is ironic, which then makes a joke of critical earnestness: i.e., reading Freud or Lacan too deeply in the figure. I can surround the figure with understanding as to function, but I am still incapable of inscribing meaning to the terms of the figure. Linda Williams has described the resistance to interpretation of such figures:

This figure, like the condensations and displacements of dreams, is not immediately translatable in its local context the way less enigmatic figures of diegetically dominant films are translatable. 4

And yet Williams is unable to accept this resistance. The analogy of the dream becomes for her a literal methodology. She sees concave round shapes in the hand and the armpit, convex shapes in the sea-urchin and rounded head of the androgyne, leading to fetishized signs, contradictory gender, and, finally, a fear of castration, contained in the images of denial.

The second figural process I want to look at occurs near the end of the film, and it mirrors the first in many ways. I defer to the description in the screenplay:

Dissolve to a close-up of the black spot — a death's head moth.

Cut back to the young woman, staring intently.

Dissolve to a large close-up of the actual skull pattern
on the moth’s back. Then iris in to the skull pattern. 
Cut to a very large close-up of the skull pattern. 
Cut back to the young woman, staring. 
Cut back to a magnified close-up of the skull pattern, 
which fills the shot. 
The young woman looks off, disdainfully. 
The man who first appeared on the bicycle stands in 
the room, seen in medium close-up. He suddenly claps 
his hand to his mouth as if his teeth were about to fall 
out. 
She looks at him with contempt. 
He removes his hand. His lips are pursed up as if he 
had no mouth. 
In retaliation, she outlines her mouth with a lipstick. 
On the man’s face, hairs now grow in the place where 
his mouth used to be. 
When the young woman sees this, she stifles a cry and 
quickly looks at her armpit, which is completely hairless. 

This figure, shocking enough on a visual plane for its 
exchanges of body parts, depends for its full impact upon 
the previous figures. In this second configuration all of the 
punctuating devices are combined in the beginning, bunched 
up to bring the cross-cutting with the force of an explosion. 
The cyclist is visually reborn of the death’s head moth and 
perhaps psychic reborn of the intensity of the woman’s 
stare. There is not one close-up, as with the hand with ants 
crawling out of it, but an extended series: close-up, large 
close-up, iris (functioning as a transitional close-up), very 
large close-up, and finally a magnified close-up, which fills 
the frame. Two dissolves, four close-ups and an iris make 
up the series. The iris, which ended the previous figural oper-
ation in irony, sets off this one with another irony. It shrinks 
the visible field of the frame, while magnifying what is seen
within the peephole, so that the extreme close-up which fills the frame is the logical shot to follow, and the force of that enjoined series of shots derives, not just from a progression in scale, but also from a momentary dichotomy. Put simply, there is expansion through reduction.

The cyclist removes his mouth with a wipe of the hand. The woman reacts with contempt and lipstick. The man reacts with hair growing where his mouth should be. The woman looks at her armpit, which is hairless.

Where before there were static associations, here there is dynamic movement, each movement a reaction to another movement, each movement breaking with realistic representation, and yet establishing a neutral plausibility through spatial contiguity and editing rhythm. In this second configuration there are no inserts, and yet the earlier inserts are precisely what complete this figure. The man removes his mouth with his hand, recalling the hand with the ants. Her application of lipstick to her mouth (seemingly compensating for his erasure of mouth with her own more mouth-than-mouth) triggers the growth of hair on his face, the male response to lipstick, to more-mouth-than-mouth. This hair, of course, leads to her looking at her armpit, because of the second shot in the previous figure: the woman’s armpit at the beach. The woman breaks the exchange by putting on her shawl and leaving. She reappears in the next sequence on the beach. It has to be the beach, of course, because the two inserts from the previous figural operation — a woman’s armpit at the beach and a sea-urchin — demand it.

These connections show “how it works” more than “what it means.” Such figural operations have withstood more than half a century of repeated screenings, without any empirical meaning becoming part of the lexicon. With this in mind, can the spectator resist the urge to interpret? Where does the urge come from? And can one resist it? I am thinking as much about the first-time viewer as about the film teacher or professional critic.

