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## Pound's Use Of Merlin As Persona In The 'Rock Drill Cantos'

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POUND'S USE OF MERLIN AS PERSONA IN THE

ROCK DRILL CANTOS

A Doctoral Essay

Presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

University of the Pacific

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Arts

of

Caryl North

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This essay, written and submitted by

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Pound's Use of Merlin as Persona

in the Rock Drill Cantos

Ezra Pound wrote Cantos 85 to 95, Section: Rock Drill, while imprisoned in St. Elizabeth's, a mental hospital in Washington, D. C. This section was first published in 1956, to be followed by the final Cantos (95-109) in 1958. The source for the title Rock Drill was an abstract sculpture cast in gunmetal by Sir Jacob Epstein as part of the Vorticist exhibition of 1915. In Pound's eyes, this sculpture provided "a central metaphor, . . . signifying, his own constant effort to drive home the ideas upon which the right kind of society rests."<sup>1</sup> In fact, Wyndham Lewis wrote a review of Pound's letters entitled "The Rock Drill," in which he attributed the concept behind Epstein's work--the "hammering away"--to Pound's own prose.<sup>2</sup> As a major portion of Pound's mature work, these Cantos represent the aging poet's move toward a final synthesis of the ideas and philosophies of a lifetime.

As in The Cantos as a whole, Pound's poetic technique in Rock Drill is fragmented and elliptical--dependent upon associational, rather than logical devices for the achievement of coherence. To create the overall structure, Pound combined two poetic techniques: first, the technique of "process," that is a juxtaposition of constantly-shifting images representative

of the poetic consciousness in a state of transformation, or "becoming"; second, the technique of atemporal synthesis--the insertion into the poetic flux of certain "timeless moments," within which the central consciousness of the Cantos shares a state of "being" with compatible consciousnesses throughout history. In these moments of "being," the fact of linear history is discredited, and is replaced by the idea of mythic time, in which the particular moment is eternalized through ritual reenactment of similar moments. For the content of these moments, the central consciousness, or persona, draws upon literary, historical, and mythical sources, as well as upon contemporary experience. Pound's use of persona, then, becomes the major means by which he achieves a unified central structure for a large body of somewhat loosely-related and constantly-shifting material.

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In the earlier Cantos, Pound incorporates such figures as Odysseus, Dante, and Confucius into the central shared consciousness, or persona. In the later Cantos, however, as Pound moves away from the persona of the hero toward that of the magician-seer, a quite different consciousness "comes to the surface." As manifested in Rock Drill, this persona not only incorporates elements of Merlin, the legendary magician, but also encompasses such deities as Hermes, such ancients as Apollonius of Tyre, and such contemporaries as W. B. Yeats. The persona becomes much more than an historical manifestation of Merlin; he becomes, in fact, the consciousness of all magician/seers--both historical



and mythological--as reenacted and relived by the poet. An examination of Pound's development of this persona can be of great benefit in dispelling much of the puzzling haziness of the Rock Drill Cantos.

The central, or "touchstone," passage for the examination of Pound's use of Merlin as persona appears in Canto 91:

Bright hawk whom no hood shall chain,  
They who are skilled in fire

shall read



tan, the dawn.

waiving no jot of the arcanum  
(having his own mind to stand by him)<sup>3</sup>

In this passage, the allusion is to the small bird of prey--the merlin-hawk. This particular hawk, however, is a "free spirit," one who cannot be chained or hooded by his master or forced to hunt and kill small animals. More vividly, this is a "bright hawk," associated with the image of "gold wings" and the "body of light" of previous lines. More than a bird, this hawk is some sort of transcendent life force, unable to be held by the chains of death and darkness.

Juxtaposed to the image of the hawk is that of the seer (Merlin)--the one who is "skilled in fire," that is, able to read the hidden meanings of the flames--to bring light out of darkness, to be an instrument of revelation. Linked both semantically and symbolically, the magician-seer and the bird of prey actually function as transformations of one another, the hawk

representing mind or spirit, and the magician representing the physical manifestation of this spirit. It is in this combined image of the hawk/seer (which comes to be identified with the unification of the body and spirit) that the shared consciousness of the persona of the later Cantos seems most completely to cohere. In order to understand the nature of this "overarching" consciousness, we must examine some of the biographical, historical and mythological guises which Pound's Merlin assumes; at the same time, we must become aware of the technique by which the poet synthesizes these shifting shapes into one controlling persona.

In the creation of his persona, Pound has drawn upon (while at the same time mythologizing) the biographies of certain of his contemporaries. Symbolic allusions to other writers (for example, T. S. Eliot as the "Possum") are abundant throughout The Cantos. In Rock Drill, one of the poets who had great influence on the course of Pound's poetic career--William Butler Yeats--is given symbolic stature as the "Hawk." Numerous allusions point to the identification of the "bright hawk whom no hood shall chain" of Canto 91 with Yeats. Not only is Yeats' poem, "The Hawk," the source of many of Pound's allusions, but it also serves as a key to a deeper understanding of the image-clusters which surround the figure of the hawk/seer persona.

In Egyptian mythology, the hawk symbolizes nobility; the Royal Hawk is sacred to solar gods and goddesses. Like the



eagle, the hawk is a symbol of the soul, which aspires toward heaven. In falconry, he is a bird of prey, and therefore represents ferocity. Through the identification with falconry, the hawk embodies both the bondage of the hood and cage and the freedom of the skies. Symbolically, he expresses mental and intellectual freedom--the refusal to be imprisoned within the practical world.<sup>4</sup> For Yeats, all of these associations become important in "The Hawk." The ferocity of the hawk is identified with mental aspiration, through which the mind of the poet is linked with the skies (the gods).

