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“The Spirit of Romance”:
Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and
the medieval tradition.

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«ond'io, che son mortal, mi sento in questa
disagguaglianza, e però non ringrazio
se non col core a la paterna festa» (Dante, *Paradiso* XV, vv..82-84).

*This work is devoted to my family, the best I could have.
My efforts were their sacrifices, my irritability was their patience,
My studying aloud their silence. Thanks for all.
Thanks also to everyone who has listened to me,
understood and tolerated me during this long study period.*

PREFACE

This work analyzes the critical and poetical works of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, focusing on their literary path around the medieval tradition and discovering how the medieval authors and their works had influenced the modern development of both writers.

The analysis starts from Pound as the leading figure of Imagism, the Anglo-American movement of the first half of the twentieth century which evaluated poetry, especially the modern one; Pound contributed to the critical and poetical apparatus of the movement, inasmuch as he became collaborator, foreign exponent and the reporter of the movement magazines. In his Imagist essays he analyzed the art of writing poetry and the role of the poet linked to it, emphasizing the attitude towards tradition as the essential feature of the poetical writer; Pound's formation influenced the Imagist conception of poetry, and then the consecutive Vorticist one, because he engaged in the movement after a period of intense studies on the Provençal tradition. Pound's university formation is the starting point to understand why critical and poetical choices dealt with the medieval tradition; during his educational and cultural years he got in touch with Provençal texts, Dante and the Troubadours mentioned in his *Comedy*, and this explained the structure of his critical work – *The Spirit of Romance* – and the meticulous attention to the musical structure of the poem: «Its technique is in one sense decidedly modern, for of course it represents the latest development in the work of a master-experimentalist; but in another sense it is traditional, for many of its effects were learned from past masters» (Hughes 1960, p.242). Pound availed himself of different means for his analysis of the Troubadour tradition: he studied directly on the original texts or through the guide of Dante's choices, with a comparative study of the sources, then he translated several Provençal poems, particularly paying attention to the works of Arnaut Daniel and Bertran de Born; his poetical writing showed an imitation and re-elaboration of the great past poetical works, of their contents and technical exercises, assimilating the excellence of tradition in order to try it out in his modern cult of poetry.

The literary roots of Eliot are buried in the poetical figure of Dante and are oriented towards his medieval culture; his critical analysis was built during a continuous period of literary experience on Dante, which lasted over thirty years; Eliot elaborated several times his perception of Dante as a poet and as a man, either from a critical and a poetical point of view. The analysis of Eliot's literary path is based on a methodological criterion, which firstly shows Eliot's critical assumptions and

then his poetical practice, instead of following a chronological order. Eliot described poetry as the creation of the triune voice of the poet; then he defined the role of this latter and the role of the critic linked to him. Eliot claimed that the fundamental feature of the perfect poet, who is also critic of himself, consisted in the ability of developing a past consciousness, which is essential to improve his poetical art; the concept of tradition is linked to the concept of culture, and to the social function of poetry. The analysis of Dante followed Eliot's three critical moments: 1920, when Eliot recognized Dante as a philosophical author, compared to the classic Roman and Greek philosophers; 1929, when Eliot defined Dante as a universal poet who can be read easily thanks to the allegorical method he used in his *Divina Commedia*, and when Eliot offered an explanation of the meaning of the three *cantiche* written by Dante; 1950, when Eliot wrote the last critical essay centred on the meaning which Dante embodied for him and his poetical choices: Dante is seen as the new Virgil, that is Eliot's guide. Eliot's interest for Dante is motivated by the modern spirit which Dante showed in his works, and this is the poetical engine of Eliot's compositions, which are based on medieval tradition.

Since the writing of other authors is the major term of comparison for those who deal with writing, both writers had the capacity of reclaiming a literary environment by paying attention to the rediscovery of the tradition of great personalities from the past. Pound and Eliot acted in an inter-textual manner, integrating texts and authors from different periods; so inter-textuality¹ presupposes a tradition, meaning two linked operations: firstly the knowledge of his predecessors' texts, secondly exegesis, that is to say comment and reflection on texts. «Nothing is as it appears at first to

1 The term *intertextuality* belongs to the literary-critical period of the seventies and it was theorized by Julia Kristeva; it is related to the relationships which a text develops with others. She defined it as «cette interaction textuelle qui se produit à l'intérieur d'un seul texte. Pour le sujet connaissant, l'intertextualité est une notion qui sera l'indice de la façon dont un texte lit l'histoire et s'insère en elle» (Kristeva 1968, p.311); she meant every operation of «transposition of one or more systems of signs into another» (Kristeva 1969, now in Kristeva 1980, p.15), and it is labeled according to different levels of modality and intention. Gérard Genette developed the meaning into *transtextuality*, which is «tout ce qui met le texte en relation, manifeste ou secrète, avec d'autres textes» (Genette 1982, p.7); this term comprises five different levels of trans-textuality: firstly *intertextuality*, which is presence of one text in another, and it can appear in three different forms, from fully explicit *quotation*, to *plagiarism* and to less explicit *allusion*. In second place he put the *paratext*, which is the relationship between the text and its frame parts; then he talked about *metatextuality*, meaning the critical link that a text has with the text which it talks about. The fourth level belongs to *architextuality*, which is a relationship in which the text does not name the other, but it presents elements in common with other texts; the last type of trans-textuality is *hypertextuality*, which is a particular relationship of one text with another, not based on comment. The hyper-text is a text that has issued from a previous text, and the creation of the former depends on a transformation of the latter, which happened through an out-and-out manipulation of the text, or through an indirect way, *imitation* (Genette, 1982).

be. Everything has a string of precedents» (Hughes 1960, p.3), so somehow or other a text will never be virgin, because of its correlations – intentional or unintentional – with the past. Pound's and Eliot's works showed this hyper-textual manner of handling tradition, and they focused on medieval tradition in particular, because they found out the features of universality, awareness of the past and critical and poetical greatness in it; through the awareness of the medieval past they managed to become modern, inasmuch as they were able to understand the innate Modernism in the *Spirit of Romance*.

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FIRST CHAPTER

Ezra Pound and the Provençal tradition

1. The experience of Imagism

1.1 The imagist movement

Imagism was an Anglo-American literary movement, which arose in the first years of the twentieth century, and it was «a reaction against the poetry of the immediate past, at least of the immediate past in England and America» (Hughes 1960, p.3), so poets who embraced the Imagist theory retrieved tradition according to a classical point of view, as a weapon against American Romanticism. This movement aimed at a new outcome and at the same time it suggested a conservative reaction in order to restore an academic rigour (Bianchi, 1965). Imagism renounced Romantic purposes because its main predecessors were Symbolism, or rather the first Symbolists called Parnassians, who preferred objectivity and exactness of form rather than emotion (Hughes, 1960), but also the second Symbolists, who fought against materialist Parnassians to «free French poetry from the tyranny of conventional form [and] to give their images of externality a spiritual, a symbolic value» (Hughes 1960, p.6). Imagism took inspiration from ancient and modern sources: «the ancient literatures contributing to its ideals were: Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Chinese, and Japanese. The modern influence was French» (Hughes 1960, p.3). It is said that Imagism is a structure in equilibrium, well-balanced by elements such as «hardness of outline, clarity of image, brevity, suggestiveness, freedom from metrical laws» (Hughes 1960, p.4), that come from Greek, Hebrew and Chinese tradition, and by neoclassical elements that come from the French tradition. Thanks to these forces under the definition of Imagism many different personalities are included, affected by different literary sources, and therefore different ways of writing poems. They were all part of this movement, forming an eclectic merger: Bianchi (1965) claims that this is possible because Imagists had a generic poetic plan. In the same way this could be seen as a free choice, inasmuch as «the first Imagists were not writing in conformity with, or in illustration of, a fixed

program [but simply] they were writing the kind of poetry they liked to write» (Firchow 1981, p. 382).

T. E. Hulme must be recognized as the father of Imagism; he was the founder of the *Poet's Club* in 1908, a group of poets who devoted themselves to poetical discussions. None of the imagists became member of this society, but during its meetings «the first experimental imagist poems were read and discussed» (Hughes 1960, p.11); Pound joined this group in 1909, and he hosted several literary and critical meetings in his apartment, which then became the match point of the new poetry.

1.2 The means of Imagism

The journalistic history of Imagism was marked by two magazines, *Poetry: a magazine of verse* and *The Egoist*; they worked as tracks of communication but in different ways: the former was more popular, and it was the main channel for the disclosure of Imagism. It was founded in October 1912 by Harriet Monroe, a critic of art on the *Chicago Tribune*, as a poetical magazine and it became one of the major tools of contact among the scholars of the period. Monroe saw in this periodical the possibility to instill into American minds the cult of poetry, because she believed that poetry is the greatest and most complete expression of the human, and it needed to be valued, especially modern poetry; she was sure that Pound and his multifaceted vocabulary could contribute to this aim (Moody, 2007). In fact, Pound became her foreign exponent and reporter (Hughes, 1960), and thanks to him many imagist writers were well-known on the circuit, so they could publish poetic examples of imagist writing, and interesting information and documents relating to the new avant-garde period. Pound marked the history of Poetry and changed the critical understanding of and attitude to modern poetry. On the other hand, *Egoist* owed its existence to a feminist review, *The New Freewoman*, and it had a short life and a limited edition; the first issue came out in January 1914, and it was a culture medium for a limited group of scholars (Bianchi, 1965). Pound worked for it only for few months, but he believed that this magazine could become the driving force of Imagism and he also shared the philosophic soul of the periodical: «The Egoist has the courage to measure the intrinsic value of things purely by their value to his or her own self» (Moody 2007, p.220), so the individual who learned to be egoist - in other words to put himself and his own desires, thoughts, and needs into the foreground - became free, because «freedom is in freeing one's

potential Self from the bonds of convention» (Moody 2007, p.220).

1913 was the year of the manifestos of Imagism: the English poet F. S. Flint wrote a short article entitled *Imagisme*, which was published in *Poetry* on 6th March 1913: he claimed that Imagists «were contemporaries of the Post Impressionists and the Futurists; but they had nothing in common with these schools [...] They were not a revolutionary school; their only endeavor was to write in accordance with the best tradition» (Flint 1913, p. 199).

In particular Imagism placed itself at a distance from contemporaneous Futurism; the first aimed to a recovery and modern reutilisation of past poetry, renovating modern poetry following the examples of the great tradition. On the contrary Futurism wanted to do everything for the sake of novelty, only through revolution; what the Imagists point out to their coevals is the fact of being Modernists, and their consequent inability to create an original result. Within the poetical area, the Imagist poet is the craftsman of words, for whom order and rules are the keywords of his acting, whereas the Futurist poet is a sort of rebel, in favour of originality in all its forms, and he achieves his goals through a kind of “liberty hall” (Bianchi, 1965).

The principal fundamentals of the Imagist theory, expounded in *Poetry* by Flint, were three in number:

1. «Direct treatment of the “thing”, whether subjective or objective» (Flint 1913, p.199)

Flint meant that the poem must be immediate in communicating the intentions and emotions of the poet; the achievement of immediacy is only possible through precision and accuracy (Bianchi, 1965).

With reference to the art of poetical writing, Pound said – in the article *Psychology and Troubadours*, published in 1916 – that «The interpretative function is the highest honor of the arts, and because it is so we find that a sort of hyper-scientific precision is the touchstone and essay of the artist's power, of his honor, his authenticity» (Pound 1916, now in Pound 1952, p.87).

2. «To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation» (Flint 1913, p.199)

Ornamental elements are useless because the poet must intend poem as a presentation rather than a description.

3. «As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome» (Flint 1913, p.199)

The poet must work keeping in mind that the most important thing in poetry is its musicality, so to each content corresponds an exact rhythm.

A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste of Pound was published in *Poetry* in 1913, in the same volume in which Flint's article appeared, in a sort of walk-through about poetic art: Pound claimed that «An “Image” is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time» (Pound

1913a, p.200); Imagists saw in the image two different phases: in the first one the poet has a vision, and in the second one he manages to transmit this to the reader. Pound proposed a revision of Flint's article, giving some advice on how language may be: «use no superfluous words, no adjective, which does not reveal something [...] Go in fear of abstractions [...] Use either no ornament or good ornament» (Pound 1913a, p.201); Bianchi claims that the poet works in a direct and instantaneous way, and he links his intuition to language: so the poet can use an ornamental element when it becomes part of the image, and not its trait of embellishment. In *A Few Dont's* Pound said that there is one level within a poem, or even the poem is sense in itself, so different interpretations are not possible, because a poem corresponds to a complex set in which different elements are cohesive with their values, forming one sole meaning; when in 1932 Pound wrote *Prolegomena*, he said instead that in a poem there are two different levels: a literal one, which works for a meaning of surface, and a symbolic one which conveys a deeper sense.

Talking about the poet's attitude towards tradition, Pound continued saying «Be influenced by as many great artists as you can, but have the decency either to acknowledge the debt outright, or to try to conceal it» (Pound 1913a, p.202); firstly, the poet must study and learn from tradition before taking inspiration from it; the great tradition has to be an artistic basis for those who want to approach to poetic art. Tradition is the point of departure for everyone who wants to write poems, because knowing strategies and poetical expedients from the past makes it possible to avoid errors or bad ways of writing poetry; Imagists used tradition after operating a selection from it, because only great poetry can be accepted. Secondly, the poet can take inspiration from a great teacher, without imitation; he has to assimilate art. For this reason the poet must not use a mere quotation, on the contrary he has to be inter-textual.

Pound claimed that the poet must not to think that a concept should be expressed in verse because it works better than in prose (Pound, 1913); any poem or prose – which the poet would like to write – does not have a standard style or a set content: every content requires its right form, but this is not a rule. The best thing the poet must worry about is to write in a good manner, using the words that are best suited to the context, moment and order. The metre is functional to style and the style creates literature; so there is not a considerable difference between prose and poem, «Si tratta solo di gradi diversi all'interno dello stesso continuo» (Calasso 2001, p.116).

Pound in 1913 warned that the poet must introduce something but avoid being descriptive, which is a value related only to painting.

«It is not necessary that a poem should rely on its music, but if it does rely on its music that music must be such as will delight the expert» (Pound 1913a, p.213); a poem is formed by two parts: the image and the rhythmical structure, which identify respectively a visual element and an

auditory one. When a poet wants to translate a poem, he must prefer to convey the original meaning of the poem, so the image, losing instead the auditory element and recreating a new phonological rhythm. Pound meant that the sound of a noun can be lost, on the other hand musicality must not be suppressed ; in conclusion Pound said that a poet must work as a musician would do.

It is well-known that the technique in Imagism was a «precise, scientific, expression of that process of the life force in and through the individual mind» (Moody 2007, p.228); this technique was functional to the human mind, because it had the power to discover things in nature, and man could then act with them (Moody, 2007). What shines through Pound's article is that the poet is viewed as *the craftsman of words*, so probably Pound's attitude and the movement itself influenced each other starting from this point; the artist work appears as an artistic labour, in which every good or bad action and every choice – right or wrong – are useful for the final poetic work. The whole spectrum is part of the poet's artifice².

1.3 Pound's contribution to Imagism

In my opinion Art in general has a cyclical life; I mean that a cultural movement rises, develops, and then dies, and the dawning of the following period is marked as being a current of reaction to or improvement of the previous movement, recovering a style closer to the former lost tradition. And this structure is repeated in a cyclical manner over the centuries, as history teaches. If we look at Romanticism, it was born as a consequent phenomenon upon the Enlightenment and Neoclassicism, contrasting the heart, emotions and spirituality to rationality and perfect beauty. Imagism arose as a break with the Romantic cultural ideal which characterized the last American period. In addition, the Imagist movement can be identified as a sort of Humanism, inasmuch as there is a rediscovery of antiquity, but at the same time the centre of the attention is the object and no longer the subject; the Imagist feeling is also characterized by a kind of Experimentalism, which aims at innovation through an avant-garde acuteness. Experimentation guarantees a new original poem, through the knowledge and practice of old and modern metrical structures, as Pound said (Bianchi, 1965). Experimentalism as technical exercise means the knowledge and the practice of metrical forms,

2 The analysis of Flint (1913) and Pound (1913) refer to the critical comment of Bianchi (1965).

coming from the past but also from modernity, which allow a poem to be original; the action of experimentation is not an end unto itself (Bianchi, 1960). The scholars created nothing new, on the other hand they re-established old poetic structures which mark the great poem. In Bianchi's opinion (1965, p.19) Imagists were not only theorists but mainly poets, so many of them must be considered as poets first of all; they act in a sort of inductive process, in which reflection on theory comes after its practice.

Ezra Pound is considered through history as the leading figure of Imagism; he weaved the woof of the movement, and probably he was the personality who most influenced the character of Imagism. «Ezra Pound is the one who most closely approximates the conventional model of the 'revolutionary' avant-garde poet» (Firchow 1981, p.379); all that is confirmed by his poetical attitude according to which «the making of the new always consists of a remaking of the old» (Firchow 1981, p.379). In a series of articles, published between 7th December 1911 and 15th February 1912, Pound promoted a theory which was the driving force of his concept of Imagism: he explain the method of the *Luminous Detail*; through this method the artist can interpret a period avoiding external information. He said «In the history of the development of civilization or of literature, we come upon such interpreting detail. A few dozen facts of this nature give us intelligence of a period – a kind of intelligence not to be gathered from a great array of facts of the other sort. These facts are hard to find. They are swift and easy of transmission. They govern knowledge as the switchboard governs an electric circuit» (Pound 1911b, now in Pound 1973, pp.22-23). He continued saying «The artist seeks out the luminous detail and presents it. He does not comment» (Pound 1911b, now in Pound 1973, pp.23); this method mirrored the imagist theory, where according to Pound the poet should refine a new way of reading, which permitted an emotion or an object to «be perceived directly through language rather than inferred through comprehension of a poetic subject» (Nichols 2006, p.176).