How this operation works is possibly even more untranslatable than the figures themselves, but a few introductory
remarks can be made. The subject of cinema, the size of screen, the conditions of viewing in the dark, the retinal reaction to editing, color, music and other facets of the cinematography, all combine to create a particular circumstance of spectatorship. And, whereas other art forms may view figural operations more as embellishments than as integral strategies of narration, Christian Metz has suggested that the reverse occurs in cinema. As Dudley Andrew has noted, "While we may be accustomed to thinking of figures as abnormal, disordering embellishments in well-ordered, rational discourse, Metz suggests that they are, especially in cinema, the normal marks of an irrational discourse which becomes progressively ordered." If we agree, even hypothetically, with Metz, then the urge to interpret (which, I contend, increases, the more enigmatic the figures) is a logical reaction to irrational discourse. The spectator, to the extent that (s)he is able, co-creates the film by progressively ordering this irrational discourse, but always at some loss of immediacy (the more elaborate the ordering, the more there is loss of immediacy in feeling and the more distanced the spectator becomes from this irrational discourse).

As Peter Wollen has pointed out, the hermeneutic code, as seen in Lacanian terms, involves the relationship of three times:

1. Seeing/being blind to  
   The instant of the look
2. Interpreting/misinterpreting  
   The time to understand
3. Knowing/denying  
   The moment of conclusion

Wollen adds: "These three times follow a logico-temporal order and each is a couplet: what one character sees may be exactly what another character is blind to; every interpretation may be a misinterpretation; a character may deny all knowledge of what he or she knows."

What if, borrowing freely from Lacan and Wollen, we substituted "spectator" for "character"? What if we extend this code to approach the experience of viewing cinema, and, in particular, figural operations? We might even allow for a lag in time and logic. The steps will still be the same.
The instance of the cinematic look, that of seeing/being blind to, is the given. But, if for some reason, the instant of the look is not followed by the time to understand (interpreting/misinterpreting), then two things would occur: first, knowing/denying, the moment of conclusion, would be impossible, and the spectator would revert to the most immediate previous stage, in this case seeing/being blind to, with resultant doubt, loss of immediacy and even memory. The spectator would be arrested at that stage, forcibly but briefly, until the next instant of the look and the possibility of all three stages occurring again. The reason I alluded to might be that the figures in question are non-referential or the editing too quick; the reason might be a condition of viewing (the projection out-of-focus, a badly scratched print, too much noise from other spectators). Or the reason might reside in the spectator (a headache; fatigue; a belief system too threatened by what is seen). All of these are variables, and perhaps these variables are as fascinating and worthy of study as the code they inform.

The Surrealist project attracts as it defies. It continues to attract the more it defies. Structuralism, semiotics, rhetorical study, psychoanalytical study, gender study, Marxist criticism, feminist film criticism, all have been brought to bear, separately and in combinations, upon the figures and figural operations in Un Chien andalou. My purpose in this paper is not to assign correctness, to pick one over the other, or to deny the interest or the insights possible in any of them, but rather to say that the generative function of the figure itself, is what engenders the various forms of film theory and criticism, and not the reverse.
Notes


3 *L'Age d'Or and Un Chien Andalou*, p. 105.

4 Williams, p. 127.

5 *L'Age d'Or and Un Chien Andalou*, p. 114.


IRONWOOD

it thrives in the desert
and they say it's tougher than oak

It is a wonderful story, the Little Magazine in America. From Hound and Horn and The Little Review, to Harriet Monroe’s Poetry and Marianne Moore’s days at The Dial, to the neat square-shouldered Hudson, Partisan, and Kenyon Reviews, to Furioso, and the original Contact of Dr. Williams, in and out of The Fifties and The Sixties, through the mimeo revolution, and the one that came later with xerox, and such milestones as Yugen, Kulchur, Io, Beatitude, Catterpillar, Hot Water, Big Table, and (how could we not mention it?) Ed Sanders’ FUCK YOU: A Magazine of the Arts.

And so it goes. For good or bad. In the ’90s litmags flourish. One can only guess, but maybe two thousand are being published in America at any given time. Some, of course, will collapse after sprinting naively through their first heat. There are those that won’t get that far. Most are not likely to go longer than five issues or two years. A few — just two or three — have circulations of about 10,000. Most are printed in optimistic runs of fewer than two thousand: many have no more than a hundred readers. They all look different, in as much as they can; they feel different, too. Some have agenda, some support an idea(l), a school or a movement. Some are erratic — let’s say “eclectic” — and are thrown together helter skelter by a good-intentioned, if somewhat penny-poor, editor who knows what he or she likes. Some are serious; others are just out for a good time. Some want to change the world, leave their mark, live forever. A few are like mosquitoes, happy to have their few hours of life, to get some attention, even if it’s only an annoying slap, and thrilled no end if they can get just one good bite in, draw just a little bit of blood.