"The Hawk" is composed of three stanzas, the first two establishing the nature and condition of the hawk, the last transforming the bird into a metaphor for the activity of the mind. In stanza one, an unnamed persona demands that the hawk be about his business of hunting:

"Call down the hawk from the air;  
Let him be hooded or caged  
Till the yellow eye has grown mild  
For larder and spit are bare."<sup>5</sup>

The hawk replies in the second stanza that he "will not be clapped in a hood,/ Nor a cage, nor alight upon a wrist,/ Now [that he has] learned to be proud/ Hovering over the wood/ In the broken mist. . ."<sup>6</sup> Finally, in stanza three, the poet addresses the hawk:

What tumbling cloud did you cleave,  
Yellow-eyed hawk of the mind,  
Last evening? that I, who had sat

Dumbfounded before a knave,  
Should give to my friend  
A pretence of wit.<sup>7</sup>

Ironically, though he has learned to hover "above the woods," the "hawk of the mind" still periodically "tumbles" to earth, through the poet's inability to use his wit appropriately. He becomes "tongue tied" before a "knave," but "puts on" an undesirable "pretence of wit" for his friend. Hence, the poet's condition is paradoxical; the "unaging intellect" is "tied to a dying body." The aspirations of the soaring mind are quite effectively shot down by the fact of mortality--the discrepancy between mental aspiration and declining or recalcitrant physical ability.

The paradox inherent in Yeats' hawk image provides Pound with many opportunities for ironic juxtaposition of agility of the mind with dullness of the body. In addition to appearing as the "bright hawk" of Canto 91, this "hawk of the mind" appears in many less likely guises. In Canto 85, the bird becomes part of a cliché: "study with the mind of a grandson/ and watch the time like a hawk" (p. 550); in Canto 89, the hawk appears as an affectionate name for Yeats (with "Rip Raps" appearing as a transformation of Rapallo): "And of Antoninus very little record remains,/ semina motuum . . . / Deluged the old hawk at Rip Raps,/ Mr. Biddle pinching the baby,/ 'You Damn sadist!' said mr cummings,/ 'you try to make people think'" (p. 603). In Canto 90, Yeats' hawk as symbol is contrasted with its opposite--the beast:

two rivers together  
                   bright fish and flotsam  
 torn bough in the flood  
                   and the waters clear with the flowing  
 Out of heaviness where no mind moves at all  
                   "birds for the mind" said Richardus,  
 "beasts as to body, for know-how" (p. 607)

Like Yeats, Pound sets up the duality between the hawk-spirit and the beast-body for which the poet must find some ultimate resolution. The "mind" forms only one-half of a composite figure; this spiritual half must make its peace with the physical half. One means of unification is suggested by the two rivers flowing together, and thus purifying the "fish and flotsam." Another symbol for union of body and spirit is suggested in the following passage (which again plays upon Yeats' hawk image):

"panis angelicus" Antef  
           two 1/2s of a seal  
 having his own mind to stand by him  
 . . . . .  
 Apollonius made his peace with the animals. (p. 623)

Through the transformational symbolism of the mass, the bread (body of Christ) is incorporated into the mind or spirit of the believer, and both become part of one mystical, spiritual body. Also, Apollonius (a mythic-historical analog to Merlin) functions as the god-seer figure who "makes peace with" the body, as represented by the animals (beasts).<sup>8</sup>

Finally, in Canto 94, the ordinary cliché "like a hawk" is transformed into the awesome figure of the hawk-king, Goth: "From the hawk-king/ Goth, Agdu/ Prabhu of Kopt, Queen Ash/ may



Isis preserve thee" (p. 635). Thus, through the poetic technique of gradually "building up" a common image through accumulation of associations until it transcends its original context, Pound has removed Yeats' hawk from the realm of biography to that of history, and, ultimately, to myth and mystery.

Pound's direct allusion to Yeats' attitude toward mental agility also strengthens the cumulative effect of the hawk image: "& as to mental velccities:/ Yeats on Ian Hamilton: 'So stupid he/ couldn't think unless there were a cannonade going on'" (p. 632). The allusion to thinking in connection with stupidity, or the difficulty of stimulating the "body" to thought, links this passage to other "hawk of the mind" allusions. Also, the reverberations of the "cannonade" are analogous to the activities of the "rock drill"--the means by which the Poundian persona attempts to impart a bit of truth to a "deaf and dumb" world.

As a final note on Pound's indebtedness to Yeats for the "hawk of the mind" image, mention must be made of Pound's familiarity with Yeats' Noh play, At the Hawk's Well. This short drama may also have influenced the imagery of the Rock Drill Cantos, particularly in respect to the frequency of appearance of the image of the well or sacred spring in association with the figure of the hawk/seer.

In Pound's personal mythology, Yeats--as the friend who first introduced the younger poet to the occult, and as a somewhat oracular figure himself--occupies a position analogous to

that of Merlin. In addition, Yeats' poetic career, particularly in its final stages, was in many ways analogous to Pound's later poetic experiences. The figure of Yeats--recounting in verse the tales of the Celtic heroes, practicing occultism and automatic writing, and sitting at the top of his crumbling tower lamenting the waning of his physical and mental powers--lends itself to Pound's particular sort of mythologizing. The linking of analogous consciousnesses--those of Merlin and Yeats (as well as other compatible deities and historical figures) results in the creation of an "overarching" consciousness--that of Pound--which encompasses all the rest. As he nears the end of his journey through the Cantos, Pound finds this particular combination to be a most fortunate synthesis--an urgently-needed symbolic persona who will transcend the failing flesh and glorify the still-bright spirit. For Pound, the bright merlin-hawk serves a symbolic function similar to Yeats' golden bird of Byzantium.