So Imagism must be considered «old-fashioned in a number of basic aspects» (Firchow 1981, p.380); the Imagist program which Pound carried on is seen as a revolutionary movement of avant-garde, in which the innovative aspect is not «a renewal, a revivification of an old tradition [but rather] a renaissance, an American renaissance» (Firchow 1981, p.380).

The cornerstone element of Imagism was maybe experimentalism, and Pound was its promoter due to his scholastic preparation and his passion for Provençal poetry. Pound faced Imagist life in this period of intense studies of Provençal authors, as Eliot wrote «he was supersaturated in Provence»; his «adaptability of metre to mood, an adaptability due to an intense study of metre, that constitutes an important element in Pound's technique» (Eliot 1918, now in Eliot 2005, p.5). This was connected to Imagism, and his insistence on the structural artifices and musicality of verse are

figments of his knowledge. «Having been seduced by Scholarship, and then having yielded to the lure of the Creative Life, Pound has spent his time vacillating between the two» (Hughes 1960, p.226), and Imagism was the perfect field where his double tendency could be mostly implemented.

Several years after the experience of Imagism, Pound said that three ways existed to give meaning to words: the first is called *phanopoeia*, and he meant the act of «throwing the object (fixed or moving) on to the visual imagination» (Pound 1934, p.63); the second is called *melopoeia*, and Pound meant the act of «inducing emotional correlations by the sound and rhythm of the speech» (Pound 1934a, p.63), and the last one is called *logopoeia*, meaning the way of «inducing both of the effects by stimulating the associations (intellectual or emotional) that have remained in the receiver's consciousness in relation to the actual words or word groups employed» (Pound 1934a, p.63). Through this distinction he claimed that the definition of Imagism propaganda was incorrect, inasmuch as «if you can't think of imagism or phanopoeia as including the moving image, you will have to make a really needless division of fixed image and praxis or action» (Pound 1934a, p.52); at the same time he said that his search into Troubadour poetry was due to his interest in *melopoeia*.

1.4 The change into Vorticism

The first anthology of Imagism, called *Des Imagistes*, was published in *The Glebe*, a periodical journal, in March 1914; «The title was affected and cryptic; the poems were based on a new technique; and there was no preface to explain the technique or to indicate the ideals of the poets» (Hughes 1960, p.34). But after the publication of this collection, Pound noticed that the movement mutated with the imprint of Amy Lowell, inasmuch as «there were personal disaffections and power-plays and a breaking away from the briefly binding principles» (Moody 2007, p.223); he distanced himself from it and he turned his attention to Vorticism, a movement which represented an occasion for a few artists from London to huddle round together, freely formulating their theories about artistic matters. Pound thought that Vorticism was a movement where individuals worked separately, then deciding to cluster together because they were driven by the same need: an English revolution; even though he had nothing in common with Vorticist fundamentals, in this movement he met the possibility to argue against mediocrity and conventionality (Moody, 2007). To be precise

it «was an alliance of artists, launched in 1914» (Schneidau 1968, p.214), even if it did not leave permanent traces in the survey of art; in some respects it proved to be a violent and hostile movement, which strove against many factions, although «the Vorticists proclaimed themselves absolutely without part and dissociated themselves from any reformist program whatsoever» (Schneidau 1968, p.215). The considerable data was Pound's attempt to define Vorticism as Imagism with another name, at least «free to make reformulations of Imagist doctrine and the theory of the Image» (Schneidau 1968, p.215); this latter was substituted by the energy, and the human being found himself in a vortex of energies coming from past and contemporary time; «this is the 'intellectual and emotional complex' again, only emphatically energized. But there is a significant new development [...] here, evidently, the energy is not the raw energy of the vital universe or of primal feelings, but rather what has been distilled from living into instinct and tradition» (Moody 2007, p.257). The emblem of the vortex represented the meeting point of different energies in the mind; Pound's medievalism gave a strong contribution to the conceptualization of the forces which acted within the vortex: «Vorticism believed that the proper end of inventive force was to create specific and definite form» (Schneidau 1968, p.221). Pound claimed that men reduced their energy to abstraction, provoking a historical and human degeneration; to overcome this situation it was necessary to allow energy to merge into a form, consisting of «the demarcation of proper bounds, the marking off of significant limits, patterns, and relationships» (Schneidau 1968, p.222). He affirmed that the force which created the form and which was able to maintain it could be reached only through tradition: Vorticism tried to «bring all the power of tradition swirling into its harmony of forces» (Schneidau 1968, p.223). Pound believed that the art of poetry could be seen under two aspects: the first consisted in a concise style, which used direct and precise words to explain what it meant, according to Imagist thinking; on the other hand it was an effort to create something which appears concrete, according to the Vorticist vision (Schneidau, 1968).

2. Being acquainted with the Romance period of Middle Ages

2.1 The university studies

In order to understand Pound's choices and his role, it is necessary to cast a glance at his cultural and educational years, because they became the fundamental engine for his subsequent poetical fervour. After the Lower School which gave him a stricter discipline and a first approach to Classical subjects, such as Latin, Greek, Grammar and Rhetoric, he decided to enroll at the University of Pennsylvania (Moody, 2007); here he got acquainted with authors of the likes of «Catullus, Browning and Ernest Dowson – significant influences on his own later poetry» (Ackroyd 1980, p. 9). He attended several courses in Latin, History, Philosophy and English literature, but what most attracted Pound was a different way of viewing literature in the way how his teachers of German and Latin considered it; «'Philology' would become the catchword for all that Pound thought wrong with the university teaching of literature as he had experienced it. Properly, Philology is the scientific study of words and languages; applied to literature is inevitable tendency was to encourage attention to the language as such and to discourage attention to the further reaches of sense» (Moody 2007, p. 16). So thanks to his education, in particular university training, he became a complete professional poet and scholar of philology; «since he wielded his erudition as an instrument of hermeneutic compression and aesthetic impact, the general understanding of his art stands to benefit from a study of his performance as a Provençal philologist» (Paden 1980, p.402).

From the outset his predisposition to carry forward a comparative method of studying emerged, but his attitude for foreign languages was not highly regarded at the University of Pennsylvania; his way of interacting was interpreted as an arrogant manner to reject the current literary method of the University (Moody, 2007); due to his being a discordant voice, in 1903 he left the University of Pennsylvania to continue his course of study at Hamilton College of Liberal Arts. Unlike his previous academic experience, the Hamilton was in favour of putting aside its disciplines to allow Pound to develop a modern scheme of study (Moody, 2007); he attended the Latin-Scientific department substituting German and French for Greek, then he took Italian and Spanish courses, and also «an extracurricular course in Provençal» (Moody 2007, p.20), provided by one of the central figures who opened his way of creating poetry: Dr Shepard, the Professor of Romance Languages and Literature. The other leading figure was Dr. Ibbotson, the Professor of English Literature, Anglo-Saxon and Hebrew. Thanks to them he approached Provence «in Anglo-Saxon, in

the Romance languages, and in medieval history. This combination proved a potent one, since it became the cultural and historical field in which he wandered for the rest of his life» (Ackroyd 1980, p.12); he developed the idea «that the study of European poetry must begin at its root in medieval Provence, following the example of Dante in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, and that it should be a study of technique» (Moody 2007, p.21). At Hamilton his textbooks were *Troubadours of Dante* by Chaytor and *Provenzalische Chrestomathie* by Appel, which seemed to be fundamentals for his *Spirit of Romance*; his acquaintance with Canello's work of 1883 explained his knowledge of Arnaut Daniel. His poems about Bertran de Born were inspired by the edition of 1888 of Antoine Thomas; in his critical works he cited other notions which probably came from the sixth volume of *Choix des poésies des troubadours* (1816-21) of Raynouard and the fourth volume of *Werke der Troubadours* (1846-53) of Mahn. He admired the literary contribution of Levy, with his *Provenzaliches Supplement-Wörterbuch* and his *Petit dictionnaire provençal-français*; probably he also used *Grundriß der romanischen Philologie* of Gustav Gröber, whose name was misspelled in the preface of *The Spirit of Romance*, he consulted the Troubadours' *vidas* and *razos* in *Grundriß zur Geschichte der provenzalischen Literatur* of Karl Bartsch and *Melodien der Troubadours* of Jean Beck for Arnaut's music. He enhanced his philological knowledge with different critical essays of the end of the twentieth-century, as *Lives of the Troubadours* (1896) of Farnell, *The Troubadours* (1878) of Farnell-Hueffer and *The Troubadours at Home* (1899) of Smith (Paden, 1980). There is no proof that he studied original or facsimile Provençal manuscripts directly, but probably his teachers could have presented some of them to him (Paden, 1980); in his correspondences with his parents it appeared that he consulted «a manuscript of the Ambrosian Library known by the siglum G» (Paden 1980, p.405) when he was in Milan, to study two melodies of Arnaut Daniel; these two melodies were copied out and they became the main source for Pound's *Hesternae Rosae, Serta II* in 1913 (Paden, 1980). Although the Troubadours' *vidas* were easy to understand, the original Provençal texts appeared obscure to Pound, and due to this he mixed different sources, sometimes quoting them incorrectly; his use of original material was motivated by two factors: on one hand the rediscovery of the past and on the other the fulfillment of the present (Paden, 1980). He was a student of Troubadour matters, a poet and also a scholar.

His study method focused on practical activities, such as translations and imitations, which allowed him to refine his poetry, learning from past authors that poetical art prescribed a finicking approach, as a painter or a musician should adopt to learn for their art (Moody, 2007); he became interested in troubadours stories, and he studied their techniques but also their lives which were revealed by their love stories. Dante became the primary influence for his poetry, because on the one hand through Dante Pound could increase his knowledge of the Troubadours, who were

Pound's 'poetic gym'; on the other hand Dante was the source of inspiration for his full-bodied work, the *Cantos*. Shepard made Pound focus on Dante's prose and poetry, lingering over the context of the period, in particular on «the relation of the literature of the Italians to European thought» (Moody 2007, p.22), through comparative reading and interpretation. After graduation at Hamilton College, Pound returned to the University of Pennsylvania to attend a Master's degree in Romance Languages; here he continued his full immersion in Provençal topics, choosing Dr Rennert as his supervisor for his thesis on Lope de Vega, but soon he met clashing interests and opinions with Professor Schelling, who led a course about Elizabethan Drama; this latter saw in Pound's thesis a work without interest, and he suggested that Pound should not waste his time pointlessly. Given the circumstances, Pound decided to abandon the university career «as an outsider he could have no power to reform the institution» (Moody 2007, p.33), in which people were interested in several subjects but not in a deep view of the literary universe (Ackroyd, 1980).

2.2 The first fulfillment of his theories

This experience did not mark a full stop in the poetical life of Pound, on the contrary his propensity for poetry took him to cross the Atlantic Ocean to Europe, and the fact that America was unready for his poetical change represented an additional reason for doing it; in 1908 he was in Venice and here he paid for the printing of his first collection of forty-five poems, called *A lume spento*, as a direct quotation from Dante's *Purgatorio*³ (Ackroyd, 1980). «The variety of verse forms and measures, with some real mastery of rhythm and rhyme, showed how effectively he had been studying the craft of putting words together to make music as well as sense» (Moody 2007, p.49), giving evident proof of his previous Provençal studies. This first collection of poems showed «the revolutionary intent and the bold ambition implicitly declared in certain poems but most of all in the arrangement of the collection as a whole [...] There is throughout a determination to challenge and drive out the 'crepuscular spirit'⁴ from modern poetry» (Moody 2007, p.50). The last group of

3 In *Purgatorio* III.132 Dante wrote «dov'e' le tramutò a lume spento»; the title means a candle whose light is quenched, and «the phrase refers to the premature death of the flashing Manfred, son of Emperor Frederick II, and the import was transferred by Pound to William Brooke Smith, a young and talented painter from Philadelphia whose death from consumption the poet mourned even years later in a letter to Williams» (Wilhelm 1974, p.13).

4 The term '*crepuscolare*' was used for the first time in the Italian magazine *La Stampa* in 1910 to review three

poems of this first collection were included in the heading titled *Fistulae*: he explained that this name referred to «the pastoral Pan pipe⁵, the true instrument of the Golden Age 'still living in the hearts of the innocent'» (Moody 2007, p.53); one more time Pound's choice revealed a basic assumption centred on the concept of musicality and the reshuffle of the past elements. In September 1908 he travelled in the direction of London, a good place to introduce his poems to a lettered public; London proved up to his expectations, and here Pound's works were appreciated, read, and published. In that period the city was characterized by a cultural ferment, and literary and artistic movements - often not at all understood but in the same way esteemed - populated the European cultural scene; thanks to this situation Pound's future promised to be favourable (Ackroyd, 1980). After *A Lume Spento*, the English public knew him through *A Quinzaine for this Yule*, a notebook of Venetian poems, where he presented himself through the alter ego 'Weston St. Lewmys'; prefacing his collection with a poetical credo, he claimed that a poet, who wants to perform his art in *Beauty*, must take into consideration its two main features, *Marvel* and *Wonder* (Moody 2007, p.75), because «we should find first these doors – Marvel and Wonder – and, coming through them, a slow understanding [...] Always the desire to know and to understand more deeply must precede any reception of beauty» (Pound December 1908, p.6). In 1909 he published two other collections of poems, *Personae of Ezra Pound* and *Exultations of Ezra Pound*: «the poems in the two collections of 1909 are confidently handled, with a mastery of form and technique» (Ackroyd 1980, p.24); in the first of these collections Pound showed «the attempt at a major structure in the arrangement of the poems, [...] the will to organize them into a total statement of his poetics and his vision» (Moody 2007, p.92). In each poem he presented several personalities who embodied *masks of the self*, or rather they were Pound's way of recognizing himself in them (Ackroyd 1980, p.25). The title of the second collection expressed what Pound wanted to be predominant, and «the word has behind it associations of dancing with joy, of strong transports of delight, of triumphant rejoicing. It is a good word for the revolt against 'the crepuscular spirit'» (Moody 2007, p.102). Unlike the previous two collections of poems, in this one the poet is «much less concerned to make claims for himself and for his art» (Moody 2007, p.104).

poetical collections of new poets; it meant «una situazione storico-culturale di tramonto, cioè al fatto che la produzione di questi nuovi poeti subentrava a una grande stagione poetica, quella dannunziana e pascoliana»; so a crepuscular poem is marked by a melancholy tone and has nothing to say, being the product of a skeptical poet towards reality (Segre, Martignoni 2001, p.200).

- 5 In Greek mythology, Pan was the god of sheep-farming, and he was also the creator of the panpipes; as the story goes Pan used to fall in love with Nymphs who did not return his love; one of these, Syrinx, was chased by Pan, and to avoid him she decided to turn into a reed. Pan heard that the sound of wind within the cane thicket was pleasant, so he cut the reeds in different dimensions, he tied them together, inventing a wind instrument; he named it Syrinx, to remember his beloved. This instrument is known as *pan pipe* or *syringe*, and in Latin its name was *Fistula panis* (Biondetti, 1997).

2.3 The work on Romance Middle Ages

The work which best demonstrates Pound's critical considerations about Provençal poetry and personalities was *The Spirit of Romance* – the conclusive work after his course which he gave in 1908 and 1909 at the Polytechnic of London entitled «The development of Literature in Southern Europe» (Cherchi 1995, p.47) – published in 1910; the theme of Pound's lectures was medieval literature, and it was carried forward for twenty-one meetings. Except for the last two lectures, the basic themes of the meetings were reported into the chapters of *The Spirit of Romance* according to a chronological sequence (Moody 2007). In this work Pound showed his main aim, that is renovating the cultural tradition of Greece, as the Renaissance Latinists managed to resurrect, and he saw in Provence its late flowering, which in turn developed in Tuscany (Moody, 2007); «the 'spirit' he was seeking in the poetic masterworks of the romance languages could be traced, he believed, from the Greek rites of Spring into the celebration of the Roman festival of Venus Genetrix [...] and on to the dawn-songs of the troubadour lovers, and thence ultimately into what Dante has Piccarda⁶ speak in his third heaven of love» (Moody 2007, p.118). This revolutionary point of view passed through three different stages, «from the cult of nature, to the cult of emotional refinement, and finally to the cult of intelligence in love with wisdom» (Moody 2007, p.118). For Pound, Dante embodied philosophical poetry, and this marked the final stage of medieval poetry, which corresponded to the acme of the 'spirit of romance' (Moody, 2007). Dante put the creators of *fin'amor* in the *Purgatorio*, and through their precepts, he raised love as the medium to develop an intelligence for approaching to God's wisdom; Pound's critical sense led him to concentrate on those creators of finer technical and musical expression who were the Troubadours, in particular he admired, as Dante did, Arnaut Daniel and «his mastery of the music of rhyme and his skill in the 'language beyond metaphor'» (Moody 2007, p.120).

The Spirit of Romance indicated an original way to approach texts from the medieval tradition, with «a new, urgent and personal fashion, seeking to grasp the “spirit”» of this world (Cherchi 1995, p.48); Pound made this work different from any other manuals of medieval literature because he personalized it with his cultural formation, translating the Provençal texts into cultural experience (Cherchi, 1995). According to Pound the erudition of Troubadours works was not sufficient to allow the assimilation and deep comprehension of these, because only through a

6 Piccarda Donati, Forese Donati's sister, is the first figure Dante met in *Paradiso* III, a spirit who lived in God's bliss and who told her story to Dante, and explained to him the life rules of Paradise.

comparative study was it possible to find out new values from a past world; he did not linger on a typical philological approach – which examined poetry from the point of view of its metrics, its authors and the relationships among them, seeking documents which confirm the conjectures – instead he tried to identify the true poets hidden behind their works. This operation aimed to the semantics of the work, in order to understand the poet's will.