The rich history (and fantastic folklore) of the litmag, along with its ephemeral nature, make us appreciate an effort like
IRONWOOD. Michael Cuddihy's magazine was built twice a year every year in a warm, dry corner of Arizona, from its debut in 1972 until its 32nd issue in 1988. A rare thing, the litmag that can be counted on. IRONWOOD was, indeed, a rare thing. Not only could you be sure it would be showing up, but you could just as surely expect page after page of quality, things new and unusual, risks, experiments, and gutsy calls from poets and critics, established and new. This is where you might find new poems from Tess Gallagher and Charles Simic; first encounter young poets like Linda Gregg, Ai, and Anthony Petrosky; and get introduced to the exotic likes of Yehudi Amichai, Tomas Tranströmer, and Czeslaw Milosz. Hank Lazer wrote on Galway Kinnell; John Taggert, on William Bronk. There were interviews with Donald Hall, Denise Levertov, Frank Stanford, and more. As well you would want it to be, every issue was a surprise, a delight.

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Michael Cuddihy was thirty-five and still looking for something. It was 1967. Or so he tells us in TRY IRONWOOD: AN EDITOR REMEMBERS (Rowan Tree Press, 124 Chestnut Street, Boston, MA 02108; 1990; 212 pp. $12.95/paper.) The undergraduate program at Notre Dame, and the beginnings of grad studies at the University of Arizona, had prepared him for the task of translating Jacques Maritain, the metaphysics and aesthetics, and in particular, THE PEASANT OF THE GARONNE, the best-selling theological polemic which had excited post-Vatican II France.

Do you believe in epiphanies? The theo-minded first steps of this story bring the word to mind. But what else: through a mutual friend, Cuddihy got in touch with a young woman to help with the typing and copy-editing of the Maritain manuscript, and in no time at all he was head-over-heels in love. A problem: the feelings were not mutual. Eventually the two did get to talk it through, and the young woman explained to him in no uncertain terms that they were "poles
apart,” that he was logical to a fault, while she saw herself as more a poet, a romantic. It doesn’t seem Cuddihy was greatly surprised by this; he’d known all along that something was missing. “I was hungry for personal experience, anxious to get close to my feelings. Poetry might be the way.” And so, like Saul, now Paul, flat on his ass in the middle of the road to Damascus, Cuddihy was struck by a bright saving light; his bolt of lightning, a good looking blonde with wonderful blue eyes.

Actually, Cuddihy was a good candidate for an awakening. He’d clearly had leanings and sympathies, even as he goose-stepped so logically. More than ten years before he had been a regular at the 92nd Street Y — it was a short five blocks from his house — and he’d been there to hear Dylan Thomas read from his poems and from the work of others. A few months later, he saw Thomas again, this time acting as the narrator in the first production of “Under Milk Wood.” Later, he tells us, he saw four or five others, e.e. cummings and William Carlos Williams, among them.

Now, though, he would approach poetry from a different angle. Now, he began to write—(mostly about love and death — surprise!) — and even took to sitting in on writing workshops at Arizona. He delved in with a passion, and in time some of his poems were accepted for publication — the first ones, in Kayak. George Hitchcock’s magazine was a favorite of Cuddihy’s. “(T)he magazine’s tone was jaunty, irreverent, full of gumption and energy . . .” — ironically, a description that would one day fit nicely his own magazine.

And that magazine would not be long coming. And it shouldn’t have been too much of a surprise. Cuddihy was an avid reader of periodicals; something that came to him by heredity, perhaps. His father, and before that, his grandfather, had headed the publishing firm of Funk and Wagnalls. Now, Michael was spending every minute he could going through the stacks at the University’s library, reading back issues of Cid Corman’s Origin, John Logan’s Choice, and William Matthews’ Lillabulero. (When the first issue of Ironwood finally appeared, it was dedicated to Hitchcock,
Logan, Matthews, and their magazines.)

There is a lot of good fortune involved in the Ironwood story. Right place, right time; that sort of thing. Clearly it helped that Cuddihy was at Arizona when his epiphany came. Richard Sheldon’s workshop was there, and it took him farther along the road. Then, as luck would have it, he met William Everson, at that time better known as Brother Antonius, the Dominican monk and disciple of Pound and Jeffers who had emerged during the Beat Generation. Antonius agreed to “tutor” Cuddihy, talking poetry and directing his reading a couple times a week at the priory. Then later, when another boost was needed, Cuddihy, home in New York state for the summer, asked to sit in on the Cornell summer workshop of William Matthews, who just happens to have married his cousin.