Turning from the hawk to the other half of the image--the magician-seer as he appears as part of the composite persona of Rock Drill--we must examine the nature of the events in Merlin's life to see how Pound has transformed the myth through his synthetic poetic technique. The divine element in Merlin's conception is particularly significant for Pound's personal mythology. The seer was thought to have been begotten by an incubus on a holy nun. In Robert de Boron's legend, the entrance



of the devil into the pure young maiden's room was facilitated by the girl's failure to leave a light shining one night.<sup>9</sup>

Paradoxically, though the "divine insemination" occurs in darkness, the "spirit" of the devil is described by Pound in terms of brightness:

Merlin's fader may no man know  
 Merlin's mother is made a nun.  
 Lord, thaet scop the dayes lihte,  
 all that she knew was a spirit bright  
 a movement that moved in cloth of gold  
 into her chamber.<sup>10</sup> (p. 613)

This merging of good (light) and evil (darkness) becomes essential in Pound's remythologizing of the image of Merlin. Also, the Messianic nature of the seer's birth is necessary to Merlin's function as divine reconciler of opposites. We can see the effect of Pound's intensification of the elements of darkness and light in the story of Merlin's birth by comparing the poet's "synthetic Layamon" with the parallel passage in Geoffrey of Monmouth's history, in which Merlin's mother tells her own experience:

"As my soul liveth and thine, O my lord  
 the King, none knew I that was his father. One  
 thing only I know, that on a time whenas I and  
 the damsels that were about my person were in our  
 chambers, one appeared unto me in the shape of a  
 right comely youth and embracing me full straitly  
 in his arms did kiss me, and after that he had  
 abided with me some little time did as suddenly  
 vanish away so that nought more did I see of him.  
 . . . But after that he had thus haunted me of  
 a long time, he lay with me for some while in the  
 shape of a man and left me heavy with child."<sup>11</sup>

Vortigern's counselor identifies the strange creature as an "incubus daemon," which has "a nature that doth partake both of men and angels."<sup>12</sup> Missing from Geoffrey's account are the images of brightness and darkness which Pound develops into a mystical penetration of the darkness by the light of the spirit. Geoffrey's history, though revealing the dual nature of the visitor, remains somewhat prosaic in the treatment of the event. In any case, Merlin's birth was considered to be miraculous, his mother to be virtuous, and his father to be Satanic.

Robert de Boron also relates that the devil's plan was to conceive an offspring (Merlin) who would serve as a deterrent to Christ--who would, in fact serve as an "anti-Christ." Unfortunately for Satan, the plan was thwarted by the young girl's penitence and by her vow to enter holy orders, thus removing the child from the influence of his demonic father; however, the child received a beneficial gift--the knowledge of the past (which included both good and evil)--from his spiritual father.<sup>13</sup> This attribute, coupled with the gift of foreseeing the future, which he received from his pure mother, made Merlin the perfect embodiment of the "holy seer."

In the Merlin/Pound persona, both the ability to "see" and to illuminate are primary requisites of the composite consciousness of the poet-seer-magician. Linked to the cliché "eyes like a hawk" and harking back to "I have seen what I have seen,"

images of eyes and seeing proliferate in the Rock Drill Cantos.  
 Preparing the way for the true "seer" in Canto 85, Pound describes  
 the plight of the masses--denied by their leaders from "seeing"  
 the truth:

Nap III had the composition divided,  
     to each compositor in the print shop  
 a very few lines  
     none seeing the whole Proclamation.  
 Keep 'em off the market four years  
     and leave 'em without understanding. (p. 549)

Repeatedly referring to lack of "awareness," particularly of  
 tradition, on the part of the populace, Pound hints in this  
 Canto at the possibility of a new order of governance which  
 would have its roots in recognition of the truth. Usually, how-  
 ever, these times of "awareness" are brief moments of perception--  
 flashes of brightness or of blinding light, analogous to the  
 moment of Merlin's divine conception. Thus, we read in Canto  
 87: "Monsieur F saw his mentor/ composed almost wholly of light  
 . . . Santa Teresa" (p. 573). The Chinese ideogram "Hsein,"  
 with its meaning of light shining through threads, is a good  
 analog for this process of "seeing" in bits and snatches.

Moving toward a means of acquiring a deeper awareness,  
 in Canto 90 Pound finds the answer in Love:

Ubi amor, ibi oculus.  
 Vae qui cogitatis inutile.  
     quam in nobis similitudine divinae  
     reperetur imago.<sup>14</sup> (p. 606)





adoption of the Merlin persona is congruous to his use of the Dionysius persona: the poet seer becomes the priest of the forbidden knowledge and thereby is able to transform ordinary experience.

In the "vitae" of Merlin as remythologized by Pound, this sacred and profane knowledge is often symbolized by secret books, or the "arcanum." Merlin was said to carry with him an unrevealed "gospel," which he chose to dictate to a priest, or hermit. This new revelation was the story of Joseph of Arimathea, of the Holy Grail, and of his own birth. In Merlin's own words: "And because I am dark and always will be, let the book also be dark and mysterious in those places where I will not show myself."<sup>15</sup>

Like the Sphinx, Merlin did not completely reveal the truth at any one time; his life remained very much a mystery; even after he became advisor to King Arthur, he disappeared for long periods of time, leaving the king and his knights to blunder into disaster.

Merlin's secret book and mysterious life become perfect metaphors for Pound's poetic technique. The poet's "arcanum" does not come in large, coherent passages of narrative, but in bits and pieces of insight--"crystals of light." In between these moments of revelation, his reader may well feel like King Arthur trying to bring England out of the darkness--lost and confused. Also like Merlin, because he does not wish to make the revelation easy, because he wishes to keep some truths



hidden in darkness, Pound chooses to hide, or at least obscure, the meaning from the uninitiated--through the use of archaic languages, obscure allusions, and Chinese ideograms. Hence, reading the Cantos may very rightly be compared in difficulty with the quest for the Holy Grail, which always seemed to elude the grasp of the knight, just when he thought he had finally found it.

More than merely a fanciful analogy for Pound's poetic technique, the legend of the Holy Grail is central to the understanding of the figure of Merlin as persona in Rock Drill; the sacred chalice or elixir comes to be closely associated with the seer himself, as the ultimate goal of the search for the hidden wisdom. Before exploring this hermetic analogy, however, we must examine the circumstances surrounding Merlin's death and his metamorphic nature in order to see how he finally became associated with the sacred vessel.<sup>16</sup>

The exact nature of Merlin's interment varies in different legends. In one group of tales, he was entombed in a tower, or a rock, where he could still speak to and advise heroes. In another, he disappeared into a house, or floating island, of glass forever. In others, he was bewitched by a sorceress and entombed in a tree.<sup>17</sup> In the Rock Drill Cantos, the Pound/Merlin persona undergoes all of these interments--and more.