2.4 An analysis on Troubadour works

Completing his analysis of Troubadour tradition, in 1912 he left for a journey through France, from Poitiers to Chalus, and from Toulouse to Beaucaire, and he wrote a notebook about this experience in the land of Troubadours, tracing a physical and psychological route similar to that of the Provençal poets, which characterized his whole existence as «il suo continuo viaggiare senza mai sentirsi a casa in nessun luogo, più vagabondo che cosmopolita, non può non richiamare alla memoria la vita errabonda di tanti trovatori [...] la vita avventurosa, sopra le righe, il carattere forte e irriverente, il pensiero anticonformista e sempre pronto alla rissa intellettuale» (Cappellini 2008, note p.28-29). Through this journey he developed a sentimentalism extraneous to his previous works and to the canons of prose (Moody, 2007); he claimed that the mastery of the Troubadour singers, referring to those who created poetry at the Plantagenet court, Arnaut Daniel, Bertran de Born and Giraut de Borneil, was undoubted (Sieburth 1992, now in Cappellini 2008). He did not pay attention to those cities which were not linked to troubadour associations; he visited Ribérac, Arnaut Daniel's home town, and then he moved to Périgueux, «thinking that he was entering it as *jongleurs* must have done, on painful feet, weary and hungry» (Moody 2007, p.185). During his journey he met more imagined people of his Troubadouric imagination than living ones; in Hautefort he thought at the troubadour figure who he more knew, Bertran de Born, and he felt pervaded with melancholy for the lost times. He visited also Châlus, where Richard Coeur de Lion died in 1199, and the following day he arrived in Rochecheouart, and he thought that probably the medieval man was stronger than the modern man in riding the difficulties out, inasmuch as the medieval one had a toughened spirit, not based on material eases; than he noticed that the people he met, were kinder in close proximity to farmland. He found out that reading Troubadour verses in the

land of their progenitors, made them more intense and they gained some shades of meaning which Pound had never thought of before (Sieburth 1992, now in Cappellini 2008). With this experience Pound wanted to «document the conviction he had formed at Hamilton that those early medieval singers were real individuals [...] and that they sang of real loves and deeds» (Moody 2007, p.182), and at the same time he added to his knowledge something that one cannot learn in the books.

The poetry of those writers, who were active from the beginning of the twelfth to the beginning of the fourteenth century, symbolized for Pound the synthesis of all European poetry (Gardini, 2002); or rather, Provençal Literature was the cradle of modern poetry, in fact it was born as a poem linked to the art, in a secular context and through vernacular language (Di Girolamo, 1989).

In order to understand Pound's point of view more clearly it is necessary to know what the Provençal tradition was. The Troubadours inherited several classical rules, such as the theme of love, the manipulation of a lyrical subject and care for the composition of lyric exercises (Gardini, 2002). The Troubadours poets lived in courts of rich palatines, and they could develop their art through the patronage of their lords; they were active in the South of France, in Spain and in the North of Italy, for the public of the court (Di Girolamo, 1989). Within the Provençal courts, a lively artistic and intellectual life took place, so they represented the heart of the culture of the period, and at the same time they dictated rules of costume, the good manners of social living and art in general (D'Anna, 2005); the Troubadour poets composed their texts and handed over their compositions to the court jesters, in order to spread them to the court public, through a musical transmission. Therefore, the poem was linked to the vocal tone and to the music, because the jester sang it, with an instrumental accompaniment, thus making it real (Di Girolamo, 1989). Their creative art, the *trobar*⁷, which consisted in a composition in vernacular language, included both the composition of

7 Several theories of the origin of Courtly Love exist: it is supposed that Provençal poetry was influenced by a Hispano-Arabic culture, inasmuch «Courtly Love was imported into southern France from Muslim Spain or was strongly influenced by the culture, poetry and philosophy of the Arabs» (Boase 1977, p.123); another hypothesis is based on the interaction between «Christianity and a primitive Germanic/Celtic/Pictish matriarchy» (Boase 1977, p.75), and Courtly Love was the result of it, «which ensured the survival of pre-Christian sexual *mores* and a veneration for women amongst the European aristocracy» (Boase 1977, p.75). Another possible interpretation saw «Courtly Love grew out of the Cathar or Albigensian heresy, either as an actual vehicle for Catharist doctrines or as an indirect expression of Cathar sentiments» (Boase 1977, p.77); Courtly Love could be the result of a contact with Neoplatonism, «which conceived of the soul as a substance, divine in origin, yearning to be liberated from the prison of created matter in order to ascend to the First Principle, the source of beauty and goodness» (Boase 1977, p.81). «The mysticism of St Bernard and the cult of the Virgin Mary influenced the ideas and sentiments of troubadour poetry, and contributed to the birth of Courtly Love» (Boase 1977, p.83); according to a folkloristic point of view, «Courtly Love evolved out of the folk traditions and ritual dance songs of Europe, particularly those associated with the rites of spring, or it was an actual survival of the pagan cult of Cybele or Maia, the Great Mother of Gods» (Boase 1977, p.86). Another hypothesis is linked to Feudal society because «Courtly Love can be explained by certain sociological factors operating within the feudal environment of twelfth-century Europe, chief of which was the rapid promotion of new men into the ranks of the nobility» (Boase 1977, p.89); It is not of primary importance to know what exactly the origins of Troubadour poetry were; instead it is interesting to notice the etymology of the term 'Trobar', which is related to the musical world: according to a French origin of the term «'Troubadour', the Provençal *trobar* and the Old French *trover* [...] meant 'compose' and later 'invent', 'find' [...]

verses and the composition of the melody which accompanied the recitation of the poem (D'Anna, 2005). The Troubadour poets wrote about love, which became a code of their poetical writing, the courtly code, which was a psychological and ethical symbol which characterized their language; only the pure at heart could understand this theme and were able to write poems about it. Through this form of love – *fin'amor* – man can refine and elevate his spirit (Gardini, 2002); what differentiates the lyric poet from the modern one are «l'artificio linguistico e lo sfoggio delle capacità stilistiche [che] non significano autodenuncia della finzione, bensì servono da strumento della verità [...] la verità sta non nelle parole ma in una loro qualità» (Gardini 2002, p.8-9). Probably these were the aspects of the Provençal literature which seduced Pound; he wrote that «the “chivalric love”, was, as I understand it, an art, that is to say, a religion. The writers of *trobar clus* did not seek obscurity for the sake of obscurity» (Pound 1916, now in Pound 1952, p.87). Pound took into consideration those Troubadours who were «animated by a passion whose authenticity is one and the same with the need of communicating it in the highest artistic way in order to move the audience» (Cherchi 1995, p.53); through the Troubadour myth of love poets did not manifest the exaltation of a sexual passion, instead they aimed at an intellectual perfection. So «The best of troubadours' poetry has the same expressive power of myths: it can be read as a simple story, or it can be read at deeper levels of meaning until reaching universal values» (Cherchi 1995, p.54). Pound's interest was focused on Arnaut Daniel in particular, because his style was characterized by both the *trobar clus* and a realistic perception, avoiding the use of metaphors and at the same time finding a symbolic force in natural objects (Cherchi, 1995).

trobar, [which meant] 'to find' or 'to compose verses', derives from the Low Latin *contropare*, 'to speak figuratively' or 'to make comparisons', from the Greek-Latin *tropus*, 'a rhetorical figure' [...] the Low Latin *tropus* denoted an 'air' or 'melody'; hence the trobador was, in the first instance, the composer of new melodies» (Boase 1977, Appendix) or rather the Greek roots demonstrate that «tropos (related to the verb trepho, “I turn or bend”) refers, among other things, to a turn or bent of thought» (Wilhelm 1982, p.13). If one examines the Arabic etymology, «the word trobador may come from the Arabic *tarab*, 'music', 'song' [...] *trobar* from the Arabic root *daraba*, 'to strike', which was applied to the playing of string instruments, and from the suffix *ador*, 'doer' or 'maker'. [...] it is interesting to note that the Arabic *wajada* 'find' also means 'feel the pangs of love or sorrow» (Boase 1977, Appendix). With Trobar were included the composition of verses and the melody which accompanied the jester's recitation (D'Anna, 2005).

3. Confront with the Tradition

3.1 The poet towards tradition

Pound's thought was based on the concept that «the modern poet must come to terms with various ways of appropriating the past – via history, translation, or poetic tradition» (Gibson 1995, p.17). For literature of the Ancient Régime, more or less until Pre-Romanticism, handling literary tradition is a fundamental characteristic for poets. Pasquali suggested a fitting metaphor: «La parola è come acqua di rivo che riunisce in sé i sapori della roccia dalla quale sgorga e dei terreni per i quali è passata» (Pasquali 1942, now in Russo 1994, p.275); he meant that words bring with themselves an etymological life and a literary and historical past. Through allusion the poet can evoke past reminiscences, which are recognizable only if the reader is able to notice them, only if the knowledge of them is shared. The poet cannot be a virgin soil, he cannot be blank sheet, because virginity is a quality that belongs only to God, and also because language is an interrupted reproduction of intentional or non-intentional quotations. Starting with the assumption that «Language is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances (oral and written) by participants in the various area of human activity [...] Thematic content, style and compositional structure are inseparably linked to the *whole* of the utterance and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication» (Bakhtin 1979, now in 1986, p.60), Bakhtin claimed that «In each epoch, in each social circle, in each small world of family, friends, acquaintances, and comrades in which a human being grows and lives, there are always authoritative utterances that set the tone [...] there are particular traditions that are expressed and retained in verbal vestments [...] there are always some verbally expressed leading ideas of the “masters of thought” of a given epoch, some basic tasks, slogans, and so forth» (Bakhtin 1979, now in 1986, p.88-89) Consequently, he assumed that language is inherently dialogic; it is not an action of virgin creation, hence a reiteration of quotes, because «the unique experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with other's individual utterances» (Bakhtin 1979, now in 1986, p.89). Often we use language thinking that words have an extra-linguistic referent, instead they allude to a play of social relationships; the object is not reality, but rather the shared connection of reality: «the expressiveness of individual words is not inherent in the words themselves as units of language, nor does it issue directly from the meaning of these

words: it is either typical generic expression or it is an echo of another's individual expression, which makes the word, as it were, representative of another's whole utterance from a particular evaluative position» (Bakhtin 1979, now in 1986, p.89). It is important to remember that «The utterance is filled with *dialogic overtones*, and they must be taken into account in order to understand fully the style of the utterance» (Bakhtin 1979, now in 1986, p.92).

Manipulation of tradition lends density to the work, indeed «la presenza del moderno in contrasto con l'antico o dentro l'antico [...crea] una certa tensione che dà movimento all'opera senza spezzarne l'unità» (Pasquali 1942, now in Russo 1994, p.276).

3.2 Pound's concept of tradition

«The tradition is a beauty which we preserve and not a set of fetters to bind us» (Pound 1914, p.137); Pound thought that there were two great lyric traditions to refer to: from the Melic one arose ancient poetry, from the poets of Provence derives all modern poetry (Pound, 1914). Mankind looks at tradition because it is a human prerogative; «a return to origins invigorates because it is a return to nature and reason. The man who returns to origins does so because he wishes to behave in the eternally sensible manner» (Pound 1914, p.139).

Pound wrote a poem called *Histrion*, that explains his consideration on tradition:

No man hath dared to write this thing as yet,
And yet I know, how that the souls of all men
great.
At times pass athrough us,
And we are melted into them, and are not
save reflexions of their souls.
[...]
So cease we from all being for the time,
And these, the Masters of the Soul, live on.
(Pound 1909a, vv.1-5, 17-18, p.38)

Pound has a particular consideration of past authors, inasmuch as he used them again, through a manipulation of texts, presumes that past authors are considered as contemporaries of the writer, because their work deserves of a current and modern consideration. Doing this, Pound set himself and all the great authors that he considered on the same plane, just contemporaries. In the fifteenth-century correspondence between Angelo Poliziano and Paolo Cortese, Poliziano wrote a letter to the latter, talking about his personal opinion about the study of Cicero and other authors, and he said that «Mihi certe quicumque tantum componunt ex imitatione, similes esse vel psittaco vel picae videntur, proferentibus quae nec intelligunt»⁸ (Poliziano 1489, now in Garin 1952, p.902); he suggested that the action of imitating just one model is a stylistic exercise devoid of creativity, genius and self-expression. He advised Descartes on developing an *erudite variety*: «Sed cum Ciceronem, cum bonos alios multum diuque legeris, contriveris, edidiceris, concoxeris et rerum mutarum cognitione pectus impleveris, ac iam componere aliquid ipse parabis, tum demum velim (quod dicitur) sine cortice nates, atque ipse tibi sis aliquando in consilio»⁹ (Poliziano 1489, now in Garin 1952, p.904); so reading and assimilating different authors would be a stimulus to create something similar or rather, in order to emulate the great styles of the past. Poliziano chose to follow and to be inspired by higher models, and he decided to pick the best out of everyone, using and re-editing these in his work. This action was driven by a keen intention to create the best model, higher than all the other ones, just because it had inherited the best from each available examples. To do this he must have considered his model authors – or rather their works – as contemporaries among themselves, because they are all to be valued on the same level, and chronological time is not an obstacle. It is a sort of pupil, who learns from his teacher and then goes ahead of him. Pound had an attitude comparable to that of Poliziano: all authors that he considered were essentials to his education, and through them he could create noteworthy works, as suggested by tradition. The fruit of Pound's labour constitutes a sort of *textus testis*, meaning a text which is a «testimone degno di fiducia» (Folena 2002, p.7), because it is possible to obtain from a great deal of many different and valuable information about author, addressee, and probably also several sources which it refers to. Pound saw in the Middle Ages the presence of a spirit, the *Spirit of Romance*, which existed already in the Classical period, and he claimed that «certain qualities and certain furnishings are germane to

8 «In my view, anyone who composes by imitation alone is like a parrot or a magpie, seeming to voice what he does not understand» (Della Neva 2007, p.3)

9 «But after you have read Cicero and other good writers widely and at length, after you have consumed, thoroughly learned and digested them, and have filled your heart with the knowledge of many matters, and you compose something yourself, then at least I would wish you to swim (as they say) without a preserver, take your own counsel sometimes» (Della Neva 2007, p.5).

all fine poetry; there is no need to call them either classic or romantic» (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952 p.13), meaning that both the classical poetry – the result of artificial schooling – and the medieval one – marked by expressive freedom and spontaneity – are modern (Cherchi, 1995).

3.3 Manipulation of the past

An example of Pound's use of tradition, which shows his skills at approaching and handling tradition is *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, a composition generated in 1919, directly related to Propertius, the Roman poet of the Thirties B.C.. This did not represent an out-and-out translation, and it was a Vorticist experiment; «the refraction of the ancient poet through a modern intelligence, or the superimposition of the one upon the other [... it is] a selection of poems and fragments from the four books of Sextus Propertius, rearranged and transposed to create a new work, and a new kind of poetry» (Moody 2007, p.350). Pound endorsed that «the interpretative function is the highest honor of the arts, and because it is so we find that a sort of hyper-scientific precision is the touchstone and assay of the artist's power, of his honor, his authenticity» (Pound 1916, now in Pound 1952, p.87). This work is a sort of tribute to a classical poet which shows Pound's ability to confront a model of the past tradition, selected as an example of poetic writing (Amoruso, 1996); it is an «attempt to recreate the time and the mind of a classic writer» (Hughes 1960, p.242). This work is not a simple act of translation, but rather a reuse of Propertius as «a mask of himself, the objectival projection behind which a transposed autobiography is possible» (Amoruso 1996, p.41). So Pound concealed himself behind Propertius's mask, and through the use of irony he achieved two aims: firstly, he experimented the research into himself, and thanks to it he could revive through Propertius, because by wearing this mask, he recognized himself in this classical poet: there is an overlapping of personalities, which then allows Pound to obtain a new image of himself. In Greek, but probably derived from Etrurian, *person* meant the theatrical mask and the character whom it represented; this concept was probably known to Pound, in view of his first work *Personae*. Secondly, this is possible because Pound was self-ironic, and this strategy is useful to approach to the past – parodying it – and, at the same time distancing oneself from past tradition, because irony is the figure of speech for significance detachment. Pound assigned the invention of

logopoeia to Propertius, and then he adapted it to his work through a sort of mythical method, which «respinge la coerenza narrativa e riproduce l'anarchia del presente attraverso la giustapposizione di materiali eteroclitici» (Gardini 2002, p.169).

When Pound wrote this reworked translation, he had matured a language for bequeathing Provençal poems, which was both archaic and colloquial; to translate *Homage to Sextus Propertius* his language was also influenced by French, adding a modern touch to his speech. Pound's translation of the latter revealed a thin bond between «Courtly Love and the Propertian attitude toward love [...] The 'feudalization of love', the humility of the lover, exemplified in the poets of the Languedoc, is paralleled by the *servitium amoris* of the Roman elegist; serf or slave, the human situation is the same» (Sullivan 1964, pp.51-52).

It is evident that Pound needed to constitute a literary canon starting from a great tradition, and this is felt as «the earliest and paradigmatic instance of a larger impulse toward order in art and society» (Gibson 1995, p.2); to create a poetical canon was essential starting from experimentation, and Provençal poets together with Dante represented the best example.

4. The Troubadours' style

4.1 The excellence of Troubadours according to Pound

Pound had a particular inclination to the medieval tradition probably due to his consideration of literature: he said that «literature is language charged with meaning» (Pound 1934a, p.28) and he believed that the study on literature was born to the need of man, who is committed with his social life; the main function of literature is the energy of human life, a stimulus, the reason to go on. Pound continued saying that literature had always had a public function, which is connected to the intelligibility of thoughts and opinions; what Pound claimed was that the medieval poet had the capacity of moving deftly with words and their world, and he was the craftsman of his art, knowing every facet of the language (Pound 1968, now in Pound 1973, p.42). The mastery of Troubadours consisted of using the language with efficiency, and their poems are burdened with sense. In fact, according to him, «good writers are those who keep the language efficient» (Pound 1934a, p.32).