If Dick Shelton and Brother Antonius could help his poetics, Bill Matthews had something more to offer. As the editor of Lillabulero, he could give sage advice on getting a litmag together. So, for the summer of ’71, Cuddihy enjoyed the fresh clean air coming across Lake Cayuga, talking poetry and reading like a gopher through Matthews’ collection of little magazines. He began taking notes about type faces, print size, paperweight, and put together a wish-list, the names of poets he’d like to include in the new magazine. In the evening he wrote a few letters; Matthews had given him addresses he wanted. Before long, replies, and submissions, began arriving in the mail: C.K. Williams, Diane Wakowski, Wendell Berry, George Oppen, David Ignatow...

Since I’ve mentioned the good fortune — the Funk and Wagnalls heritage, the nearby 92nd Street Y, poet-cousins — it is only fair to tell the other side of the story. It is the other side that makes Cuddihy’s good story great. At the age of nineteen, he was struck down by polio. It was the early ’50s, and this was the god-awful scare of the day. An iron lung gave way to a special “rocking bed,” a kind of self-powered respirator, once some stability was established. With a brace for his neck and back, he was able, within a year or two, to spend long hours in a wheelchair, and walk
briefly with assistance. He'd been told by a therapist, optimistically, that he would live to the age of thirty-four. At the time he was twenty-three. Almost every respiratory polio he had known or heard of had died by their early forties; most were in their twenties or thirties. Now, here he was in the dooryard of his fortieth year, and he was getting ready to launch a poetry magazine. *Grace under pressure.*

With his fortunes, good and bad, packed and ready, his wild hopes and dreams, and an armload of manuscripts, Cuddihy headed back to Tucson.


When you look back at something like *Ironwood* and try to make sense of it all, try to find a thread that ran through sixteen years, it is obvious: Cuddihy. He was the heart, the energy, and the soul of *Ironwood*. Sure, you could say this about the editors of all litmags. But you'd be wrong. *Ironwood* is different somehow. Cuddihy is different. If another editor at another magazine had gotten tired — and why not, after sixteen years? — how hard would it be to turn the reins over to another, keep the tradition alive. Look at how often it's done. And when it's not, it probably has more to do with the fact that there are no takers to be found, no one with the money, energy, time, and inclination to keep building these little magazines. These are some of the traits that you'll find in a good editor, but an important one has been left out — talent. Michael Cuddihy sure did have a talent for editing a poetry magazine.

He had talent, not just for finding gold in the piles of dross, but for seeing beyond the poems themselves, to the excitement of poetics. While each issue had good poetry, it was all the better in that it came from new, younger writers: Bruce Weigl, Gil Ott, Michael Burkard, David Romtvedt. It was new looks at Neruda, Machado, and Parshchikov. Cuddihy seemed to be able to see around corners, to know what was coming. As Robert Hass writes in his introduction to the volume: "*Ironwood* was always faithful to its originating
impulse, the opening to feeling, but it was the complicated, continually evolving curiosity about where poetry was heading that made it so interesting and lively.” Ironwood broke a lot of stories to poetry readers, introduced a lot of new faces to the crowd.

(And yet. An interesting aside that can’t go unmentioned: On page 71 Cuddihy bemoans the fact that “Book People’s catalogue compared (an early issue) unfavorably with an issue of Painted Bride Quarterly, a Philadelphia magazine, citing our preference for established poets and neglect of the experimental.” This, of course, is not so much a knock at Ironwood as it is a doff of the cap to the good job Louise Simons and her staff were doing back in ’75.)

It was the special issues that Cuddihy built that impressed me most. Ironwood #10, published in December ’77, was the James Wright issue, and the beginning of my fascination with the magazine. I’d gotten a copy of #3 somewhere: Bly’s Machado, Dacey, Piercy — this was the king of litmag I was likely to pick up whenever I saw it. But here, too, was a group of Eskimo poems translated by Richard Lebovitz — something new. And there was an interview with William Matthews. I probably found it someplace — at Gotham in NYC or the Middle Earth in Philly. Maybe it was the interview: I was and still am a Matthews fan. Much clearer, however, are my recollections of #10. I purchased it at a place called the Book Cellar in Brattleboro, Vermont, while en route to a Maine honeymoon. How is it that we remember such things? Not long before I had heard Wright read in New York, a night that left a strong impression. Now, here was a fourteen page spread of his new work, and critical (if somewhat celebratory) essays by a number of people, many of whom I admired: Hass, Bly, Logan, Dave Smith, Peter Stitt, and so on.