Circumstances surrounding Merlin's entombment in the rock vary. In some legends, he was made captive in the stone by a

sorceress. In several versions of the Grail Legend, he is portrayed as "speaking" from under what is known as "Merlin's Rock." For Pound, this rock becomes a symbol for the poet's own interment--for the state of being "buried alive," specifically, in a mental institution, and, more generally, under an oppressive political and economic regime. Like Merlin, the poetic persona can only communicate with the ordinary world through his words--the small bits of "light" that manage to escape as he "drills" his way up through the rock.

In the Rock Drill Cantos, this image of captivity in stone appears in many transformations, and is quite often associated with an image cluster that consists of the tower, the tree, the gushing spring, and the altar. In Canto 90, the rock, the pool, and the grove of trees--as well as the temple and the altar--appear together, the stone by association becoming the dwelling place for the gods:

glides from the rock pool    the blue serpent  
                                  And they take lights now down to the water  
                                  . . . . .  
                                  water jets from the rock  
                                  and in the flat pool as Arethusa's  
                                  a hush in papyri.  
                                  Grove hath its altar  
                                  under elms, in that temple, in silence  
                                  a lone nymph by the pool. (p. 607)

Here, the spring, or the jet of water spurting from the rock, and the serpent (image of undifferentiated consciousness), represent hidden sources of knowledge coming to light. The

stone reappears with the elm later in this Canto:

To Zeus with the six seraphs before him  
The architect from the painter  
the stone under elm  
Taking form now, . . .  
the stone taking form in the air. . . (pp. 607-608)

In this passage, the stone itself is metamorphic, gradually taking on a meaningful form, or Forma. Again, in Canto 94, the images of trees and stream appear with that of the stone: "In the summer lightning, close upon cock-crow,/ So that walking here under the larches of Paradise/ the stream was exceedingly clear/ & almost level its margin 'was thrown in my way a touch-stone" (p. 638). And, finally, the image of water is combined with that of stone in the matrix line which appears throughout the Cantos: "As the water-bug casts a flower on stone" (p. 574).

In its metamorphic, or transformative, quality, the stone becomes associated with the Holy Grail. This sacred object, like Merlin, seems constantly to change its shape; also like Merlin, it represents the hidden mysteries of divinity which can only be revealed in brief moments or epiphanies of light. Though sometimes represented as a chalice, or drinking-cup, the Grail also assumes the appearance of a stone--the Lapis Exilis, or stone of exile.<sup>18</sup> Also, as an image of sustenance, it has remote connections with Christ as the "rock" or foundation stone of the church.<sup>19</sup> In its stone aspect, the Grail resembles the philosopher's stone, or the "prima materia," and becomes associated with hermetic philosophy; in this



context, it is equated with the stone in the nest of the phoenix, from which the new bird rises.<sup>20</sup> These hermetic associations also cluster around the stone imagery in the Cantos. Both the "touchstone" of Canto 94 and the gold-spotted stones in "griffins dig rocks spotted with gold/ and the phoenix" (p. 637) are transformations of the Grail Stone.

Images of stone statues (as beings or spirits imprisoned in stone) are also associated with the transformative nature of the Merlin/Pound persona. In Canto 91: "Then Undine came to the rock,/ by Circeo/ and the stone eyes again looking seaward" (p. 610). Later in this same passage: "The Princess Ra-Set [climbs]/ to the great knees of stone" and "enters protection" (p. 611). In some of Pound's stone allusions, it is the "spirit" which is imprisoned in the stone: "as Augustine said, . . . easier to convert after you feed 'em/ but this was before St. Peters . . . where the spirit is clear in the stone" (p. 623); and, in a more profane context: "Yes, my Ondine, it is so god-damned dry on these rocks . . . By olibanum, the polite salutation, the smoke sign,/ Do not pester the spirits" (pp. 623-624). Also, Pound's treatment of the spiritual, or transformative, quality of the stone is related to the idea that the form of the sculpture pre-exists, merely being set free by the sculptor. This quality becomes important in the metamorphic passages in Rock Drill which show the stones "taking form":

The architect from the painter,  
                                   the stone under elm  
 Taking form now,  
                                   the rilevi,  
                                   the curled stone at the marge  
 Faunus, sirenes,  
                                   the stone taking form in the air (pp. 607-608)

In another version of Merlin's entombment, he was imprisoned in a tree by a sorceress, hence the persona of the seer becomes identified with other deities who were enchanted in trees. For example, in Canto 90: "Beatific spirits welding together/ as in one ash-tree in Ygdrasil./ Baucis, Philemon" (p. 605). Through the mythological significance of Ygdrasil, or "world's tree," as the source of life, it is linked to the various manifestations of the stone--particularly the Grail Stone.

The specific nature of Merlin's entombment in stone is described by the seer-persona himself in Rock Drill:

By the white dragon, under a stone . . .  
 Lay me by Aurelie at the east end of Stonehenge  
 where lie my kindred.<sup>21</sup> (p. 613)

Here, the Merlin/Pound persona directs the details of his burial--to be effected near Stonehenge, the strange group of rock structures which were said to have been transported to Britain by Merlin's magic. Significantly, these huge stones were thought to have magical healing qualities. In Geoffrey's history, Merlin praises the stones:



At these words of Merlin, Aurelius burst out laughing, and quoth he: "But how may this be, that stones of such bigness and in a country so far away may be brought hither, as if Britain were lacking in stones enow for the job? Whereunto Merlin made answer: "Laugh not so lightly, King, for not lightly are these words spoken. For in these stones is a mystery, and a healing virtue against many ailments. Giants of old did carry them from the furthest ends of Africa and did set them up in Ireland what time they did inhabit therein. And unto this end they did it, that they might make them baths therein whensoever they ailed of any malady, for they did wash the stones and pour forth the water into the baths, whereby they that were sick were made whole.<sup>22</sup>

These huge stones, then, were thought to possess the same miraculous healing powers that Christ displayed at the pool of Bethesda. These curative powers were only released through the medium of the sacred spring, or in this case, sacred baths. Stonehenge was also thought to have been at one time some sort of altar for the gods.