Pound filled his Provençal thirst for knowledge with a meticulous studying of the major authors of the period. He started writing poetry inebriated with Occitan *cansos*, and his works is affected by the phonological arrangements and themes of Troubadours. He «was aware of a long occult tradition behind the idea of mind he employed» (Schneidau 1969, p.126). What charms Pound the most is the phonological apparatus of the Provençal poems, where the phono-symbolism is functional to the poem virtuosity; excellence lies in «Provençal minstrelsy [...] the Troubadours were melting the common tongue and fashioning it into new harmonies depending not upon the alternation of quantities but upon rhyme and accent» (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952, p.22). Pound lingered over the first meaning of the *canzone*, linked to its troubadour origin; as he claimed that «both in Greece and in Provence the poetry attained its highest rhythmic and metrical brilliance at times when the arts of verse and music were most closely knit together, when each thing done by the poet had some definite musical urge or necessity bound up within it» (Pound 1914, p.137-138). So the poem was born to be sung or accompanied by music, and due to this the poem is subject to rules of music as Pound claimed that «the movement of poetry is limited only by the nature of syllables and of articulate sound, and by the laws of music, or melodic rhythm» (Pound 1914, p.141), and this ancient concept is also observable in the Italian tradition which derives from that of

the Troubadours: «the *canzon* of Provence became the *canzone* of Italy, and that when Dante and his contemporaries began to compose philosophic treatises in verse» (Pound 1914, p.138).

The attention to sounds and its related forms is evident in Pound's poems, but in particular in *Cantos*, where the concept finds explanation in a deeper eclectic conception; the structure of the work is based on a refined rhythm and on visual elements typical of magic medieval formularies, and even before of Sumerian, Chinese and Egyptian symbolism (De Rachewiltz, 1965). Pound employed the figure of the ideogram, and with it he reawakened a concept of miraculous power held in it; 'image' is ima-go and means the action of acting in depth, and it represents a sound and a form; poem has always belonged to magic world (De Rachewiltz, 1965).

4.2 How to handle the Provençal tradition

For Pound, the best way to get in touch with the Troubadour tradition was to translate the great Provençal poems, which helped him in developing an extraordinary technical skill; «Pound's entire corpus of translations also constitutes an act of criticism: his very choice of poems reveals a critical attitude» (McDougal 1972, p.9). The biggest obstacle was embodied by the language: it was difficult or maybe impossible to translate a poem from Occitan into English, maintaining the general and the specific sense of the poem, without changing the phonological structure, as Pound said: «Such substitutions must be made in nearly all translations; and very often a Romance or Latin word stands between two English words, or includes them» (Pound, *The spirit of romance*, 1910, now in *The spirit of romance*, completely rev. ed., 1952 p.26). So «Pound has not yet created an equivalent language for Provençal, but rather is simply accepting the “poetic language” of his day» (McDougal 1972, p.19); as he declared in *Poetry*, the part of the poem «which strikes upon the imaginative eye of the reader will lose nothing by translation into a foreign tongue; that which appeals to the ear can reach only those who take it in the original» (Pound 1913a, p.205), but it was important to remember that the «rhythmic structure should not destroy the shape of your words, or their natural sound, or their meaning» (Pound 1913a, p.204). Translations allowed Pound to manipulate the great poetry of other authors, and the poetry into which he took refuge was a poetry of refined surfaces, so «he could supply those surfaces, with his technical and rhythmic expertise»

(Ackroyd 1980, p.53).

In *The Spirit of Romance*, Pound explained his consideration about the two literary worlds, the Provençal and the Italian one, and their connections and divergences about love; he was apprised of Italian poetry, in particular the style of *Dolce Stil Novo*, derived from Provence, and Dante's lover, Beatrice, was none other than the lady of troubadours, and even if «the directness of Provençal song has [in Guinizzelli's poem] here been lost» (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952, p.107), the Italian poetical forms are simplified in the rhyming, compared with Provençal ones, but on the other hand they had a more complex structure (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952). Initially, Pound was interested in Tuscan poems which were «characterized by this spiritualization of the lady, and by a philosophical consideration of the nature of love» (McDougal 1972, p.72); for this reason the first poet Pound considered was Guido Guinizzelli, and his «preciseness of the description» and «a clarity of imaginative vision» (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952, p.105). Pound was particularly influenced by the concept of love in Cavalcanti, where love gets through the eyes; Pound translated several sonnets of him, and in *Sonnet VII* he wrote:

Who is she coming, drawing all men's gaze,
Who makes the air one trembling clarity
Till non can speak but each sighs piteously
Where she leads Love adown her trodden ways?

Ah God! The thing she's like when her glance strays,
Let Amor tell. 'tis no fit speech for me.
Mistress she seems of such great modesty
That every other woman were called "Wrath."

No one could ever tell the charm she hath
For toward her all the noble Powers incline,
She being beauty's godhead manifest.
(Pound 1912, now in Pound 2011, vv.1-12, p.29)

Here the lady was perceived as «a semi-divine figure [...] moving with precision and brilliance. Love emanates from her glance [...] and all men become powerless in her presence. She is the apotheosis of a type of beauty that for Pound characterizes the medieval world» (McDougal 1972, p.76); Pound was certain that «the cult of Provence has been a cult of the emotions; and with it there had been some, hardly conscious, study of emotional psychology» (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952, p.116). Pound hypothesized that in Provence, this area not being disturbed by the Albigensian Crusade, declared by Innocent III to eliminate the heretical group of the Cathari from the places of Languedoc, there remained a sort of paganism; so Provençal poets seemed to «have, in some way, lost the names of the gods and remembered the names of lovers. Ovid and *The Eclogues* of Virgil seem to have been their chief documents» (Pound 1916, now in Pound 1952, p.90). Pound

wondered if «this aristocracy of emotion, [evolved], out of its half memories of Hellenistic mysteries, a cult [...] for the purgation of the soul by a refinement of, and lordship over, the senses» (Pound 1916, now in Pound 1952, p.90); and then he focused on the use of language included in Provençal poems, and not on this mystical hypothesis.

Pound translated Arnaut's poems at the beginning of his activity as a translator; he attempted different times to give a good translation of *Sols sui qui sai lo sobrafan quem sortz*. In *The Spirit of Romance* he published a part of the first stanza, showing a literal translation of the prose which accompanied the poem and it did not prove to be effective in English:

Sols sui qui sai lo sobrafan quem sortz
Al cor d'amor sofren per sobramar,
Car mos volers es tant fermes et entiers
C'anc non s'esduis de celliei ni s'estors
C'anc encubic al prim vezer e puois:
Qu'ades ses lieis dis a lieis cochos motz,
Pois quan la vei non sai, tant l'ai, que dire
(A. Daniel, now in Eusebi 2005, vv.1-7, pp.130-136.)

And Pound translated in this way:

I am the only one who knows the over-anguish which falls to my lot, to the heart of love suffering through over-love; for my desire is so firm and whole, never turning away or twisting from her, whom I desired at first sight and since, so that now without her I say to her hot words, since when I see her I do not know, having so much, what to say. (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952, p.27).

He substituted “sobrafan” and “sobramor” with “over-anguish” and “over-love”, but these seemed to be not perfectly suited to the Provençal meaning; «Pound's translation of “cochos” (“eager”) as “hot” is an attempt to suggest the poet's passion, but the expression is rather trite in this context» (McDougal 1972, p.109). It is interesting to notice Pound's route of improvement of translation, comparing line 6th of stanza I:

So that now without her I say to her hot words (1910)
So, far from her, I speak for her mad speech (1910)
And I, afar, speak to her words like flame (1912)
That far from her my speech springs up flame (1917)

(McDougal 1972, p.114)

The line evokes the same image, but the last version is more direct and powerful. Pound studied Provençal poets in a Pre-Raphaelite diction, but «whose themes and language are more representative of Victorian England than anything truly medieval» (McDougal 1972, p.111). These

translations exhibits how Pound was the creator of a language capable of reproducing the sensibility of Provençal poems; «this language is archaic, because the feelings being expressed are archaic, but it is a new language, totally unlike that of the Pre-Raphaelites» (McDougal 1972, p.114).

Another good example of Provençal translation in which Pound made several transformations is *Si tuit li dol elh plor elh marrimen*¹⁰, Bertran de Born's *planh*; in the original version of commemoration of the death of Henry II' s eldest son, the author wrote it in «five eight-line stanzas of decasyllabic verse, with a rhyme scheme of AbabCddE. Henry was represented as a virtuous man, and his qualities and his skills were listed in a sort of catalogue. He is depicted as the ideal man, who embodies all the finest and highest qualities of courtly life; the omniscient author lined up with Henry and the ideal of him. The repetition of the first and last words of each stanza [...] creates a ground bass which underscores the mournful tone of lament [and] a preponderance of long vowel sounds [...] also contributes to this» (McDougal 1972, p.22) and Bertran also emphasized this aspect by repeating the rhyme scheme within the stanza:

Si tuit li doil e il plor e il marrimen
E las dolors e il dan e il chativier
C'om hanc agues en est segle dolen
(B. Born, now in Gouiran 1985, vv.1-3)

In Pound's version, *Planh for the Young English King* (Pound 1909a, p.46-47), the order of the stanzas was maintained, with the characteristic structure of the genre: «the expression of the poet's grief, the elegy for the departed, and the invocation to God to look after the soul of the departed» (McDougal 1972, p.23); he also managed to retain the repetitions, even the internal ones:

If all the grief and woe and bitterness,
all dolour, ill and every evil chance
that ever came upon this grieving world
were set together they would seem but lightnings
against the death of the young English King.
Worth lieth riven and Youth dolorous
(Pound 1909a, vv.1-6)

Pound also «creates a pattern of long vowel sounds so that the tonal effect of his translation is similar to the original» (McDougal 1972, p.23), as we see in the second line:

Bertran E las dolor e il dan e il chativier

10 B. Born, now in Gouiran 1985, pp.255-267.

Pound All dolour, ill and every evil chance

Pound changed the 35th line of the last stanza, where he created «an image far more vivid than anything in the Provençal» (McDougal 1972, p.23):

Bertran E receup mort a nostre salvamen
(which means And received death for our salvation)
Pound Who drank of death for our salvacioun

Pound also misread the 12th line, probably reading «"en" as "Sir" (DOMINE>*en [sic]*) rather than as the preposition "en" (in)» (McDougal 1972, p.23):

Bertran Trop an agut en Mort mortal guerrier
(which means They [troubadours and jongleurs] have found in Death a deadly warrior)
Pound O'er much hath ta'en Sir Death that deadly warrior

Pound's poem is less optimistic than Bertran's; for the latter «there exists a possibility that love may not be leaving this world: in Pound's version this possibility is denied. There is a great feeling of loss in both poems, but the bitterness resulting from this loss is stronger in Pound's version than in the original» (McDougal 1972, p.24). This point of view is rendered emphatic by his translations:

Bertran marrimen
(which means wretchedness)
Pound bitterness

Bertran ira
(which means gloominess)
Pound ire

As the translation shows, the main problem for Pound consists in the search for an appropriate language; the translations of the Provençal poems forced him to select the best of them, narrowing down the field of Provençal authors worthy of being considered as the great tradition; on the other hand he shaped a poetic language and a technical skill comparable to that of his masters (McDougal, 1972).

5. The experimentation on Troubadour poetry

5.1 Arnaut's form and Bertran's appreciation

Pound claimed that «Knowledge is NOT culture. The domain of culture begins when one HAS “forgotten-what-book”» (Pound 1960, p.134), meaning that the author must cultivate (in fact *culture* comes from the Latin verb COLERE> to cultivate) his knowledge, proposing a new interpretative key of the work that he adopted as his own, but at the same time he has forgotten the work because he arrives at a higher level of understanding. As a matter of fact, «Culture starts when you can DO the thing without strain [...] No artist can present what he hasn't got» (Pound 1960, p.209), so culture presupposes the possession of a “digested” knowledge of tradition. It is a sort of symbolic image which Dante offered us in *Vita Nuova*, with the poem *A ciascun'alma presa e gentil core*, where Dante wrote about a metaphorical vision.

After studying and translating Provençal poetry, knowing the ropes, Pound experimented with what he had learnt; his first poems had a Troubadour arrangement, which «constitutes Pound's first poetic interpretation of Provençal culture, revealing those aspects of the culture which became an important part of his Weltanschauung» (McDougal 1972, p.40). *Sestina: Altaforte* was one of these; it was expressly dedicated to Bertran de Born, as a homage to the one who was not be taken in the right consideration, meaning Dante's critical position in *Inferno XXVIII*, where Bertran appeared as a trunk which held his head with a hand, as if it were a lantern; Pound said that the great Bertran was commemorated for his Provençal *planh* for prince Henry, but not here; in this passage Dante remembered him «for the goad of his tongue, and for his scorn of sloth, peace, cowardice, and the barons of Provence» (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952, p.45). Pound's *sestina* opened in this way:

LOQUITUR: *En* Bertrands de Born.

Dante Alighieri put this man in hell for that he was a stirrer up of strife.

Eccovi!

Judge ye!

Have I dug him up again?

The scene is at his castle, Altaforte. "Papiols" is his jongleur. "The Leopard," the *device* of Richard Coeur de Lion

(Pound 1909b, vv.1-6, p.42)

In this poem Pound used many references to Dante's image of Bertran, getting from *Bem platz lo*

*gais temps de Pascor*¹¹, a *serventes*¹² in which Bertran told about a military context. The *Inferno* XXVIII takes place in the ninth Bolgia, where the seeders of dissention, schism and scandals were scourged; here Dante situated Bertran, showing a change of idea about the value of the poet: «Bertran is not seen as a lover, but simply as a belligerent warrior» (McDougal 1972, p.56). Before the composition of the *Divina Commedia* Dante wrote the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, a treatise about the vernacular, or to say better «un'arte del dire in volgare, e particolarmente del dire in rima nel bello stile» (Folena 2002, p.200); it is a reflection on the stylistic use of the language and it appears as a militant text which wants to demonstrate the Italian superiority in literature, compared to French and Provençal literature, seeing that the new Italian authors have clout, foremost among everyone Dante himself. In this work Dante talked about Provençal poetry for the first time, and he outlined a rhetorical canon: he said that man is driven by three supreme aims: usefulness, pleasure and morality. *Salus, venus* and *virtus* are the *magnalia*, meaning the highest subjects related to the human aims. He identified the greatest poets of each subject, indicating three Provençal poets: Bertran de Born as the best poet of weapons, Arnaut Daniel as the greatest in love matters and Giraut de Bornelh for virtue; in the range of Italian poetry Dante mentioned Cino da Pistoia as the master of love and in a roundabout way he talked about himself as the greatest poet of virtue (Folena, 2002). What Dante admired in Provençal poets was «più la tecnica che il pensiero, la squisitezza di stile e le sottigliezze metriche, la compagine splendida delle strofe» (Folena 2002, p.214); Dante put Bertran in the *Inferno*, expressing a moral opinion: Dante moulded his *Canto* following the verbal representation of epic style, which Bertran used before in his *Bem platz lo gais temp de pascor*; Bertran wrote the Sirventese *Non puosc mudar un cantar non esparja*¹³, and on its *trobar clus* and its consonant virtuosity the style of the *Inferno* XXII is modeled; this was the *canço* which Dante presented in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* as exemplification of Bertran as poet of weapons. For his *serventes* Bertran made use of a metrical scheme of Arnaut Daniel, *Si'm fos amors de joi donar tan larga*¹⁴, working in this way a *contrafactum*, that is a text which owns a non-original melody, on which a text different from the original is introduced. So Dante selected a *canço* which works as *contrafactum* of Bertran; he assumed the lesson which was then used again in the *De Vulgari*. In the *Commedia* Bertran was considered for his contents, whereas Arnaut was quoted for his metrical form, expressing a negative judgment on Bertran compared to Arnaut, because: Bertran was positioned among those who sowed dissension, and his style and images were arranged

11 B. Born, now in Gouiran 1985, pp.723-745.

12 The *Serventes* or *Sirventese* was a poetical compositional genre, similar to the Italian *canzone* but different from it due to his metrical base (the *cobla*); The term is linked to its being slave to the melody of a *canzone*, or rather it referred to the position of the serve towards the courtly Lord (Beccaria, 1994).