The Wright issue was not Ironwood’s first time isolating someone’s work, nor would it be their last: #5 had focused on the Objectivist, George Oppen. Future numbers would consider the likes of Tomas Tranströmer, Czesław Milosz, Robert Duncan and Oppen again (posthumously). Still other
issues were shared: Linda Gregg was given the Ironwood treatment even before her first collection was published; she shared an issue with César Vallejo. Emily Dickinson was given new attention in an issue with Jack Spicer. Hilda Morley shared her spotlight with the lately heralded “Language” poets. There was a volume which featured a symposium on Chinese Poetry and its Influence, and another simply called Bearings: Approaches to Poetry & the Poem, a “poetics” issue.

(A few years back, when the PBQ decided to initiate a series of special issues to focus on a single poet, beginning with Etheridge Knight, then Robert Francis and John Logan, it was Ironwood, and their special issues, which were used as a model.)

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Litmags — the process is not always pretty. The day-to-day operation is ink, ugly-smelling paste, and paper cuts. It could make for tedious reading, but Michael Cuddihy reports it well — clean, quick, and painless. The editor’s job is thankless. Few realize all that goes into it, the time and energy, the spirit. In the end, there is nothing but this little mountain that you’ve built. And believe it or not, it is enough.
The Heteroclite Flip-flop: 
Pound’s Guide to Kulchur

Though Guide to Kulchur is a fascinating book, it fails in comparison to Ezra Pound’s earlier ABC of Reading because it is trying to be to society at large what the former book was trying to be to literature. Part of what is so attractive about Pound’s endeavor is his willingness to wrestle with foreign disciplines. Yet what I’d like to show here are examples of contradictions that proliferate as he gets in over his head. I am not necessarily trying to show these to discredit Pound, for it seems at times that he himself feels the contradictions to be valuable (or at least necessary) side-effects that are part of the price for approaching the sheer range of subjects that Guide to Kulchur addresses.

Almost two-thirds into the book, Pound writes:

I am, I trust patently, in this book doing something different from what I attempted in How to Read or in the ABC of Reading. There I was avowedly trying to establish a series or set of measures, standards, voltmeters, here I am dealing with a heteroclite set of impressions

(p. 208)

One hundred pages later, in reference to Aristotle, Pound writes:

If we accept Schopenhauer’s acid test for writers, the work is bad. It is heteroclite a hodge-podge of astute comment and utter bosh, material for the sottisier, but above all, subversive, morally bad.

(308)

This could be accidental. Yet when Pound writes

Aristotle did not implant a clear concept of money in the general western mind. He saw that money was a measure . . .

(278)
one begins to suspect that Pound is ambivalent about Aristotle (and, in fact, the root of his interest in the philosophe, who he derogatorily calls “Arry”) is either because he consciously identifies with, or unconsciously projects his own dilemma on, Aristotle. This is not to say he didn’t strive to dissociate himself from the mere measuring stick of Aristotle:

As working hypothesis say that Kung is superior to Aristotle by totalitarian instinct. His thought is never something scaled off the surface of facts. It is root volition branching out, the ethical weight is present in every phrase. The chief justice had to think more soberly than the tutor and lecturer.

(279)

Not only does Pound himself best resemble a tutor more than a chief justice, but there are many passages in *Guide to Kulchur* that show that sobriety for Pound is not an unequivocal good, or at least that it doesn’t preclude an occasional “drinking bout.” It is Plato rather than Aristotle, however that helps trigger such enthusiasm in Pound:

If Plato’s ideas were the paradigms of reality in Plato’s personal thought, their transmutation into phenomena takes us into the unknown. What we can assert is that Plato periodically caused enthusiasm among his disciples. And the Platonists after him have caused man after man to be suddenly conscious of the reality of *nous*, of mind, apart from any man’s individual mind, of the sea crystalline and enduring, of the bright as it were molten glass that envelopes us, full of light.

(44)

If there is any doubt what kind of value Pound confers on this process, he recapitulates it more clearly:

I believe that the most rabid anti-platonist must concede that Plato has repeatedly stirred men to a sort of enthusiasm productive of action, and that
one cannot completely discount this value as life force.

(347)

Nonetheless, he stops short of saying this enthusiasm is necessary for action. Indeed, it is rather often that Pound must deprecate the Greek philosophers to elevate Confucius (Kung):

The distinction I am trying to make is this. Rightly or wrongly we feel that Confucius offers a way of life, an Anschauung or disposition towards nature and man and a system for dealing with both.