By the allusion to Stonehenge, Pound elevates the stone image to mythical proportions. The giant structures serve as a matrix image--a focal point for all the stone imagery of Rock Drill. The home of the nature deities, the mysterious source of healing powers, and a sacred burial ground, the stones function as transformations of the Grail Stone; hence they are closely identified with the Merlin/Pound persona.

In his burial instructions, the Merlin/Pound persona also establishes his noble birth by commanding that he be buried next to Aurelie--a king who was one of his kindred.

Even more importantly, the persona, by allusion to the story of the dragons, gives a veiled warning that, though buried, he will still be a hidden influence or "force" in the kingdom.

To understand the full implications of the persona's burial instructions, we must examine the story of Merlin and the dragons. Quite early in his career, Merlin was threatened with death by a certain king of Britain--Vortigern--who needed the blood of a fatherless boy (namely Merlin) to keep the walls of his tower from collapsing. Because of his skill in soothsaying, Merlin was able to talk the king out of his original intention, by accurately locating the true source of the problem: Two dragons--one white and the other red--lived in the waters under the foundation stones of the tower, and the oppressive weight of the stone kept forcing them into motion, thus causing the walls to collapse. When the king uncovered the dragons, the beasts fought, the white one killing the red. This fight became Merlin's prediction of the oppression of the race of Britain (red dragon) by the Saxons (white dragon).<sup>23</sup>

Pound's use of the dragon legend is uniquely his own, a partial inversion of the original story. By demanding in Canto 91 to be buried by the white dragon under the foundation stone of the tower (symbolizing Britain) the persona identifies himself with the victorious heirs; however, though victorious,

he has chosen to remain under the stone, continuing to cause the walls of the tower to shake and crumble. The persona, though no longer visibly present, will continue to "rock" the kingdom from his subterranean position--to affect the course of history. Just as Merlin became both the advisor to the king and his critic, so the Poundian persona becomes the critic of European history--particularly modern economic history--from his position "under the rock." Likewise, Pound's Leaning Tower of Pisa becomes a modern-day analog for Merlin's burial tower.

Of equal significance in Pound's adoption of the Merlin persona is the legend of the wizard's entombment in a "house of glass," having its origins in a Celtic tale of a revolving glass island with four horns, the dwelling place of the gods or the "ghosts" of the dead.<sup>24</sup> In Pound's mythology, the glass house becomes "crystal," and goes through a series of transformations, finally becoming, in fact, the true essence of existence, the Grail Stone (with Merlin as one of its manifestations).

In one transformation, the glass house is a crystal ball into which the soothsayer looks to see new reflections (or facets) of the past and present--as well as to predict the future. The "crystal" appears in this guise in many passages, such as the following: "Then knelt with the sphere of crystal/



That she should touch with her hands,/ Coeli Regina, . . ."  
 (p. 619), and "THE GREAT CRYSTAL/ doubling the pine, and to  
 cloud" (p. 611). Throughout Canto 91, as well as elsewhere in  
 the later Cantos, allusions to peering into the crystal and  
 "seeing" the future abound, the crystal functioning as an  
 analog for the previously-mentioned "deep eye": "he saw it,/   
 in the green deep of an eye:/ Crystal waves weaving together  
 toward the gt/ healing (p. 611). Both "deep eye" and the  
 crystal ball serve as orbs into which one looks deeply in  
 order to "see"--to search out the "essence," to predict the  
 future. Elsewhere in this passage, a "sea-wrack" is reflected  
 in the queen's eyes; this is, in fact, the wreck of the Armada  
 which Drake sees foretold in Queen Elizabeth's eyes (p. 612).

In another transformation, the crystal ball becomes  
huge--large enough, in fact, to be both the womb or receptacle  
 of the poet's consciousness and also its tomb. To put some-  
 thing "under glass" is to remove it from the world, to seal  
 it off hermetically. Thus, the persona's disappearance into  
 the "house of glass," like his disappearance into the stone,  
 can be considered a retreat--perhaps into physical isolation,  
 or even into his own madness. This retreat is described  
 vividly in one of the last Cantos:





Over harm  
 Over hate  
     overflowing, light over light . . .  
 the light flowing, whelming the stars  
     in the barges of Ra-Set  
 On river of crystal.

Here, the medium of connection is the flowing crystal stream, which unites, or "overarches," evil and darkness with light, and ultimately "heals" the communicant.

This use of crystal rivers, streams, and subterranean springs brings to Pound's adoption of the Merlin persona another dimension--possibly seen most clearly by reference to some of the magician's other guises. In one of his transformations, Merlin appeared as a child of nature, semi-human, living in a cave, in a forest glen--existing in a primitive state.<sup>26</sup> In this role, he was closely related to other nature deities--Circe, Undine, Artemis, and Ra-Set. Also, like Brutus and Apollonius, he was said to have a mystical power over animals (hence over nature).<sup>27</sup> He experienced the divine healing power of the hidden stream as a result of this "oneness" with nature. In one legend, Merlin was cured of his madness by a fall into a stream; in another, a stream gushed up beside him and cured his self-inflicted wounds.<sup>28</sup>

Pound incorporates all these image clusters surrounding Merlin as nature deity--the forest glen, the caves, the animals, and particularly the healing stream--into the Rock

Drill Cantos. For the persona, the "flowing crystal" becomes the medium through which the healing power of nature is transmitted from the deities to mortals. The persona's attitude toward the function of nature is encapsulated in one of the last Cantos:

heaven                      earth  
                 in the center  
                 is  
                 juniper

The purifications  
                 are snow, rain, artemisia,  
                 also dew, oak and the juniper

And in thy mind beauty, O Artemis,  
                 as of mountain lakes in the dawn,  
Foam and silk are thy fingers,  
                 Kuanon,  
And the long suavity of her moving,  
                 willow and olive reflected,  
Brook-water idles,

. . . . .  
the rock layers arc'd as with a compass  
                 this rock is magnesia, (p. 778)