13 B. Born, now in Gouiran 1985, pp.569.

14 A. Daniel, now in Eusebi 2005, pp.145-153.

according to the moral sharpness of the *Canto*; on the other hand Arnaut was in the *Inferno*, but as the last poet named in it, and his words were pronounced by Folchetto from Marseilles in the *Purgatorio*. The different moral treatment of the poets is obvious. In the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* Dante quoted himself talking about stanzas without rhymes, suggesting his *sestina* *Al poco giorno e al gran cerchio d'ombra*¹⁵, a perfect experiment of expressionist moral use of phonetic; however the creator of the *sestina* was the Provençal master Arnaut Daniel, in *Lo ferm voler qu'el cor m'intra*¹⁶. It is not known if Pound studied this rhetorical mechanism which is hidden in Dante's choices and opinions, but what is clear is that Pound acted in a way comparable to Dante; in fact, he utilized the highest example of formal artifice and experimentalism, the *sestina*, to talk about Bertran de Born. So he used the formal lesson of Arnaut Daniel, with the content of Bertran de Born, but unlike Dante, he elevated Bertran, redeeming him from his Infernal position. He made two implicit considerations about the two Troubadour poets in question; he had a high esteem of Arnaut Daniel and his work, in fact he dedicated to him the second chapter of *The Spirit of Romance*, entitling it *Il miglior fabbro*, as a quotation from Dante: in *Purgatorio* XXVI he positioned Guido Guinizzelli, the Italian father poet of the *Dolce Stil Novo*¹⁷; here there was the seventh circle of the *Purgatorio*, in which lustful humans have to expiate their sins. Dante approached Guido with a feeling of devotion and gratitude, relating to his cultural and poetical relation with him, but here Dante acknowledged the stylistic superiority of Arnaut Daniel through Guido Guinizzelli's words:

«O frate», disse, «questi ch'io ti cerno
col dito», e additò un spirito innanzi,
«fu miglior fabbro del parlar materno.
Versi d'amore e prose di romanzi
soverchiò tutti; e lascia dir li stolti
che quel di Lemosi credon ch'avanzi [...]»
(Dante, *Purgatorio* XXVI, vv.115-120)

With the expression *Miglior Fabbro* (from the Latin FABRU(m)= *he makes*), Dante meant that

15 It was one of four *canzoni* considered as *Petrose*; this term referred to the experimental poems which Dante wrote following Arnaut's example of poetic technique. The poet did not abandon *Dolce Stil Novo* precepts, because he shared its own tragic current, but differently he used a stronger and harder style, antithetical for contents and form, marked by a rough language, avoiding the sweetness of verses previously suggested by Love. This poetry treated the theme of the «*donna pietra*», who personified the cruel and ruthless woman, not interested in love; she became the opportunity to try out a new style: «una sperimentazione che è qui ricerca di un linguaggio aspro e difficile, retoricamente elaborato, tecnicamente complesso» (Segre-Ossola 1997, pp.480-481).

16 A. Daniel, now in Eusebi 2005, pp.154-162.

17 In *Purgatorio* XXIV Dante met Bonagiunta Orbicciani, who was a follower of Guittone D'Arezzo's poetry; Bonagiunta claimed that Dante with his poem *Donne ch'avete*, included in *Vita Nuova* XIX, surpassed the previous poetry creating a new modern way of writing poetry, indeed the *Dolce Stil Novo* (Sapegno, 2004). The features which distinguished this poetic movement were «la scelta di forme espressive piane, semplici e la centralità del tema amoroso che si sviluppa intorno all'equivalenza fra amore e cuore nobile» (Santagata 2006, p.186); for this reason Dante recognized Guido Guinizzelli as his predecessor, with the poem *Al cor gentile rempaira sempre amore*, where Guinizzelli explained that love took shelter into a kind heart, noble in the sense of spiritually height. (Santagata, 2006).

poetry was the best handcrafted art, indicating with art every creative activity which presupposed an order; recognizing Arnaut as the best craftsman he positioned him as forefather of his tradition and of the Provençal one, adding a choice of preference if we look at Guinizzelli's opinion about Giraut de Bornelh (who came from Limousin). As Dante recognized a paternity in Arnaut and his acceptance of Arnaut's art, so did Pound, through Dante. Moreover, to confirm Pound's position towards Arnaut, he explained what Arnaut's mastery consisted of: he said «in the forms of Arnaut Daniel's canzone I find a corresponding excellence, seeing that they satisfy not only the modern ear, gluttonous of rhyme, but also the ear trained to Roman and Hellenic music, to which rhyme seemed and seems a vulgarity» (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952, p.22); the writing of Arnaut seemed to be difficult due to «his refusal to use the “journalese” of his day, and to his aversion from an obvious familiar vocabulary. He is not content with conventional phrase, or with words which do not convey his exact meaning» (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952, p.25). What Pound noticed, against his contemporaries' points of view on the Troubadours, was that «Arnaut's research results in a language which has an absolutely new power: it is an almost primal language, free from plain connotations and metaphors, yet substantial and defined just as the images which it attempts to communicate» (Cherchi 1995, p.52); Dante was the first who recognized the power of this language, which lies in its refined musicality, which in turn supported the language. The best example of how musicality worked with and for language was the invention of Arnaut, the *sestina*, which Pound defined as «a form like a thin sheet of flame folding and unfolding upon itself» (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952, p.26); Pound claimed that he was not sufficiently competent to demonstrate how Arnaut surpassed in mastery the other troubadours, because it would be possible only through the original language, and not in translation; anyway he thought that Arnaut «was the first to realize fully that the music of rhymes depends upon their arrangement, not on their multiplicity. Out of this perception he elaborated a form of canzone where stanza answers to stanza not boisterously, but with a subtle persistent echo» (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952, p.38).

Because Arnaut Daniel was the creator of the *sestina*, and Pound thought that inventors are those who «found a new process, or whose extant work gives us the first known example of a process» (Pound 1934a, p.39). In *I Gather the Limbs of Osiris* (Pound 1911b, now in Pound 1973, pp. 21-44) Pound claimed that Arnaut created a poetic style, unlike his contemporaries; Arnaut founded his method on the research of beauty in the poem, which is possible through a polyphonic rhyme. He paid attention to what supports and correlates words, music and rhythm; this is possible only when «the music of rhymes depends upon their arrangement, not on their multiplicity» (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952, p.38). Pound praised Arnaut also because he developed two ways of writings, the *melopoeia* and *logopoeia*; for the former, Pound thought that Provençal poetry could present many

more cases of it, because music and words were at the same level of importance. The latter was present in Arnaut as «his search for *le mot juste*, resulting in his precision on language» (McDougal 1972, p.106); in 1934 Pound added to these two types of writing another one, defining it as *phanopoeia*: this was visible in Arnaut too, because in his poems «there are a number of images to which Pound has ascribed a “visionary significance”» (McDougal 1972, p.107). To sum up, Pound found in Arnaut «the precision of language he so admires in Dante, the introduction of a number of new stanzaic forms, a brilliant use of rhyme, and a thorough development of “melopoeia”, “phanopoeia”, and “logopoeia”» (McDougal 1972, p.107); so thanks to Dante and his language, «where image and idea are one and the same, where neologism coincides with a new situation, where neatness conveys the primeval strength of the word, where essentiality reaches sublimity» (Cherchi 1995, p.59), he glanced at Pound, Dante's predecessor.

Returning to *Sestina: Altaforte*, if for *sestina*¹⁸ we meant Arnaut's creation, here Pound «with the exception of two lines (21-22, where the ending words are reversed), and the envoy (where only four of the six ending words are repeated), Pound follows Daniel's scheme exactly» (McDougal 1972, p.57); in fact the first stanza of Pound's *sestina* was the following:

I
 Damn it all! All this our South strinks peace.
 You whoreson dog, Papiols, come! Let's to music!
 I have no life save when the swords clash.
 But ah! When I see the standards gold, vair, purple, opposing
 and the broad fields beneath them turn crimson,
 then howl I my heart nigh mad with rejoicing.
 (Pound 1909b, vv.1-6, p.42).

So the end-words were:

peace	A
music	B
clash	C
opposing	D
crimson	E
rejoicing	F

18 The *Canzone sestina* or *Lyric sestina* works in this way: each stanza is composed of six lines, without the typical divisions of a canzone; every stanza is linked to the following one with end-words, and the following has the same end-words but in a different order. The order is dictated by the *retrogradatio cruciata*, according to it the first line of the second stanza rhymes with the last of the first stanza, the second line of the second stanza with the first line of the first stanza, the third with the second to last, the fourth with the second, the fifth with the third to last, the sixth with the third. The result is: ABCDEF-FAEBDC-CFDABE-ECBFAD-DEACFB-BDFECA. Then the envoy of three verses closed the sestina, and according to Arnaut this provided for the nearest end-words, as they were in the last stanza (ECA); differently Dante reused all the end-words, allocating them in this way: three within the lines, and three at the end of them (Beccaria, 1994).

In the fourth stanza, the end-words should follow the scheme ECBFAD, whereas it worked in this way:

IV

And I love to see the sun rise blood-crimson
AI watch his spears through the dark clash
And it fills all my heart with rejoicing
And pries wide my mouth with fast music
When I see him so scorn and defy peace,
His lone might' gainst all darkness opposing.
(Pound 1909b, vv.1-6, p.43).

So the end-words were in this arrangement:

crimson	E
clash	C
rejoicing	F
music	B
peace	A
opposing	D

And the envoy (or *tornada*), where the rhyme scheme returned to the stanza of the beginning, it should have three end-words within the three verses, and three as end-words at the end of them, according to Dante's scheme:

B(intern)	A(end)
D(intern)	F(end)
E(intern)	C(end)

However Pound's *sestina* followed Arnaut's original scheme in this way:

VII

And let the **music** of the swords make them **crimson!**
Hell grant soon we hear again the swords **clash!**
Hell blot black for always the thought '**Peace!**'
(Pound 1909b, vv.1-3, p.43).

So the scheme was as follows:

music B	crimson E
no word for D	clash C
no word for E	Peace A

If we look at the final part of the *sestina*, Bertran was presented «as a bloodthirsty warrior, and his two invocations to “hell” are an ironic reminder of Dante's later placement of him» (McDougal 1972, p.58); unlike the *sestina* by Arnaut, «who had chosen end words that change in meaning from verse to verse, Pound's end words are relatively inflexible, and simply produce a hollow echo with each repetition» (McDougal 1972, p.58).

Pound dedicated another poem to Bertran de Born, *Near Perigord*, in which Pound wondered if the Troubadour poet in question was mainly a poet of war or of love; Pound knew that Bertran had left a love *canço*:

Bertrants, En Bertrants, left a fine canzone:
“Maent, I love you, you have turned me out.
The voice at Montfort, Lady Agnes' hair [...]”
(Pound 1915, vv.5-7, p.111).

At the beginning of the poem, Pound questioned:

You'd have men' s hearts up from the dust
And tell their secrets, Messire Cino,
Right enough? Then read between the lines of Uc St. Circ,
Solve me the riddle, for you know the tale
(Pound 1915, vv.1-4, p.111).

In the final part of the second section Pound referred to Dante's opinion on Bertran:

Surely I saw, and still before my eyes
Goes on that headless trunk that bears for light
Its own head swinging, gripped by the dead hair,
And like a swinging lamp that says, “Ah me!
I severed men, my head and heart
Ye see here severed, my life's 'counterpart'
(Pound 1915, vv.164-169, p.118).

So Pound summarized Dante's judgement on Bertran from *Inferno* XXVIII into six lines, adding a transformation to his sort of concise translation: he made an interpretation for the last two lines, emphasizing «a separation of “head and heart”»; and thus he was interpreting Dante to support his belief that Bertran was torn between his devious strategy (his “head”) and his love for Maent (his “heart”))» (McDougal 1972, p.66). In the third part there was the theme of separation again, but it referred both to “head and heart”, and physically to Bertran and Maent:

I love a woman. The stars fell from heaven.
And always our two natures were in strife
(Pound 1915, vv.171-172, p.118).

Pound showed that «Dante's punishment was in fact effective even before Bertran's death. Bertran separated brothers, and in so doing was separated from Maent» (McDougal 1972, p.68); it was the theme of *contrappasso*, which meant that in the afterworld the sinner served a term of imprisonment commensurate to his fault, for the analogy or for the opposite. Therefore, «Bertran, torn in life between his head and his heart, finds this to be his ultimate fate» (McDougal 1972, p.69). Pound claimed that «the art of the troubadours meets with philosophy at Bologna and a new era of lyric poetry is begun» (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952, p.101); what came to light was the fact that Dante was what he was thanks to past tradition, in particular thanks to the Troubadours' contribution; Dante talked about their mother tongue referring to the Provençal Langue d'Oc, so he was expressing «a slight evidence of the regard in which this forgotten speech was held by the Tuscan poets, both for its sound and for its matter» (Pound 1916, now in Pound 1952, p.88). Pound is linked to Dante for many different aspects, but what is interesting to notice here is his bond to the Troubadour tradition.

5.2 Provençal forms arranged

Pound wrote many poems that derived from forms of Provençal poems and the contents of Italian ones; in *Canzon: The Yearly Slain* (1911) – which represented a summary of love in the lyric – Pound adapted the poetic form of Arnaut, who used it in *Sols sui qui sai lo sobrafan quem sortz*, and he wrote as epigraph:

Canzon: The Yearly Slain .

(WRITTEN IN REPLY TO MANNING'S "KORE.")

" Et huiusmodi stantiae usus est fere in omnibus cantionibus suis
Arnaldus Danielis et nos eum secuti sumus."¹⁹
(Pound 1911a)

19 Of such a kind is the use of *stanza* in almost all Arnaut Daniel's *canzoni* and we have followed him (editor's note).

So Pound followed the example of Dante, who mulled over a Provençal poem and then imitated it; he also used «a very popular medieval tradition: writing a poem that answers or amplifies the work of another poet» (McDougal 1972, p.80); unlike Provençal love poetry, Pound presented a fleeting love, «based on a sexuality unredeemed by any nobler vision» (McDougal 1972, p.82), which was a reflection of the cyclical temporality of nature:

IV

Love that is born of Time and comes and goes!
Love that doth hold all noble hearts in fief!
As red leaves follow where the wind hath flown,
so all men follow Love when Love is dead...
(Pound 1911a, vv.1-4).

In *Canzon: The Vision* (1911)– which was «a prayer for union with an 'ivory woman' who with a falcon of light has caught his heron heart» (Moody 2007, p.140) – and in *Canzon: Of Incense* Pound presented the theme of *fin'amor*: «each poem chronicles a love perceived at a distance in time and space (an *amor de lonh*), and in each poem the lady is described in terms of the Tuscan poets» (McDougal 1972, p.83); in the first poem Pound apparently «continually looks backward and relives the moment of ecstasy» (McDougal 1972, p.84) when he wrote:

III

When new love plucks the falcon from his wrist
And cuts the gyve and casts the scarlet hood
Where is the heron heart whom flight avails
O quick to prize me Love, how suddenly
From out the tumult truth hath ta' en his own,
And in this vision is our past unrolled.
(Pound 1911a, vv.1-6).

Canzon: The Spear (1911)– where 'spear' meant «the shaft of light from heaven which both gives the wound of love and cures it» (Moody 2007, p.139) – used the stanza-form which Jaufré Rudel employed in *D'un amor de lohn*, and following his content, Pound wrote about a man separated from his beloved; «Unlike Rudel's poem, where a strong physical attraction exists, there is a complete absence of sexual contact» (McDougal 1972, p.86). Close to the end of the poem, Pound introduced Guinizzelli's topos of light:

VII

The light within her eyes, which slays
Base thoughts and stilleth troubled waters,
Is like the gold where sunlight plays
Upon the still o'ershadowed waters.
(Pound 1911a, vv.1-4).

5.3 Comparative ways of handling past tradition

In the first years of his career Pound pursued an imagistic point of view, but he is also remembered for being a Modernist, due to his habit of defending «the most innovative experiments with precedents not only traditional but sometimes primitivistic [...] At the same time [he] was marked by a need to get free of the past [...] but he was sure that a revolutionary step toward freedom would move in the direction of recovering true tradition, not way from it» (Schneidau 1969, p.110). His comparative way of handling tradition characterized all his poetry oeuvre, and *The Cantos* was the broadest and the most variegated example of this attitude; although it was the result of a whole poetic and critical life, where different cultural ideas amalgamated, it showed Pound's use of Provençal materials. In his first collections of poems one can see an attempt to recreate a historical period, and he succeeded in the revival of the past Provençal, making the poets of the period contemporaries to him (McDougal, 1972). «Implicit in his treatment of the past, both in the early poems and *The Cantos*, is his recognition of the permanence of the values to the contemporary world. Each historical character is chosen because he embodies certain values that Pound finds attractive: taken together, they indicate why Provence has exerted such an appeal for him» (McDougal 1972, p.141); Pound kept faith to his consideration of the Provençal authority through all his works, but in *The Cantos* the presentation of his values were implicit, leaving to the reader the assignment of understanding the significance. Troubadours started to appear from *Canto IV*, where Guillelm de Cabestaing and his legend of the eaten heart were evoked:

«It is Cabestan's heart in the dish.»
«It is Cabestan's heart in the dish.»
(Pound 1924/5, now in Pound 1972, vv.21-22, p.24)

He started from the first reference to this tradition of a fatal banquet, writing earlier in line 15th:

Speaking in the low drone...:
Ityn!
Et ter flebiliter, Itys, Ityn!
And she went toward the window and cast her down,
«All the while, the while, swallows crying:»
Ityn!
(Pound 1924/5, now in Pound 1972, vv.15-20, p.24)

He referred to the act of cannibalism of Procne and Philomela²⁰ as recounted in Greek mythology; as the story goes, these two sisters were daughters of the king of Athens, Pandion; this latter came to war against the king of Thebes, and for this reason he asked Tereus from Thrace for help. Pandion was defeated his enemy, so he gave the hand of his child Procne to Tereus, as thanksgiving sign for the received help and from this wedding Itys was born; then Tereus fell in love with Philomela and he molested her. To prevent her from reporting this to her sister, he lopped off her tongue; but Philomela embroidered the fact on a *peplos*, so Procne could see what had happened. Procne killed her child Itys, then she served him as a meal to the unsuspecting Tereus, before running away with her sister. Tereus, blinded by fury, tried to kill the two sisters, but the two girls prayed to the Gods to be turned into birds; the divinities accepted their request, so Procne became a swallow and Philomela a nightingale. After the direct speech reported by Pound in the poem, where it is claimed that in the dish there is Cabestaing's heart, he continued alluding to the Troubadour legend, saying:

And she went toward the window,
the slim white stone bar
Making a double arch;
Firm even fingers held to the firm pale stone;
Swung for a moment,
and the wind out of Rhodéz
Caught in the full of her sleeve.
...the swallows crying:
'Tis. 'Tis. Ytis!
(Pound 1924/5, now in Pound 1972, vv.24-32, p.24)