(24)

Yet, neither the Guide to Kulchur nor The Cantos offers a way of life and a system. In fact, both seem blatantly anti-systematic except perhaps at times when Pound expresses the urge to “make a paradiso/ terrestrē” (Cantos, p. 816). Thus, Pound is as torn between Kung and Plato as he is between his desire and his ability. On further examination, it can be seen that it is not the Western philosophers themselves he devalues. It’s how they “have been served up as highbrows” (23). When we take this into account, the preface that opens this book can actually be read as a defense of the Western philosophers:

In attacking a doctrine, a doxy, or a form of stupidity, it might be remembered that one isn’t of necessity attacking the man, or say “founder,” to whom the doctrine is attributed or on whom it is blamed. One may quite well be fighting the same idiocy that he fought and whereinto his followers have reslumped from laziness, from idiocy, or simply because they (and/or he) may have been focussing their main attention on some other goal, some disease, for example, of the time needing immediate remedy.

(7)
Thus, Pound comes close to actually using Kung to defend Zeno, Epicurus and Pythagoras. Like Kung, “they did advocate modes of life, and did not merely argue about certain abstractions” (25). In fact, these alleged “highbrow” ideas are more basic than common sense that comes from “the synthetic feeding bottle of the occident as we know it” (26).

Still, even if we discard the fallacy \textit{ad hominem} and the misinterpretations to which the Greek philosophers have been unwilling subjects, the question remains as to what modes of life they did advocate. To discern this, Pound must try to “get a bracket for one kind of ideas . . . that will hold a whole set of ideas and keep them apart form another set” (29).

At this point, we must make a clean cut between two kinds of “ideas.” Ideas which exist and/or are discussed in a species of vacuum, which are as it were toys of the intellect, and ideas which are intended to “go into action,” or to guide action and serve us as rules and/or measures of conduct.

(34)

This raises at least two questions: (1) Is Pound able to maintain a conceptual distinction between these two ideas throughout \textit{Guide to Kulchur}? and (2) Does Pound adequately prove why the second is more effective (and thus better)?

An analogy can be made between the above conceptual distinction and the following assumption: Pound feels that both the Greek philosophers and Christ were irresponsible and decadent in their dangerous relativism what cares more about “the individual responsible [only] to himself” than about any “communal responsibilities” (38). If I, as a nasty reader of “crossword puzzles” (48), put two and two together, it’s easy to see that Pound feels something like this: In order for an idea to truly go into action, it must “think for the whole social order” (29). If, on the other hand, an individual is responsible to himself, that’s actually a kind of irresponsibility, a
toying with thought in an onanistic vacuum. While I’m not sure whether I’m inferring it or if Pound’s implying it, I do see this reasoning as a little too harsh, a little too clean a cut. In fact, it’s so clean Pound cannot cling to it consistently. Of course, that doesn’t mean that the attempt to cling to it becomes tainted with ignobility. One certainly cannot fault Pound with not making the effort.

Grant tentatively that the welfare of the common people was not the first care of the emperors; it would still be impossible to deny the effective provisions taken time after time to establish beneficent order, from which the total people derived benefits greater than occidental history had known before the Pax Romana.

(42-3)

Aside from Pound’s dubious certainty that the total people benefitted (did Pound take a poll?), this statement raises the question of motives. Here, Pound seems clearly to be stressing the significance of the (public) outcome, not the (private) intention. This is consistent with his earlier statement: “It doesn’t matter whether a good writer wants to be useful, or whether the bad writer wants to do harm” (ABC 32). Yet elsewhere in Guide to Kulchur, motives matter as much as the outcome:

We know that there is one enemy . . . ever prattling of short range causation for the sake of, or with the result of obscuring the vital truth.

(32, italics mine)

There are still other instances in which neither seems important:

The value of Leo Frobenius to civilization is not for the rightness or wrongness of this opinion or that opinion, but for the kind of thinking he does.

(57)
There is something very levelheaded and objective about this statement. But it seems glaringly immoral for Pound, who elsewhere writes: "you cannot get anything DONE on an immoral tradition. It will merely slide down. Arry was interested in mind, not in morals" (331). Still, for Pound, good writing was itself a moral act. Unfortunately, he seems to forget that writing can constitute a convergence between thought and action, between mind and morals; that all writing is only as immoral as the light by which you read it, even though he quotes Frobenius:

It is not what a man says, but the part of it which his auditor considers important, that measures the quantity of his is communication.

(59)

This quote seems as if it could serve for Pound as another qualification of his attack on Greek writers. When he writes

... I [don't] remember Plato's having thought about money, which lapse may merely mean that thirty years ago neither I nor anyone else read Plato (or Dante, or whomever) with an enlightened economic curiosity.

(39)

he's showing accurately and perceptively what it is to be a reader. He realizes that reading is a mutual act. Yet after quoting Frobenius (see above), on page 59, Pound goes further. He seems to be saying that it is the writer's responsibility to stir the reader towards having the same concerns that the writer does. It is not what one says that achieves this end, but how one says it:

STYLE, the attainment of a style consists in so knowing words that one will communicate the various parts of what one says with the various degrees and weights of importance one wishes.