Appropriately, the persona invokes Artemis as the goddess whose beauty is manifested in nature. Water--in the snow, rain, dew, lakes, and brooks--is the predominant symbol of purification. For the persona, the elements of nature and the nature deities become the great bridge between heaven and earth, God and man. Subtle alterations in sound complement the transformational nature of the process. For example, "artemisia," the herb, becomes "Artemis," the goddess, and "magnesia," the mineral.<sup>29</sup>

The flowing motion of the crystal stream, analogous to the revolution of the "great crystal," is the key symbolic

movement in the Cantos. This "flowing," in fact, becomes another metaphor for the poet's technique. Many of the most lyrical passages describe a process similar to this flowing or revolving; out of this motion, concrete images and scenes are "conjured up," brought to light from "deep eye," beneath the rock, or under the tower or ocean. These metamorphic passages become the means by which the poet/persona finally arrives at a resolution of the dualities of body and spirit, soul and matter, time and timelessness. They not only transport him to the country of the dead, but ultimately bring him up and out of his personal hell to a new vision of Paradise (in Jungian terms, the integration of the psyche). Typical of these hypnotic, metamorphic passages is the following:

& from fire to crystal  
                     via the body of light  
                     the gold wings assemble  
 . . . . .  
 Rose, azure,  
                     the lights slow moving round her,  
 Zephyrus turning  
                     the petals light on the air. (p. 615)

This passage is related to the imagery surrounding Merlin's birth as well as to the imagery of "process" by which the persona resolves the dualities: Images of crystal, fire, light, and gold wings are related to the transformative process-- "light" out of darkness, "crystal" out of fire. The wind functions as another analog for the flowing of the stream and the revolution of the crystal, and is closely related to

the bright wings of the demonic spirit.

A final transformation of the "great crystal" as a place of interment for the persona may be traced back to the Celtic legend describing the final resting-place of the gods as a revolving glass island with four sides, or four antlers.<sup>30</sup> The number four was extremely important in the mythological representation of the gods as symbols for completion. The four letters in the names of many of the ancient gods (for example, "NUTT") represented divine equilibrium.<sup>31</sup> In addition, many Oriental religions center on the worship of four gods--two light and two dark (equivalent to the Jungian symbols of the conscious and unconscious selves).<sup>32</sup> Symbolic tetrads abound in ancient and medieval writings--ranging all the way from the four elements to the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. In Christian symbolism, the Holy Trinity may be more accurately characterized as a quaternity--with the fourth side represented by the devil.<sup>33</sup> An element common to all of these tetradic systems is the idea of completion--four representing a stable structure, a unity achieved by the merging of opposites.

Analogous for the four-sided crystal island of the Merlin legend abound in Pound's mythology, becoming associated with the poet-seer as an integrative symbol. The architecture of four is a recurring motif in Rock Drill.



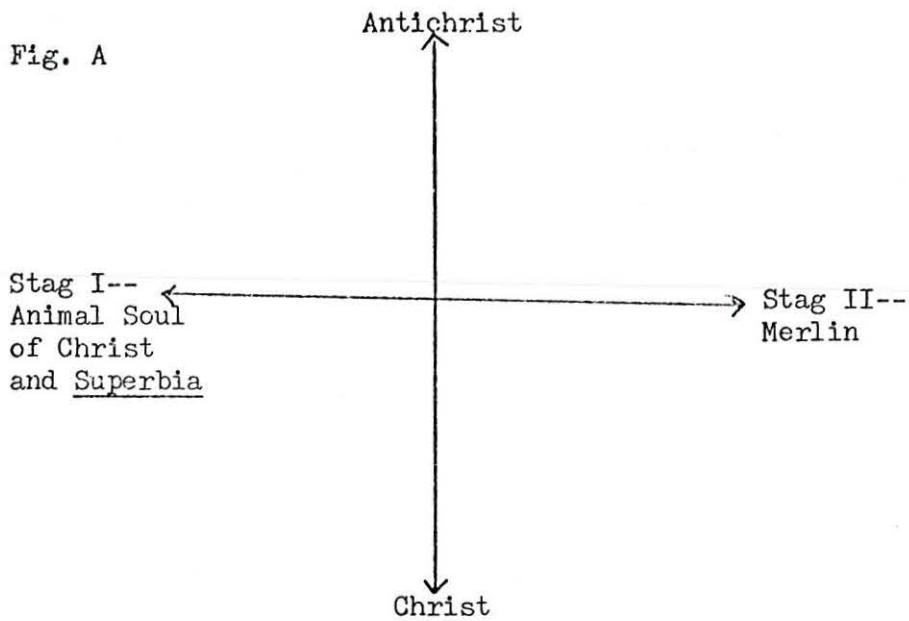
It appears in an economic context in: "buy columns now by the gross/ as for the four porphery/ with the stone loop" (p. 614). Toward the end of Canto 91, it appears in its most emphatic form: "and the whole creation concerned with FOUR" (p. 616); here, the numeral is linked by the use of capitalization with "NUTT overarching," and later with "THE GREAT CRYSTAL." By association, also, the "four porphery" are linked with the "High city of the mind," and, in Canto 92, are transformed into the "four altars."<sup>34</sup> These architectural motifs are linked indirectly with the figures of Lear and Janus in the passage "Now Lear in Janus' temple is laid/ . . . timing the thunder/ Nor Constance hath his hood again" (p. 613). Thus, the Pound/Merlin persona (fused with the identities of Lear and Janus) comes full circle back to his spiritual manifestation as the hawk. As an altar, or temple for the gods, then, the revolving four-sided glass temple (manifestation of the mystic tetrad) represents spiritual Paradise for the persona--a place of "light and movement," where gods "move" in the crystal.

In addition to its symbolic association with the worship of divinity, however, the number four took on a special function in medieval alchemy, by association with the alchemical agent Mercurius.<sup>35</sup> As spirit, Mercurius was considered to be the personification of the prima materia.