Probably Pound read directly from Cabestaing's *Vida*²¹, because only Cabestaing²² referred to a dish, confirming his knowledge of the Troubadour tradition; the *Vida* recounted the story of a rich but black-hearted man, Raimon de Castel Rossillon, whose wife – dona Soremonda – was in love with Guillelm de Cabestaing; when the lord found out this adultery, he could not tolerate such an outrage, so he decided to take his revenge: he planned a homicide; he ordered his helpers to kill the man, to extract his heart and to cut off his head. His helpers obeyed, and they gave the heart to their

20 I referred to the Italian dictionary of mythology of Beccaria (2004).

21 G. de Cabestaing, in Boutiere and Schutz 1971, pp.531-533.

22 One consequent result of this Provençal legend was the poem *A ciascun'alma presa e gentil core* by Dante; in the third chapter of *Vita Nuova* he wrote about an eaten heart which referred directly to Cabestaing's *Vida*, but unlike this, he reduced the story to the mere act, subtracting the context of the legend. Dante's scene was simplified because adultery, revenge and disclosure were omitted; Dante maintained the metaphorical equivalence built in the Provençal literature which objectified the essence of the love affair. The poem recounted that Dante had a vision in which Beatrice was eating his heart, while Love, who was holding her, was crying; the vision, which had a worthiness of reality for a medieval man, was the overall metaphor of Dante's relation with tradition; as Beatrice ate the heart, so Dante gulped down the Provençal tradition. Eating the heart meant the absorption of a poetic tradition, which became something different, specific of the poet; in Dante's vision it is possible to notice what he had eaten "before" writing, that is Cabestaing's legend.

lord; then Rossilion prepared a meal for his wife with Cabestaing' cooked heart. He served it to his wife, and after she ate it (him), the husband completed his revenge telling her what she had really eaten; contrary to his expectations, the wife said that it was the best dish that she had ever eaten²³. Given that the punishment had the opposite effect, the husband tried to bring it to completion by hitting her with a sword; she forestalled him by letting herself fall from the terrace, so in the suicide she freed herself and hushed up her husband's vindictive desire. She committed an act of cannibalism, which is a taboo in every culture and time because it presupposes a doubling of the identity, and human people are not allowed to be double; from the Catholic viewpoint, it is a sin of pride, because only God can be three entities in the same person (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). In this case in particular, the woman ate the main vital organ, so the most powerful part of a person, inasmuch as it is the seat of the soul and courage; moreover the heart is symbolically the body part linked to love, so the closest part to the love of her lover. The centre of the revenge was the said-unsaid, where the dishonour struck the passive subject, and the truth sullied him; a power game was established, where the woman won because she had the last word. She did not feel any disgust at the act of eating, inasmuch as she would never have the chance to taste anything better, because she understood that she herself and her lover would be together forever, her body with his heart, thus only one. After alluding to Cabestaing's heart on the dish, Pound wrote:

«No other taste shall change this» (Pound 1924/5, now in Pound 1972, v.23, p.24)

In this way he referred to Soremonda's expression, because Pound did not know another taste like this, since this was the best of all; given that, this taste could be the Provençal one, so nothing better than it existed and no other great poet could change this assumption.

In this dense structure of the text, the author mingled and built links with two different stories of cannibalism, using the Ancient Greek tradition and the Provençal one and showing his way of handling past resources with a comparative attitude.

Then Pound wrote about the Provençal poet Peire Vidal, firstly in the poem *Piere Vidal Old*, and years later in *Canto IV*: in the poem he told about this Troubadour who fell in love with a lady from Carcassone, known as Na Loba, and due to his unbridled passion for her, he was clearly manifesting the first signs of madness, behaving more like a beast rather than a man, directly referring to Vidal's *De chantar m'era laissatz per ira e per dolor*²⁴:

23 «Seigner, ben , 'avetz dat si bon manjar que ja mais non manjarai d'autre», G. Cabestaing, now in Boutiere and Schutz 1971, p.531-533.

24 P. Vidal, in A Valle 1960, p.57.

When I but think upon the great dead days
And turn my mind upon that splendid madness,
Lo! I do curse my strength
And blame the sun his gladness;
For that the one is dead
And the red sun mocks my sadness.

Behold me, Vidal, that was fool of fools!
Swift as the king wolf was I and as strong
When tall stags fled me through the alder brakes,
And every jongleur knew me in his song,
And the hounds fled and the deer fled
And none fled over long.

[...]

One more fool's vigil with the hollyhocks.
Swift came the Loba, as a branch that's caught,
Torn, green and silent in the swollen Rhone,
Green was her mantle, close, and wrought
Of some thin silk stuff that's scarce stuff at all,
But like a mist wherethrough her white form fought

[...]

Just then she woke and mocked the less keen blade.
Ah God, the Loba! and my only mate!
Was there such flesh made ever and unmade!
God curse the years that turn such women grey!
Behold here Vidal, that was hunted, flayed,
Shamed and yet bowed not and that won at last.
(Pound 1909b, vv.1-12, 31-36, 43-48, p.46-47)

Pound recounted Vidal's experience in detail, explaining the factors which led Vidal to his madness; Pound's interpretation seemed to be necessary to understand the comparison which linked Vidal and Actaeon in *Canto IV*, where he compared the legend of Actaeon and Diana²⁵ with the story of Vidal; «both legends deal with metamorphosis, resulting from a mystical perception of great intensity» (McDougal 1972, p.143); Pound wrote:

Actaeon...
and a valley,
[...]
If it were gold.
Beneath it, beneath it
Not a ray, not a slivver, not a spare disc of sunlight

25 According to the legend, Actaeon was reared by Chirone, a centaur who taught him the art of hunting; once Actaeon went hunting, he saw Phoebe (alias Diana) who was having a bath in a wellspring; on being seen Phoebe went crazy, and she transformed him into a stag, setting his dogs on him; they did not recognize their owner, so they mangled his flesh (Biondetti, 1997).

Flaking the black, soft water;
Bathing the body of nymphs, of nymphs, and Diana,
Nymphs, white-gathered about her, and the air, air,
Shaking, air alight with the goddess,
fanning their hair in the dark
[...]

Then Actaeon: Vidal,
Vidal. It is old Vidal speaking,
stumbling along in the wood,
Not a patch, not a lost shimmer of sunlight,
the pale hair of the goddess.
The dogs leap on Actaeon,
'hither, hither, Actaeon,'
Spotted stag of the wood;
(Pound 1917-1962, now in Pound 1972, vv.33-34, 39-46, 52-59, p.24-26)

Although Vidal chose his metamorphosis, here he was compared to Actaeon because they both understand themselves to be part of the universe and connected with it; «the sexual encounters of Vidal and Actaeon permit them to experience this revelatory intuition, although in both cases the cost is great» (McDougal 1972, p.144).

Pound recounted «a history of the Provençal civilisation» (Makin 1978, p.73) in *Canto VI*, where in a few full lines he blended the greatest personalities who marked the history of Provençal culture, from the first Troubadour, William IX of Aquitaine, to the last one, the Italian Sordello; the *Canto* represented «a continuity of culture and awareness of human possibilities from the circle of William IX of Aquitaine right through to the circle of Dante, and that this continuity depended on personal influence and contact» (Makin 1978, p.73). The composition starts with the first Troubadour William IX, referring to «the great metaphor of Odysseus's journeyings in search of understanding» (Makin 1978, p.74) of *Canto I*²⁶:

VI
What you have done, Odysseus,
We know what you have done...
And that Guillaume sold out his ground rents
(Seventh of Poitiers, Ninth of Aquitain).
(Pound 1924/5, now in Pound 1972, *Canto VI*, vv.1-4, p.40).

With the third line Pound alluded to the First Crusade in which William IX took part (Makin, 1978); during his journey he probably got in touch with the Arabic culture in Spain, and his poetry was affected by it, as Pound recognized in *Canto VIII*:

26 «In *Canto I* he is going to Hell to find the way home; or he is returning to the ancients to draw on their wisdom for current use. Elsewhere he is voyaging out onward in search of cultural contacts» (Makin 1978, p.74).

And Poitiers, you know, Guillame Poitiers,
had brought the song up out of Spain
With the singers and viels.
(Pound 1924/5, now in Pound 1972, *Canto VIII*, vv.156.-158, p.62).

The profits of William's crusade «are sexual: distributing the available wealth fertilises, and hoarding it is, for him, like sodomy, 'life-denying'» (Makin 1978, p.75). Pound directly quoted William's words:

«Tant las fotei com auzirets
«Cen e quatre vingt et veit vetz...»²⁷.
(Pound 1924/5, now in Pound 1972, vv.5-6, p.40).

Meaning that the Troubadour poet «preferred increasing his knowledge of the world to sitting on acquired wealth» (Makin 1978, p.75); William was the king who put his people into contact with gods, and he represented the sovereign power, the lover and the poet who fecundated, in this case, a cultural dynasty:

Till Louis is wed with Eleanor
and had (He, Guillaume) a son that had to wife
The Duchess of Normandia whose daughter
Was wife to King Henry e maire del rei jove..
(Pound 1924/5, now in Pound 1972, vv.9-12, p.40).

Pound named several personalities of this dynasty: Eleanor of Aquitaine, who was William IX's granddaughter and whose first husband was Louis VII of France, then William IX, William X, Eleanor's second husband, Henry Plantagenet, and Richard Coeur de Lion, who was Eleanor's and Henry's third child; then Pound told about Eleanor's and Louis' love affairs and about the cultural interests of Plantagenet's family.

Pound quoted *Can vei la lauzeta mover* of Bernart de Ventadorn when he told about Bernart who fell in love with Eleanor, and the situation of the adultery referred to the atmosphere of Bernart's poem; in fact Pound wrote:

«Is shut by Eblis in
«And will not hawk nor hunt
nor get her free in the air
«Nor watch fish rise to bait
«Nor the glare-wing'd flies alight in the creek's edge

27 «I fucked them as much as you will hear, A hundred and eight-eight times..» (Makin 1978, p.75).

«Save in my absence, Madame.
“Que la lauzeta mover”.
(Pound 1924/5, now in Pound 1972, vv.42-48, p.42).

As Bernart had written:

Can vei la lauzeta mover
de joi sas alas contra l rai,
que s'oblida e s laissa chazer²⁸
(Bernart, in Lazar 2001, vv. 1-3).

Pound believed that the *Dolce Stil Novo* descended by the Provençal poems, and «here he 'demonstrates' this by atmosphere. The clarity of the Bernart section, which is a faithful remaking of the tone-colour of some of the best Provençal verse – for example, the lines of Bernart quoted – is completed by a line borrowed from Guido Cavalcanti» (Makin 1978, p.79): the poem in question said «who sheds such light in the air» (Makin 1978, p.79):

Chi e questa che ven, ch'ogn'om la mira,
che fa tremar di claritate l'aire
(Cavalcanti, in Favati 1957, p.136).

Pound completed the Plantagenet's dynasty with the Italian poet Sordello, although this latter had no connection with Eleanor's lineag: he came from Mantua, but wrote his poetical compositions in Provençal language; Pound recounted Sordello's life with the same Languedoc idiom:

E lo Sordels si fo de Mantoana,
fills d'un paubre cavallier, sier El Cort;
E deletaise en cansons.²⁹
(Pound 1924/5, now in Pound 1972, vv.54-56, p.43).

In this Troubadour *Canto* Pound showed a dynasty which «renewed itself in each generation not by anxious conservation of disembodied images of the past, not by a kind of cultural classicism, but by cultural/monetary/sexual fertilisation by courage, which is why the Provençal poetry was not a static but an evolving art» (Makin 1978, p.81).

In *The Spirit of Romance* Pound claimed «I believe in a sort of permanent basis in humanity, that is to say, I believe that Greek myth arose when someone having passed through delightful psychic experience tried to communicate it to others» (Pound 1916, now in Pound 1952, p.92); therefore as a human being gives birth to a child in order to defeat death, because he is the reflection of the

28 «When I see the lark move its wings for joy against the light, so that it forgets itself and lets itself fall...» (Makin 1978, p.75).

29 «E lo Sordels si fo di Mantovana, Son of a poor knight, Sier Escort, And he delighted himself in chançons» (Pound 1924/5, now in Pound 1972, vv.54-56, p.42).

parents' self in the future, so the meaning of Literature is related to the attempt to transfer one's own mood to those who come after. In this way different epochs can communicate between themselves, and man could see and interpret the possible relationships and the common *basis of humanity*; according to this vision, different historical figures can be considered as contemporaries, as Pound did. With Provençal material he succeeded in developing «a method for recreating the historical past, and he continues to use this method in *The Cantos*» (McDougal 1972, p.150); although he came to adopt the ideogrammatic form for his work, he maintained and developed the polyphonic rhyme of Arnaut Daniel. His attempt to consider the tradition as a whole is proved in mixing different and far epochs, seeking «esempi di giustizia e verità incarnati da uomini retti e testimoniati da monumenti imperturi» (Gallesi 1002, p.9); his work represents an epic, and this result was determined by a deep admiration for Dante, starting with the assumption that his work had never seen a decline because his purpose remained current during the literary and critical periods, and by the desire of exceeding the master. In the light of its medieval contents, Dante's knowledge had spiced the poetic talent of Pound, but this latter developed a basic idea similar to Dante's and at the same time different according to a more focused point of view. Dante used the genres and the works inherited from the past cultures, Latin and Romance ones, in order to put the Italian tradition in a more elevated position, as an avantgarde in which the vernacular showed its preeminence over the others and over Latin in particular (Asperti 2004); Troubadour poets were part of a meta-literary reflection of Dante, they represented the way through which he experimented and exceeded a new kind of language, and they were the touchstone to describe Dante's medieval world; «he lasted through the medieval-hating Age of Enlightenment, and really came into his own in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries» (Wilhelm 1974, p.155). Pound created a work with the appearance of Dante's *Comedy*, and in a similar way he handled the Troubadours' tradition; he chose the epic genre, and he started with the medieval period, seeing in them the example of the best of technical artifice; as Dante did, he started from a good model and thanks to it he developed a new idea of genre, elaborating the old one. It is interesting that having at his disposal a temporal period wider than that which Dante used, and the multiple possibility to refer to several cultures, Pound's choice fell again on the Provençal tradition, a great civilization fundamental for his work. Admiring the master and his great work, *The Divina Commedia*, Pound knew that there were several difficulties in reproducing, or rather creating, an epic in the twentieth century with the American Language; to overcome them he followed Dante's choice of escaping the necessities of the epic genre – as a tradition outlined by a precise order, where a historical and mythical hero told his story, through lies which seemed to disguise his main purpose – by gaining from a multitude of traditions, and then unifying these through their connections with himself (Redman, 1995). This heterogeneous

selection was made by Pound in *The Cantos*, like all the rest of his poetry, related to his concept – and Dante's implicit one – of handling tradition.

Pound's epic followed the leadership of Dante, embracing «Aristotelian reasoning with Platonic imagination, scientific knowledge with poetic sensibility, and East with West» (Wilhelm 1982, p.62); unlike Dante, he thought he wished to write an historic poem, and the economic theme was at the centre of his interests: «Where Dante used the supernatural as the source of mystery for his poem, Pound uses the handling of money» (Wilhelm 1982, p.70). He did not want to recreate Dante's cosmology, also because he claimed that «There is little doubt that Dante conceived the real Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise as states, and not places» (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952, p.128); thus he opted for a Confucian cosmology, maintaining the musical structure of the *Divina Commedia* in his journey of the mind.

SECOND CHAPTER

T. S. Eliot and the medieval tradition of Dante

1. The art of saying

1.1 What is poetry

The definition which Eliot gave for *poetry* was an attempt to be innovative and original, and it was the result of a life spent in inspecting what poetry really consisted of; his assumptions about this art were essential to understand his poetical way and why he made choices oriented to Dante's universe; he started talking about three voices which take part in this art: «The first is the voice of the poet talking to himself – or to nobody. The second is the voice of the poet addressing an audience, whether large or small. The third is the voice of the poet when he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse; when he is saying [...] only what he can say within the limits of one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character» (Eliot 1953, p.4). He claimed that the first voice diverges from the second concerning the poetic communication: the first one addresses the reader to his own voice, in the second one the poet give voice to his imaginary characters creating a new speech; so the problem arise between the quasi-dramatic verse and the non-dramatic one. Talking about love poetry Eliot said that «a good love poem, though it may be addressed to one person, is always meant to be overheard by other people» (Eliot 1953, p.6); according to him the best metric form to write about love is prose. On the basis of his own poetical experience, he claimed that these three voices are audible in the mind of the poet who knows the ropes of writing for a long time; he learns that the poetry written to be read is different from the one written to be recited, and the same verse pronounced by a single person or by a choir of people sounds different.

Examining the relation among the characters described by the poet, poetry – meaning the language which amounted to a high level of intensity in particular narrative moments – has to be distributed proportionately to the characterization in the poem; when a character has to speak with

words which are not poetry, he needs appropriate lines to do it, because «When the poetry comes, the personage on the stage must not give the impression of being merely a mouthpiece for the author» (Eliot 1953, p.9). The character can own features belonging to the natural traits of the author, otherwise the writer can give to the character some values or defects which has never belonged to him; the life and the behavioural traits of the characters derives from the poet, because the poet instills these in them, but in turn the poet depends on the characters whom he creates.