(59)
No mean task, especially if you don’t know what you want, let alone how to get it. Style remains an important measure for Pound. It is obvious that he tries many different styles both in his writing and in his “personal” life. *Guide to Kulchur* itself, like the *Cantos*, is heteroclite and “rambles” (by Pound’s own admission), yet at the same time it does actually cause one to “see an instant” through its language. If we can’t figure out whether Pound wanted to be right, good, correct, moral, or whether he wanted to be captivating, a good conversationalist, and above all, not dull, does that mean that we lack an understanding that Pound has? (At this point, would Gaudier-Brzeska say, “Of course, you can see it’s a horse”? *ABC* 21) It is an open question. The issue of style does raise the question of why (not if) Pound is interesting.

For Pound was obviously interested not simply in the stylistics of writing, but in lifestyle as well. Nearly thirty years earlier, he writes: “The study of literature is hero-worship” (*Spirit of Romance* 7). In this vein, Pound peppers *Guide to Kulchur* with personal anecdotes that illustrate either his urge to break down the divisions between the public and the private, or simply the fact that he’s aware that, to some extent, he’s a celebrity:

> I have no doubt that the reader will think this expression violent, and I should think so myself if I had not seen in the flesh a British Colonel, a man who was recently standing in the public eye as a champion of a cause most unpopular in England, shrink from a sheet of paper carrying my 8 Volitionist questions as if I had been an asp or a red-hot iron.

(250)

This seems a sad enough statement of the artist exiled from the court, the lengths to which frustration could lead one, but as Pound continues, we realize that it’s not necessarily the sheet of paper from which the Colonel is shrinking, but the way it reaches him (in fact I’m almost tempted to feel
sorry for the little usurer). Pound continues:

I shoved it into the pocket of his dinner jacket, but
doubt if he has ever had the moral courage to look
at it.

(250)

Another example of personal style is:

Has [T.S.] Eliot or have I wasted the greater number
of hours, he by attending to fools and/or humoring
them, and I by alienating imbeciles suddenly?

(177)

The honesty is almost disarming. Is it possible that Pound
chose the idiosyncratic canon he championed in order to alien-
ate imbeciles suddenly? It doesn’t seem likely, yet the relation
between Pound’s beliefs (tastes) and his behavior is as
complex and problematic as the “chicken or the egg” question.
Though I think it’d be a lie to say that Pound did not really
enjoy the writing he championed (and I have no way of prov-
ing it), I can see an ulterior motive in his devaluation of
Shakespeare when he expresses his urge to mark “out [his]
own particular garden where contemporary criticism pullu-
lated less abundantly” (149). Thus, like that of any reader,
his taste does not exist in a species of vacuum. Is it thus possi-
ble that when he says Mussolini, he really means Jefferson?

“The genius of Mussolini,” Pound writes, “was to see and
repeatedly affirm that there was a crisis not IN but OF the
system....The imbecility of America from 1900 onward, was
loss of all sense of boundaries between public and private
affairs.” (186). Mussolini is admired because of his all-encom-
passing (totalitarian) view. He fits the bill of Pound’s rather
extreme criteria for a strictly public (hollowed out?) man
of action in a way Eliot, who was content to have upward
mobility within a corrupt system (as Pound saw it), couldn’t
(or wouldn’t).
However, the distinction between public (action) and private (convictions) still has not been fleshed out satisfactorily. Let me backtrack to see if Pound does achieve, or even really fully wants to achieve such a clear cut distinction (which is debatable especially if one takes into account Pound’s repeated assertion that the line thickened with USURA):

Socrates was disruptive. The Athenian suspicion that thought might have some real effect upon life is seen in their application of the hemlock.

(39)

If we compare the use of the word “real” in this statement to the use of it in the “Royalty And All That” chapter of Guide To Kulchur

The real history of France during the age of infamy was Flaubert and co. The intellectual struggle against French political pimpery, frumpery and finance....No one wants to preserve it save as pathology.