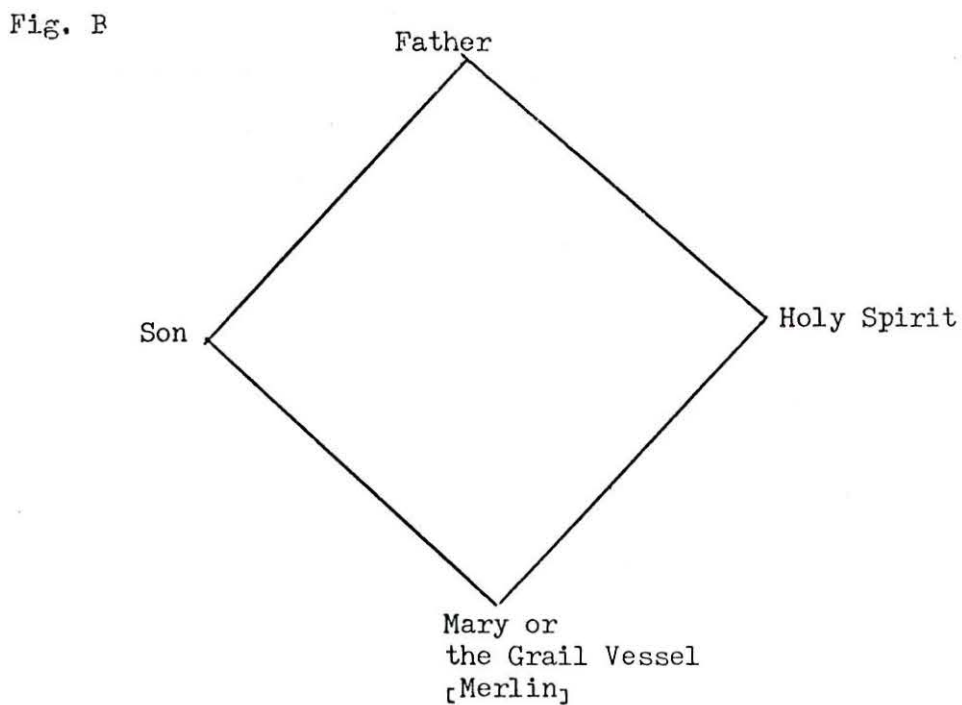
He was represented as a concealed nature god (in psychological terms, an embodiment of the inner man, the Self, which in many features resembles Christ).<sup>36</sup> In the later legends of Merlin, many of these mercurial features were attributed to the magician. Like Mercurius, Merlin, with his capacity for infinite physical transformation, became a symbol for the union of opposites--a synthesis of the physical and spiritual natures of man.<sup>37</sup> This integrative function was represented by a symbolic tetrad--portrayed in two different ways (see figures A and B). In figure A, Merlin is symbolized by a stag (one of his characteristic guises), thus serving to balance the figure of Christ (also a stag), by representing the "dark" side of the self, or the soul (in Jungian terms, the integration of the Shadow).<sup>38</sup> In figure B, Merlin occupies the space analogous to that of the Holy Grail, again serving to complete the figure of the Trinity (taking a position sometimes occupied by Mary).

As the figure of Merlin was represented in alchemy, so he is in Pound's mythology--as a union of opposites out of which a new "wholeness" emerges. Finding its symbolic analog in the image of Merlin's strange conception as a mixture of darkness and light, the integration of good and evil becomes the primary function of the poetic persona. Going

into the depths of hell and death, he finds there a Paradise. Out of the "body of fire," he experiences the "body of light." Even within his own entombment, he gains new life. As a unifying consciousness, the persona derives his power from a union of the forces of darkness and light--the devil and the holy nun. This mystical union is not localized, but represents an all-encompassing religious experience. Through the adoption of this persona, the aging poet-seer finally comes close to achieving a sense of psychological fulfillment--a "oneness" rather than the old polarities. The persona reconciles both Merlin (the man) and the merlin (hawk)--the personal and the universal life, the historical and the mythological experience, and--above all--the physical (body) and spiritual (soul) aspects of man. By the reconciliation of these opposites, the poet-persona needs no longer suffer the constant turmoil of a "living death." Pound's final goal is, by means of the unifying consciousness, to find a way "up and out"--to transcend time, to become immortal. Not until the poet has attained this "Grail Stone" at the end of his quest will the mysteries of Merlin's secret book finally be revealed and the last crystal facets of Pound's arcanum come to light.



(Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, The Grail Legend, p. 376)



(E. Jung and M. L. von Franz, p. 376)



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Mary Bernetta Quinn, Ezra Pound: an Introduction to the Poetry (New York: Columbia, 1972), p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> Quinn, pp. 140-141.

<sup>3</sup> Ezra Pound, Cantos (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 615. All subsequent references to the Cantos will appear in the text.

<sup>4</sup> Ad de Vries, Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery (Amsterdam: North-Holland Pub. Co., 1976), pp. 240-241.

<sup>5</sup> William Butler Yeats, Selected Poems and Two Plays, ed. M. L. Rosenthal (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> Yeats, p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> Yeats, p. 63.

<sup>8</sup> Leon Surette, A Light From Eleusis, a Study of Ezra Pound's Cantos (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979). Apollonius of Tyana was an historic-mythic character from the First Century, a magician and sage, also a vegetarian, who was arrested and tried for treason and who vanished, after telling the court that he was "no mortal." Surette shows very convincingly that the Apollonius persona becomes more of a shaping influence in Rock Drill than the Odysseus persona, as Pound moves from the position of a struggling seeker to one who "knows."

<sup>9</sup> Robert de Boron, Roman de l'Estoire dou Graal ("Merlin"), in Prose du XIIIe siecle (Paris and Ulrich, n.d.), n.p. Also see Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, The Grail Legend, trans. Andrea Dykes (New York: Putnam's, 1971), pp. 350-351. E. Jung and M. von Franz have done extensive research on the many versions of the Merlin legend. I am indebted to these scholars for much of the information concerning Merlin in this essay.

<sup>10</sup> Christine Brooke-Rose, "Lay Me by Aurelie: An Examination of Pound's Use of Historical and Semi-Historical Sources," in New Approaches to Ezra Pound, comp. Eva Hesse (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 1969), pp. 264-265. Brooke-Rose gives the sources for these lines as follows: "The two lines after the Constance line . . . are a faint echo of Layamon, in 'synthetic Layamon,' . . . The 'archaic' or true Layamon line that

follows ('Lord, thaet scop the dayes lihte') . . . is taken from Aurelie's prayer before battle . . . Here it serves to introduce the account of Merlin's immaculate conception, . . . [and the last three lines] because both Merlin and the forma are timeless [are] given . . . in Pound's modern English."