Writing for the third voice means writing with the «voice of poetic drama [which] is brought out in another way by comparing it with the voice of the poet in non-dramatic poetry which has a dramatic element in it – and conspicuously in the dramatic monologue» (Eliot 1953, p.12); then he claimed that in the dramatic monologue the dominant voice is the second one, because when he speaks through a mask, he is speaking to an audience and not to himself. Poetry was not born only for poet's fruition, it needs an audience, in particular in the event that the poet writes an epic, because his voice is essential to guide the reading/hearing people. He suggested that the *Divine Comedy* is not an epic, or rather not totally an epic, because also the characters speak directly to the readers; for this reason this work can be seen midway between epic and drama, inasmuch «the epic is essentially a tale told to an audience, while drama is essentially an action exhibited to an audience» (Eliot 1953, p.15). For the first voice Eliot did not mean the lyric poetry, because he said that the term lyric is not satisfactory inasmuch it refers to a short poem which expresses in a direct way the poet's emotions and thoughts; he claimed that «the poet may be concerned solely with expressing in verse – using all his resources of words, with their history, their connotations, their music – [his] obscure impulse» (Eliot 1953, p.18). The poet's aim is to find the best right words to express what he means, without thinking about an audience.

Eliot asserted that the three voices of poetry are often heard together, and he concluded that in poetry there cannot be only the voice of the poet talking with himself, otherwise it would be an exercise of rhetoric; part of the delight of reading a poem consisted of «the enjoyment of overhearing words which are not addressed to us» (Eliot 1953, p.18). He reiterated that if a poem has been imagined for a private delight of the poet, it would be made of an unknown language, understandable only by the poet himself; differently, he believed that the three voices of poetry are present in the poetic drama. Each character had his own voice, distinct from the other ones; this voice represents the voice of the character who talks with the words of the author, and the author who is speaking with this voice saying something for himself, so two meanings are included in the same words, telling something quite different for both. Besides, in the great poetry, an impersonal voice stand out from the previous two. The structure of Dante's *Comedy* worked in the same way, because the work started as a drama – a tragedy which evolved into a comedy – in which the

writer's voice told the story; the poet mingled his voice as a narrator with his voice as a character, while meeting other several characters and talking with them. Each character had his own voice, although he/she expressed what the poet would say; poet's impersonal voice could be heard in particular when the writer gave the words of another real poet to one of his characters, for example when in *Purgatorio* XXVI Dante talked with Arnaut Daniel, who used the words of Folchetto from Marseilles³⁰.

1.2 The role of the poet

Analyzing the figure of the poet, Eliot explained that he could not use the past as if it were a chewed piece of food, taking the part which he preferred; he had to «be very conscious of the main current, which does not at all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations» (Eliot 1919, now in Eliot 1982, p.38). He asserted that the changes of the artistic mind of Europe were developments, meaning a sort of refinements, but as a matter of fact, since they did not abandon nothing of the previous past tradition, they did not improve anything; so Eliot suggested that the substantial difference between past and present consist in the fact that the last one «is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show» (Eliot 1919, now in Eliot 1982, p.38). Handling tradition means seeing how a poet develops his work through a consciousness of the past, and in order to progress he has to sacrifice himself through a process of extinction of his personality: a depersonalization procedure; Eliot believed that in this way the poetic art approaches to the science feature of clarity. This theory of the impersonal poetry described how the poem was related to its author, meaning that «the mind of the mature poet differs from that of the immature one [...] by being a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations» (Eliot 1919, now in Eliot 1982, p.39); the greatest artist is the one who is able to separate his experience of suffering man from his

30 Arnaut started his personal presentation to Dante with these words: «Tan m'abellis vostre cortes deman, qu'ieu no me puese ni voill a vos cobrire. Ieu sui Arnaut, que plor e vau cantan» (Dante, *Inferno* XXVI, vv.140-142); *Tan m'abellis* was the *incipit* of Folchetto's poem, *Tant m'abellis l'amors pessamens* (F. de Marselha, now in F. de Marselha, p.68).

mind which creates the work starting from that pain. Eliot claimed that an experience of life makes emotions and feelings available to the poet: the great poetry uses these elements without an evident and direct way; the great poetry does not focus on the intensity of the feelings and emotions, but it centers on the artistic process of sublimation of the result, that is the moment during which all the shades of feelings, emotions, images, and the other poetic particles are ready to be united to form a new compound. In Eliot's metaphysical idea, «the poet has, not a “personality” to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which expressions and experiences combine in peculiar unexpected ways» (Eliot 1919, now in Eliot 1982, p.40); he continued asserting that, talking about the two elements at disposal to the poet, he does not look for creating new emotions, but he has to use the ones which he has available and, starting from these, express new feelings. He claimed that there are emotions which live in the poem and not in the poet's life; «The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living» (Eliot 1919, now in Eliot 1982, p.42).

The impersonal method theorised by Eliot was linked to the «esthetic value of personal expression» (Austin 1966, p.303), because he used the poetic process as a distraction from his personality. The poet has to be impersonal, taking distance from his own personality, but when the poem is complete it appeared personal, because the characters reveals indirectly the poet's personality behind them; so the great poet seems to be always present but at the same time always hidden, and the touch of his creativeness is not completely revealed in this objective poetry. «Eliot's rejection of personality as a distinguishing quality of the poet's mind [...] is a rejection of the belief that the personalities of man and poet, during the creative process, are unified, not of the belief that personality constitutes one of the causes of value » (Austin 1966, p.305); but the world created by the poet depends on his personal life, and it becomes the symbol of the poet's self. In the essay *Hamlet and his problem*, examining the work of Shakespeare, Eliot formulated his theory of the *objective correlative*, according to which an artist has to express an emotion by «a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked» (Eliot 1920b, now in Eliot 1960, p.100); in the great work of art the characters described by the poet are the «“objective equivalents”» (Austin 1966, p.305) of the poet's emotion, but this emotion and the characters' ones do not need to be the same. Although the poet worked through depersonalization, his poem is integral part of himself, inasmuch as the impersonality of the poem affects at first his strategy rather than the expressed emotion, and then

the impersonal poem is the expression of a symbolic meaning; on the other hand Eliot's interest focuses on what held the objective framework, that are the author's hidden emotions and personality (Austin, 1966).

1.3 The role of the critic

In *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, he offered instructions for reading and better understanding his poetry, while he was formulating his general assumptions, because «the poet as critic often tells us as much about himself as about the poet under observation» (Kenner 1955, p.27). Through his criticism he appeared as «a poet of moral nature, or the history of man» (Kenner 1955, p.28), because when he analyzed Dante he reasoned that a poet has to be aware of both past and present tradition, in order to develop a poetic sensitivity for human relations; so this became a central aim in his poetry. Looking for the one who embodies the perfect critic, Eliot described different types of reviewer, starting from the *impressionistic critic*: this one is the one who exposes «a sensitive and cultivated mind – cultivated, that is, by the accumulation of a considerable variety of impressions from all the arts and several languages – before an “object”» (Eliot 1920d, now in Eliot 1960, p.3); his criticism shows his impressions with an interpretative translation of them. He said that a critic should elucidate what he means, leaving to the reader the task of judging by himself; he traced a sketch of the technical critic, who writes in order to present a new lesson about how to practice a particular art and who is limited – as well as his own aim – because there is not «the disinterested exercise of intelligence» (Eliot 1920d, now in Eliot 1960, p.12). According to Eliot, Aristotle embodied the mind which a critic has to have, that is «the scientific mind – a mind which, as it is rarely found among scientists excepts in fragments, might better be called the intelligent mind [...] an amateur, though an excessively able amateur, in physiology, he combined to a remarkable degree sensitiveness, erudition, sense of fact and sense of history, and generalizing power» (Eliot 1920d, now in Eliot 1960, p.12). So he claimed that a substantial difference subsists between the one who is simply able to appreciate a poem and the one who can express an opinion with a critical intelligence; he concluded that the sensibility of the poetic creator and the sensibility of the critic should be complementary, and the same person should own these two attitudes. He said that poetry is an entity in a continuously changing state, and criticism is understandable through the

assumptions which critics express around the concept of poetry itself; he claimed that a poet should know what his poetry would mean, «but what a poem means is as much what it means to others as what it means to the author; and indeed, in the course of time a poet may become merely a reader in respect to his own works, forgetting his original meaning – or without forgetting, merely changing» (Eliot 1933, now in Eliot 1950, p.130). In fact «The reader's interpretation may differ from the author's and be equally valid – it may even be better. There may be much more in a poem than the author was aware of» (Eliot 1957, p.31).

In 1957 Eliot wrote another essay about criticism linked to poetry, called *The Frontiers of Criticism*, as a development of his first argument; he claimed that in his time criticism was undergoing the influence of a heightened interest in literature, and in particular poetry seemed the most convenient way to discuss literary criticism because poetical style appeared essential for a poem; although it was not true, «but the illusion that in poetry we come nearer to a purely aesthetic experience makes poetry the most convenient *genre* of literature to keep in mind» (Eliot 1957, p.107). He concluded by saying that often critics do not look for the origin of a poem – in relation to the sources used by the poet – but for its real meaning instead; the work of the critics could in this sense be dangerous, because «there must be just one interpretation of the poem as a whole, that must be right [but, at the same time] there will be details of explanation, especially with poems written in another age than our own, matters of fact, historical allusions» (Eliot 1957, p.113), when the meanings of a poem are rather dictated by the readers; the assumption that the meaning of that poem is shared by the intention of the poet can be another danger of criticism. After thirty years of experience, Eliot defined criticism as the way to «promote the understanding and enjoyment of literature» (Eliot 1957, p.115); probably, the perfect critic is the one who is also a poet, and the perfect poet is the one who is also a critic, because a double vision of poetry improves the creating act and the perception of it.

1.4 The craft of creating poetry

After deep analysis and well-pondered essays, Eliot claimed that the process of creating poetry is not nearly trivial, because «to create a form is not merely to invent a shape, a rhyme or rhythm. It is also the realization of the whole appropriate content of this rhyme or rhythm» (Eliot 1920f, p.63).

Eliot said that he knows only one way to grasp the poetic way of creating verses, and it occurs through the manipulation and the imitation of other poets; he claimed that the study of metric and its method is a way to learn poems, not poetry, because «it is not from rules [...] that we learn to write: we learn by imitation indeed, but by a deeper imitation than is achieved by analysis of style» (Eliot 1957, p.28). Talking about the music of poetry, he claimed that it cannot exist aloof from the meaning of poetry itself; he said that music must come from the poet's experience, in fact the poet must «like the sculptor, be faithful to the material in which he works; it is out of sounds that he has heard that he must make his melody and harmony» (Eliot 1957, p.32). Eliot's purpose is to underline that «a 'musical poem' is a poem which has a musical pattern of sound and a musical pattern of the secondary meanings of the words which compose it, and that these two patterns are indissoluble and one» (Eliot 1957, p.33).

He said that poetry, in particular modern poetry, is difficult because of personal reasons, which allow the poet to express himself in an obscure way; the difficulty can concern the novelty, otherwise a different reading can suggest a different difficult interpretation: «I know that some of the poetry to which I am most devoted is poetry which I did not understand at first reading» (Eliot 1933, now in Eliot 1950, p.151). Eliot started from the assumption that poetry has a social function, it has had it in the past and it will have it in the future; the purpose of the poetry might be conscious and deliberate. In the past, in the primitive runes and chants, the use of poetry was related to the religious ritual; the first forms of epic and saga were the means of transmitting history, which then would become a form of entertainment. «Before the use of written language a regular verse form must have been extremely helpful to the memory» (Eliot 1957, p.16); in the society which developed later, such as ancient Greece, poetry had the good measure of attention, developing out of the religious context and relating with social occasions. Some of these meanings were present in modern poetry; *didactic* poetry, like the *Georgics* of Virgil, did not evolve in modern verses, but it worked like prose, in particular in *satire*: so in this way a poem could be satiric, because its aim was «to ridicule the objects against which they are directed» (Eliot 1957, p.16), and didactic because its aim was «to persuade the reader to a particular political or religious point of view» (Eliot 1957, p.17); so its social function is linked to the information, and in turn, to philosophy, religion and politics. *Dramatic* poetry has the social function directly linked to drama, inasmuch as it is appreciated by that kind of public who reads the poem aloud, in solitude or in a small company, where the verse «has as its function the making an immediate, collective impression upon a large number of people gathered together to look at an imaginary episode acted upon a stage» (Eliot 1957, p.17). Eliot claimed that one of the essential functions of poetry, independently from the kind of poetry, is to arouse pleasure; besides, a poet should be able to give something more than only the

highest pleasure; behind every kind of intention that a poem communicates, «there is always the communication of some new experience, or some fresh understanding of the familiar, or the expression of something we have experienced but have no words for, which enlarges our consciousness or refines our sensibility» (Eliot 1957, p.18). The value of poetry is different from any other art expression, in particular because it can be completely appreciated in its own language, because translations lose part of the significance, much more if compared to a prose work; since the Middle Ages, people have felt the impulse towards the literary use of language, previously satisfied by Latin, so they began to write poetical verses: «this appears primarily to do with the expression of feeling and emotion; and that feeling and emotion are particular, whereas thought is general» (Eliot 1957, p.19). Therefore, the problem lies in what has to be expressed, because a thought can be easily translated into another language, thus keeping its meaning, whereas the feeling loses something when it is translated, because an emotion cannot only be expressed, but it has to be felt; learning a new language is one of the reasons which allow one to expand one's personality. Eliot said that emotions and feelings should be expressed «in the common language of the people – that is, in the language common to all classes: the structure, the rhythm, the sound, the idiom of a language, express the personality of the people which speaks it» (Eliot 1957, p.19). The poet's duty towards the language is an indirect duty to the reader, expressing through poetry what people feel and disclosing what they do not know about themselves; embodying different feelings is a way to enlarge the language which the poet uses. Then Eliot claimed that the way of perceiving feelings is different in space and time, and although it appears obvious, it is «the reason why we cannot afford to stop *writing* poetry» (Eliot 1957, p.20); he said that if we distance ourselves from past literature, without creating a continuity between the living literature and the past one, we will not be able to understand this latter and probably we will not be good at creating a new one. Poetry has a social function because, seeing it in the macro-system, it affects and enriches the language and the sensibility of the whole nation; what comes out from these assumptions is that the language which people use affects the quality of poetry, and at the same time «poetry, like every other single element in that mysterious social personality which we call our 'culture', must be dependent upon a great many circumstances which are beyond its control» (Eliot 1957, p.23). Although Eliot seems to be claiming that poetry should be appreciated through an isolated meditation, giving the impression that poetry is a way to separate people, from a national and cultural point of view, poetry shows that it has always influenced and stimulated different countries.

2. A conservative tradition

2.1 The concept of tradition

T. S. Eliot was both a great poet and a great critic of the twentieth century; his critical essays appear very useful to understand his poetical compositions and the literary context in which he worked. In 1919 he wrote *Tradition and the Individual Talent* for the magazine *The Egoist*, in which he defined what tradition consists of, and the relationship which a poet and his poetry established with it; he started emphasizing that approaching an author, especially a poet, implied getting in touch with the past tradition, because «the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously [meaning] the period of full maturity» (Eliot 1919, now in Eliot 1982, p.37). Eliot said that for tradition he did not mean following the example of the poets who had written before us and imitating them with a perfect adherence to their successes; he claimed that «Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour» (Eliot 1919, now in Eliot 1982, p.37). So tradition implicates the awareness of a historical continuity, which in turn involves a temporal perception of past and present, «not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence» (Eliot 1919, now in Eliot 1982, p.37); Eliot said that the historical sense allows the poet to write with the feeling of having all Literature at his disposal, because it is concurrent in its existence and its order. «This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer more acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity» (Eliot 1919, now in Eliot 1982, p.37). The poet, like the artist, has significance only in comparison and in contrast with other poets; he can be appreciated and valued considering his previous colleagues, who wrote like him, before him. Eliot believed that each new work of art has to relate with the other preexisting works, and it modifies the ideal order created by those prior to it, introducing itself in this disposition; given that the order was complete before the new work arrived, the novelty creates a change in the whole order, because this order is subjected to an alteration made by the introduced novelty with the existing works; the conscientious poet knows that «the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new» (Eliot 1919, now in Eliot 1982, p.37), and this line of reasoning entailed that a new work has to be judged by the past standards,

meaning a comparison with the past. According to Eliot, tradition is perceived as a contemporary entity, in which present and past are blended. If we look at the original etymological meaning of the Roman term *traditio*, it referred to a transaction of inheritance as the legal transfer of a property from a giver to a receiver; the testament was the centre of tradition. In the course of time it lost its original connotation, and the word was used to refer to dissimilar elements bound together, and «it is used to discover or to ascribe a continuity of motifs, ideas and topoi to authors and texts from an external point of view; [the normative significance of the term was retained in its] construction of continuity [...] that is established through cultural practices, rites and symbols, designed to counter change, decay and forgetting» (Assmann 2007, p.14). If art is not steady in front of time, it is necessary to consider its movements within the historical spirit, which «presuppose a critical awareness of the impact of time and change on all cultural products» (Assmann 2007, p.14); to avoid the loss of past, the cultural practice of canonization allows one to select specific monuments, including them into a transcendent Pantheon. In 1711 in *An Essay on Criticism* Alexander Pope traced the difference between art and nature, where the former was vulnerable to time unlike the latter; according to this assumption, art could be preserved unchanged if it is conceived as trans-temporal. The concept of tradition survived in the intellectual minds, after transformations and reinventions of it; when Eliot wrote about tradition, he discussed it through art, history and time, ending up again in the opposition between temporality, history and nature. Like such philosophers as Nietzsche and Heidegger, Eliot wondered what position art assumed in the modern time and its relation with history; he found the answer in reinventing the notion of tradition in a «self-reflexive way, distancing it from history without eliminating history altogether» (Assmann 2007, p.17); he claimed that «History is related to what is temporal and thus contingent, arbitrary and fragmentary, while tradition is related to what is timeless and thus meaningful, order and whole» (Assmann 2007, p.19). Eliot was innovative inasmuch as he thought that the temporal history and the timeless tradition can interact together; he considered tradition as a system, where the change and the development are perceived as aesthetic categories, and the old and new are both part of a process of co-adaptation which turns into the whole, the unity. With this approach to tradition, «Eliot deconstructs the framework of chronology which had been the backbone of historicist thinking» (Assmann 2007, p.20); his conception of tradition was a constant process of reconstruction. According to Eliot, the poet can shift between two time levels: «the present and the 'present moment of the past'» (Smith 2007, p.26); the writer deals with past dead authors, who are already communicating with him in the present. Thus the poet takes the position of a sort of medium because he mediates between the living voices and the dead ones.