(264)

we see the two Pounds. The first statement is more tongue-in-cheek to be sure, but its concern is the concern of Kung. The second statement shows Pound accepting literary success as real enough. Pound may have been jealous of Flaubert’s quiet fame, but ultimately Pound’s fate was closer to Socrates’ Like Socrates, Pound sought to disrupt. Through such strategies as Vorticism and his Italian radio speeches, Pound railed against the system in ways that could hardly be considered sober enough for a chief justice. Even if sobriety isn’t the virtue Pound claims it is, it becomes clearer and clearer that Pound was less sober than both Flaubert and Socrates. Despite his efforts, Pound could only rarely console himself with assertions that strictly literary successes were “real” enough (to say nothing of literary popularity). This seems to be in sharp contrast with Flaubert or Shelley’s unacknowledged legislature. Though, I am afforded a psychologist’s privileged (and thus somewhat false) view of Pound’s life and am running the risk of the ad hominem fallacy once more.
In the section entitled "The Proof of the Pudding" Pound writes:

...note that when an idea does not go into action, this is because of some inherent defect in the idea.

(188-9)

It is, I think, relevant to note that he is not attributing the defect to the bearers of it, but to the idea itself. This statement seems to contradict the following:

No man knows the meaning of ANYTHING in any paper until he knows what interests control it.

(196)

In the second statement, the idea has a definite relation to a man or a group of men. There is a discrepancy hinted at between what is said and what is meant or, more to the point, what is said and what is done. In the first statement, there is no room for a remark like "FREE ENTERPRISE: a good idea that got corrupted by the wrong people." It seems Pound is judging the good by its worldly success. This may be a fitting antidote to the "what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world but lose his soul" rap that has prevented many a utopian from action, but at the same time it implies that the more acted on an idea is, the more successful it is. Actually, this could be useful on the personal level, but is Pound overstepping the mark here?

When Pound writes "You can, by contrast, always get financial backing for debauchery."(281), I half agree, yet I still am not satisfied that Pound has achieved a successful definition of action and its relationship to ideas. We could ask what interests could lead Pound to believe ideas are defective unless they go into action. We could ask how he shows that being "in action" is not enough. We could even ask how he knows that there is such a thing as an idea that's not an action. I'm still not quite sure he's convinced me that this class of ideas, a toy of the intellect, even exists.
We can ask these questions and others, but I can’t investigate the full implications here of Pound’s imbroglio. Pound writes:

I have never writ anything more to the point than: The truth about a field is one thing to an impressionist painter wanting to paint it, another to the farmer who means to plant something and make it grow. The magic of music is in its effect on volition. A sudden clearing of the mind of rubbish and the reestablishment of a sense of proportion.

(283)

The distinction between a farmer and a painter is interesting. Yet at times Pound seems to be one; at other times he’s the other. Isn’t it at least possible that you can only be a farmer if you’re a good painter? The answer depends on what Pound means by “field.” If he’s metaphorically referring to a “headspace,” then growth does occur by the way one paints it. This explains the earlier statement:

Pisanello painted horses so that one remembers the painting, and the Duke of Milan sent him to Bologna to BUY horses. Why a similar kind of ‘horse sense’ can’t be applied in the study of literature is, and has always been, beyond my comprehension.

(ABC, 30)

Of course, the Duke of Milan could be very stupid. Pisanello could bring back a very beautiful horse that carries a disease that a doctor who can only draw stick figures would notice in a second.

The other curious phrase in the above statement is “effect on volition.” If music is valuable because of its effect on volition, how can volition be volition if, by definition, it is the prime mover? Wouldn’t music make volition a nomological dangler? The answer doesn’t matter as much as the feeling that music, like Plato, can lead to action. Coming as it does
in context directly after the statement on painting, it presents
the ideogram that you can paint the field to make fruit grow,
you invent what you discover, etc. This creates a confusion
that for Pound is never more than a means to an end. In this
case, the end is proportion.

Even though some of Pound’s statements approach a synthe-
sis elsewhere elusive to him, it does not stop him from prais-
ing the Chinese chronical that requires “that the Emperor
shd. reflect three days in a sort of retreat, no jazz and only
necessary food for three days, before -pronouncing a death
sentence.(275). How can the same Pound who had just written
“music...re-establishes a sense of proportion” advocate the
lack of music in such a crucial decision-making process?
Wouldn’t doing so be like claiming that painting a farm will
not, alas, make fruit grow? If poetry atrophies when it gets
too far from music, being an emperor faced with such deci-
sions would place a poet very far from political power indeed.
Many poets accept this role graciously as a kind of relief.
Yet Pound always felt pulled both ways. Hopefully, this paper
shows the difficulty inherent in the balance Pound sought
and why the urge to deal with a set of perceptions as
heteroclite as possible may have been at the root of his inability
to keep “his center/ fighting the world.”(Cantos, 816)
Bibliography

Acknowledgments
The author would like to thank Bob Perelman, of the University of Pennsylvania, whose Modernism class he audited during the fall semester 1990 and whose unique and spirited approach to Pound was very helpful in requiting some of the insights that appeared in earlier versions of this essay.
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