11 Geoffrey of Monmouth, from Historia Regum Britanniae, trans. Sebastian Evans, rev. Charles W. Dunn (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1958), in Arthur King of Britain, ed. Richard L. Brengle (New York: Appleton, 1964), p. 49.

12 Geoffrey of Monmouth, Historia, p. 49.

13 Robert de Boron, n.p. Also see E. Jung and M. von Franz, p. 351.

14 This passage may be translated as follows: "Where love is, the eye is./ Alas, what you know is useless!/ how in us in a likeness to the divine/ the likeness (image) is repeated."

15 Robert de Boron, n.p. Also see E. Jung and M. von Franz, p. 392.

16 The adjective "metamorphic" is used here specifically in reference to the process of metamorphosis in the Ovidian sense. For Pound, Ovid's Metamorphosis serves as one of the key sources for the transformational images in the Cantos.

17 P. Zumthor, Merlin le Prophete (Lausanne, 1943), pp. 218 ff. Also see E. Jung and M. von Franz, p. 392.

18 Wolfram von Eschenbach, Parzival, ed. K. Bartsch (Leipzig, 1927-29), Book V, verses 350 ff. and Book IX, verses 1083 ff. Also see E. Jung and M. von Franz, pp. 148-149.

19 L. E. Iselin, Der Morgenlandische Ursprung der Graalslegende (Halle, 1909), p. 63. Also see E. Jung and M. von Franz, p. 166.

20 E. Jung and M. von Franz, p. 152. According to these scholars, "the phoenix legend makes no mention of a stone but explains that the bird amassed inflammable resins in its nest. In another context, however, the Lancelot Grail speaks of the bird Serpillion which was burnt by Pirastite, a stone it had brought from the Vale of Hebron for the purpose of warming its young, which were then fed by it as the Grail also fed those whom it protected."

<sup>21</sup> Brooke-Rose, pp. 266-267. Brooke-Rose traces these burial instructions back to Uther, who becomes part of the composite Aurelie/Uther/Pound/Merlin image.

<sup>22</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, Historia, p. 53.

<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, History of the Kings of Britain, trans. Sebastian Evans, rev. Charles W. Dunn (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), Book VII, p. 139.

<sup>24</sup> Zumthor, p. 257. Also see E. Jung and M. von Franz, pp. 391-392.

<sup>25</sup> Zumthor, pp. 218 ff. Also see E. Jung and M. von Franz, p. 391.

<sup>26</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, Vita Merlini, in La Legende Arthurienne, v. III, ed. E. Faral (Paris, 1929), n.p. Also see E. Jung and M. von Franz, pp. 358-359.

<sup>27</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, Vita Merlini, n.p. Also see E. Jung and M. von Franz, p. 363.

<sup>28</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, Vita Merlini, n.p. Also see E. Jung and M. von Franz, p. 360.

<sup>29</sup> In the Oxford English Dictionary, oak, juniper, magnesia, and artemisia are all shown to contain medicinal or healing properties. Artemisia was a medicinal herb of great efficacy as an uterine; juniper was used in medicine as a stimulant and diuretic; oak-water, made of oak bark, was used as a medicine; and magnesium carbonate was used as an antacid and cathartic. In addition, juniper was used as an element of purification, and magnesia was thought to contain some of the ingredients of the philosopher's stone. Hence, all of these natural substances contain transformative qualities which Pound utilizes in Canto 110.

<sup>30</sup> E. Jung and M. von Franz, p. 392.

<sup>31</sup> De Vries, p. 201. Among the various mythical meanings of the number four, De Vries mentions "universality and divine equilibrium."

<sup>32</sup> C. G. Jung, Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971). See his discussion of Mandala imagery, pp. 355-390.



<sup>33</sup> E. Jung and M. von Franz, p. 338: "On closer inspection the Christian symbol of wholeness is only seemingly a three-fold one, for its opponent is the Devil as the fourth." This is but one version of the formula. Robert de Boron substitutes the Grail for the Devil as the fourth. In medieval representations, the Virgin becomes a quaternary god symbol. A common function of these quaternities was the joining of matter (pertaining to space and time) with the purely spiritual Trinity.

<sup>34</sup> E. Pound, p. 616: "and if honour and pleasure will not be ruled/ yet the mind come to that High City . . . Formality, Heydon polluted. Apollonius unpolluted/ and the whole creation concerned with "FOUR"; p. 619: "Then knelt with the sphere of crystal/ That she should touch with her hands,/ Coeli Regina,/ The four altars at the four coigns of that place."

<sup>35</sup> De Vries, p. 318. Mercury was the Heavenly Messenger: "Hermes," interpreter or mediator. As psychopomp he announced death and accompanied the soul to the Underworld. . . He was the divine protector of Alchemy as Hermes Trismegistus; the fluid metal mercury symbolized unlimited transformation and penetration. Alchemical names for the metal were "fool, serpent, sea, lantern, pilgrim, sword, ermine, deer, or fool's cap," also "an inferior devil" and "the philosopher's child."

<sup>36</sup> E. Jung and M. von Franz, p. 368: "A concealed nature god and personification of the lumen naturae, the alchemical Mercurius is at the same time an embodiment of the great inner man, the Self, which displays features complementary to the ecclesiastical figure of Christ."

<sup>37</sup> E. Jung and M. von Franz, p. 376: "As fourth member of the quaternity, Merlin carries the animal components of the Christ symbol . . . and is impressed with devilish traits."

<sup>38</sup> The Merlin/Pound persona is quite closely associated with the animal nature of man; hence killing of animals is distasteful to him. The stag appears in this context in Canto 89: "Judge Marshall, father of war./ Agamemnon killed the stag, against hunting rites./ 'Leave the Duke, go for gold.'" (p. 602)



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