In 1933 Eliot wrote another critical essay on tradition, named *After Strange Gods*, in which he

returned on his former considerations about it; redefining the term, he said that «Tradition is not solely, or even primarily, the maintenance of certain dogmatic beliefs; these beliefs have come to take their living form in the course of the formation of a tradition» (Eliot 1934a, p.18). He said that he considered part of the tradition all the «habitual actions [...] which represent the blood kinship of 'the same people living in the same place'» (Eliot 1934a, p.18); he claimed that we usually become conscious of a traditional concept when it falls into disuse, but it represents a double mistake, because we remain clinging to an old tradition without being able to distinguish between what is real and essential and what is unnecessary and sentimental, and on the other hand we are inclined to consider tradition as something unchangeable, which it has no possibilities to improve. Eliot affirmed that a sentimental attitude towards past tradition is not useful, because «For one thing, in even the very best living tradition there is always a mixture of good and bad, and much that deserves criticism; and for another, tradition is not a matter of feeling alone» (Eliot 1934a, p.19). Then he compared the term tradition to other terms which have a connection with it, such as *orthodoxy*; for Eliot the right tradition must also include the Christian tradition – although it was not always indispensable in the artistic success of a writer – and in the past the link between the two was evident, in particular in what is named Conservatism. He redefined tradition as «a way of feeling and acting which characterises a group throughout generations; and that it must largely be, or that many of the elements in it must be, unconscious; whereas the maintenance of *orthodoxy* is a matter which calls for the exercise of all our conscious intelligence» (Eliot 1934a, p.29); he continued claiming that tradition exists within a social group, instead *orthodoxy* belongs to anyone's mind. Then he affirmed that tradition is part of the DNA of a person, or rather something related to blood and not actually to brain, because «it is the means by which the vitality of the past enriches the life of the present» (Eliot 1934a, p.30); if tradition works together with *orthodoxy*, feeling and thought can coexist. Eliot advised about the twofold possible effect of the lack of consideration of tradition in literature: «extreme individualism in views, and no accepted rules or opinions as to the limitations of the literary job» (Eliot 1934a, p.32). He said that the artist is not influenced by tradition, actually he uses it to modify, reading its peculiarity through his time; in this way Eliot overturned the Romantic conception, because the poet must refuse his personal and sentimental view of the world to be closer to his time: «l'emozione soggettiva non va vissuta, ma esperita, non va balbettata nella piena dell'ispirazione, ma rivelata, nuova e sorprendente, nell'ordine del linguaggio» (Serpieri 1973, p.12).

2.2 The concept of culture

In order to understand Eliot's concept of tradition more clearly it is useful to examine his considerations about what culture represented; in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, written in 1948, he claimed that there are three ways of looking at it, depending on the individual, on the group or class, and the whole society which culture refers to: «the culture of the individual cannot be isolated from that of the group, and that the culture of the group cannot be abstracted from that of the whole society; and that our notion of 'perfection' must take all three senses of 'culture' into account at once» (Eliot 1948, now in Eliot 1951, p.24). He asserted that only the third type represents the best idea of culture, because the others depend on and derive from it; he saw the culture of society as a way of life of this whole one. Eliot defined culture «as something to be achieved by deliberate effort, 'culture' is relatively intelligible when we are concerned with the self-cultivation of the individual, whose culture is seen against the background of the culture of the group and of the society. The culture of the group also, has a definite meaning in contrast to the less developed culture of the mass society» (Eliot 1948, now in Eliot 1951, p.21); Urbanity and civility, learning, philosophy and arts are the elements which composed the culture of society, meaning «'manners' in its fullest sense [for the first element]; knowledge and crafts of all sorts [for the second one]; deepest and widest sense [of philosophy]» (Lucy 1960, p.3); the most important trait of this concept is that culture is a living entity, which operates at all levels of society, and at the same time, the perfection of all of these levels do not guarantee the culture of anybody. Furthermore, he said that these good manners taken without sensibility, intellect, human attribute and education lead to automatism or, on the contrary, vanity in the arts, pedantry in learning, a useless prodigy in the activities of the mind. Eliot affirmed that culture and religion, although they are different things, are two inseparable elements of the way of life of that society. Because culture involves all the levels of society, it can be complete only in the entirety of this latter, because a single individual cannot find a complete cultural expression. «Progress in civilisation will bring into being more specialised culture groups» (Eliot 1948, now in Eliot 1951, p.26), but from this cultural specialisation derives «the most radical disintegration that a society can suffer» (Eliot 1948, now in Eliot 1951, p.26), inasmuch as the elements of the culture do not communicate with each other, and the results are an impoverishment in the artistic sensibility caused by the separation from the religious one, and the decline of the higher stages become a problem for all the other ones. Eliot claimed that culture can be easily described as «that which makes life worth living» (Eliot 1948, now in Eliot 1951, p.27); seeing it from a religious viewpoint, culture is «essentially, the

incarnation [...] of the religion of a people» (Eliot 1948, now in Eliot 1951, p.28). The situation of Europe, according to Eliot, showed a shared tradition, which was Europe heritage from the Greek and Roman past, and from Christianity; tradition seems to be the same conception of culture, instead it really «is for him that part of living culture inherited from the past and functioning in the formation of the present» (Lucy 1960, p.6). Tradition is essential for our culture, because it allows us to remain firmly anchored to the present. Given that Art is one of the component parts of culture, literature – which is an artistic manifestation – is also included in it, and it is affected by this latter and viceversa; in fact «Every writer must be influenced both as a man and as an artist by his time, and by the place and society in which he finds himself» (Lucy 1960, p.7). So Eliot believed in a tradition which is modified and developed through the changing of culture; in this sense a poet writes with awareness of the past and its presence in the present, modified by culture, and he is conscious of his place in time and in a historic perspective (Pompei, 1955, now in Casari, 2010).

2.3 A classical conception

In 1944 Eliot wrote a short essay entitled *What is a classic?*, in which he wondered what a classic represented and how a poet had to relate to it; he started by considering Virgil as the greatest example of European Literature, thinking of him as central for European Culture and for his own assumptions about classic poetry. He explained that the word *classic* has several meanings, and he took in consideration only one of them: the literary perfection coming from Latin and Greek literature, with its authors and contexts; he defined «one kind of art, and [he was] not concerned that it is absolutely and in every respect *better* or *worse* than another kind» (Eliot 1944, p.9). He believed that it is impossible to list the qualities which a classic must display, and he cannot find an author who embodied all these peculiarities, because nobody, Virgil included, could be the greatest poet to represent the best literature of all; he thought that the imperfection of a poet or a period – in a classical sense – should not be considered as a defect, inasmuch as «Every language has its own resources, and its own limitations» (Eliot 1944, p.9). He said that the most suitable synonym for what he meant by the term *classic* was *maturity*; he distinguished two different types of *classic*: the first one is the classic in the universal meaning, referring to Virgil, and the second one is «only such in relation to the other literature in its own language, or according to the view of life of a particular period» (Eliot 1944, p.10). A classic occurred only when civilization, language and literature are

mature, created by a mature mind, and only a mature mind can recognize this maturity itself; he claimed that the maturity of literature reflects the society which has produced it, and under this latter there is history, or rather the language progress which realizes its potentialities within its limitations. The maturity of a society presupposes a maturity of mind together with a maturity of manners; both must be accompanied by the maturity of language, and it happens when «it has a critical sense of the past, a confidence in the present, and no conscious debt to the future» (Eliot 1944, p.14), and this process could be seen in literature, through the poet's awareness of his predecessors. On the other hand, the maturity of mind needs a consciousness of history; Virgil is a classic precisely because he showed his maturity of mind and the maturity of the period in which he lived in his awareness of history.

When a poet is considered a *classic* according to a Romantic meaning of the term, it means that he is an author who works over and outside a period of time, as a sort of orator and prophet; Eliot defined himself as a *classic*, but refusing this nineteenth century definition. He did not consider the history of poetry as a theoretical or empirical evolution, because poetry does not produce any practical and theoretical innovation; in Eliot's opinion poetry is a creative process because the poet's language and style give it originality. He was aware that the validity of an artistic work cannot be modified in any historical epoch, inasmuch as the work is a living statement of that period; the artist who creates the work bequeaths it to the subsequent generations and periods because it is a living statement, and for this reason it does not belong only to the past (Guidi, 1961). What distinguishes and ratifies the validity of the work is its originality, which proves that it is unique and inimitable. Eliot was a classic because he focused on the ethics of poetry rather than on the emotion expressed in it; he thought that poetry is the result of the intensification of his contemporary language, and it expressed a dense mixture of thought and meaning, and this assumption is a fruit of the meticulous analysis of another *classic* poet: Dante.

3. The significance of Dante

3.1 The philosophical poem

In 1904 Eliot attended Milton College in New England, and in 1906 he left it to enroll at the University of Harvard: here he studied Dante's poetry following the lessons of Charles Eliot Norton, and he attended a course of Sanskrit; Eliot appreciated Provençal literature and the *Dolce Stil Novo* reading Pound's *The Spirit of Romance* (1910), and thanks to these experiences he developed a deep interest in and admiration for Dante and his context. In 1855 at Harvard James Russell Lowell founded a study system of tackling Dante «which audaciously demanded merely a rudimentary knowledge of Italian, together with a knowledge of Latin, and the possession of a prose translation of the *Commedia* as armament to storm the edifice of the Trilogy» (Higgins 1970, p.130), and Eliot attended this training process. He read the Italian version of the *Divina Commedia* directly, endorsing Dante's text in the Harvard way or rather in the New England tradition: learning from the original text only through the reading, without attending explicative lessons, because «soltanto attraverso la lettura, per quanto imperfetta, un grande poeta poteva essere assimilato dalla sensibilità di un giovane ed esercitare quindi la sua azione formativa» (Kenner 1964, p.36). Eliot got in touch with Dante, and the consequent perception of Dante's works influenced the poet in two ways: initially he absorbed the works to adapt them to his personal poetry, inasmuch as he looked for the functionality of the texts in order to become a poetic vehicle; then Eliot analyzed Dante's works from a critical viewpoint, looking at and interpreting their ethic contents (Sanesi, 2001). In the 1920s he wrote his first critical essay on Dante, recalling a quotation of Paul Valéry about *la poésie philosophique*, which Eliot read in the critic note of *Athenaem*, 23 July 1920; Eliot felt the need to adjust Valéry's opinion about the philosophical poetry. Valéry claimed that the philosophical poem was not allowed in the present, unlike the past, due to the modern specialization of art; in Eliot's opinion if a philosophical poem worked in the past, the modern poet had to study it and its differences compared with his modern work, although it was not recognizable in the modern form. If the poem presented the coexistence of a double element, the poet had to isolate each one: the philosophical element and the poetical one; taking Dante as an example, Eliot wanted to demonstrate that the philosophy is functional to the poem's structure and, in the same way, the structure is essential to the balance and the beauty of the poem. He continued saying that probably Valéry discriminated the philosophical poetry because not everyone would make such an efficient

choice, which managed to arouse something in the reader (Eliot 1920a, now in Sanesi 2001, p.3). Eliot said that «The poet can deal with philosophic ideas, not as matter for argument, but as matter for inspection. The original form of a philosophy cannot be poetic. But poetry can be penetrated by a philosophic idea, it can deal with this idea when it has reached the point of immediate acceptance, when it has become almost a physical modification» (Eliot 1920a, p.62). He traced the subtle difference between philosophy and allegory to be found in Dante's work, explaining that «The philosophy is an ingredient, it is a part of Dante's world just as it is a part of life; the allegory is the scaffold on which the poem is built» (Eliot 1920a, p.163); he claimed that according to Dante's intention, the *Divina Commedia* was a work of “moral education”; it was not an epic poem, and although Dante's voice appeared as a prophetic preaching, the work cannot be seen only through an allegorical key. Dante's work had a complex form, and «The examination of any episode in the Comedy ought to show that not merely the allegorical interpretation or the didactic intention, but the emotional significance itself, cannot be isolated from the rest of the poem» (Eliot 1920a, p.165); there was not ambiguity in the infernal figures described by Dante, «The damned preserve any degree of beauty or grandeur that ever rightly pertained to them, and this intensifies and also justifies their damnation» (Eliot 1920a, p.167). The structure of the *Divina Commedia* was modeled by human emotions, and Dante's scale of emotions was the most comprehensive: «The contemplation of the horrid or sordid or disgusting, by an artist, is the necessary and negative aspect of the impulse toward the pursuit of beauty. But not all succeed as did Dante in expressing the complete scale from negative to positive» (Eliot 1920a, p.169); each character and each part of the *Comedy* were comprehensible even if they were analyzed in their totality, because the micro-system works within the macro-system, and this latter is functional to the micro one: «It is one of the greatest merits of Dante's poem that the vision is so nearly complete; it is evidence of this greatness that the significance of any single passage, of any of the passages that are selected as “poetry”, is incomplete unless we ourselves apprehend the whole» (Eliot 1920a, p.170). Dante's aim was not to create emotions, but to express something through a vision, and this was possible because he added the philosophical element coming from the human mind to his poetry; according to Eliot, Dante exceeded if compared with every other poet because he «has succeeded in dealing with his philosophy, not as a theory (in the modern and not the Greek sense of that word) or as his own comment or reflection, but in terms of something *perceived*» (Eliot 1920a, pp.170-171). Dante's method presupposed that, under the vision revealed by the allegory, the metaphysical poetry appeared as that *something perceived*.

3.2 The mastery of Dante

In 1929 Eliot wrote another essay on Dante³¹, analyzing the main works of the master, the one who inherited a crude metrical form his predecessors and was able to obtain indefinite and meticulous refinements of it (Eliot 1920f); he started by claiming that he preferred to approach poetry – in particular Dante – avoiding being guided by critical observations on the author, because it could be a motivation but also an obstacle to the direct perception of the text and to the best part of it when someone approached a poem, that is the savour of a poem as a personal cultural conquest. Eliot believed that understanding all the meanings of the *Comedy* was not necessary to evaluate Dante's poetry, because his quality was significantly irrespective of the structure he used for his work; he suggested that this work could be appreciated through different and consecutive contacts, from the first easy reading to the subsequent deeper and more fulfilling ones. Dante's poems aroused a poetic emotion because it was an authentic poetry, which communicated to the reader before he could completely understand it; this peculiarity was related to the universality of the language used by Dante: the late medieval literary Italian was close to Latin, and this latter represented the language which unified and permitted the thought exchange among a heterogeneous collection of people. So Dante's Italian – or rather the Florentine vernacular – inherited this trait from the Latin one; moreover Dante amplified the perfection of his poetic words creating a crystal clear style, where the meaning was obscure but the word appeared noticeable. Eliot offered several explanations about why Dante was easy to read for a foreign reader, claiming that there were two principal causes: firstly Dante wrote in an epoch in which Europe was spiritually attached, creating a work which Europe understood because it was culturally united, and because he wrote using a language close to the medieval Latin, the main literary language; secondly, he used the prevalent medieval method in Europe, the allegory, which was easily comprehensible and appreciated not only in Italy. Inasmuch as Dante was easy to read, through Dante it is possible to learn how to write poetry, because he was a great poet and his way of creating poetry could be assimilated and imitated, unlike authors as Shakespeare. This asserting was motivated by the fact that he used a language which was a common idiom made perfect, and not the own language of a great English poet. Then he said that a poet who expressed his work in an allegorical poetic procedure meant that he was able to writing poems through visual images; Dante's imagination was based on visions, because in his time vision owned a virtue of truth. For medieval belief, visions had the same value as dreams, and for this reason allegory was a mental disposition which allowed the poet to be

31 This critic essay and its analysis refer to Eliot 1929, now in Sanesi 2001.

recognized as a mystic or a saint; the prophet Dante as such needed to communicate his visions to a heterogeneous public, and in order to achieve his purpose he decided to adopt a language marked by simplicity of expression and few metaphors. Eliot believed that through allegory Dante managed to place different personalities – real and legendary, past and contemporaries – on the same level, making his work credible, and with simplicity and wit he showed the same reality as an impressive vision. In the same critical essay Eliot defined and gave his personal opinion on the three parts of the *Comedy*; he started with the *Inferno*, saying that Dante showed the possibility of creating the highest poetry with the smallest number of metaphors, rhetorical expedients for producing sought-after words and elegant lexicon. In the *Purgatorio* Dante combined the great art of writing poetry with careful philosophical observation, and the *Paradiso* offered the subject matter to write the great poetry; Eliot said that a poet like Shakespeare touched upon many different aspects of life through his works, more than those treated by Dante, but this latter was able to express these aspects in greater levels of exaltation of the higher and of degradation of the lower ones. The comprehension of each realm depended on the comprehension of the whole entire work, although the *Inferno* could also be understood alone, whereas the *Purgatorio* presupposed the reading and assimilation of the *Paradiso*, and a second reading of the *Inferno*; for Eliot ‘comprehension’ meant a mental attitude which abandoned the moral judgment to accept beliefs and it is clear that «Eliot looked on the great work as poetry first and foremost, and as a historical material only second» (Higgins 1970, p.137), and Dante's work had much more significance in its entirety rather than in its individual parts. He concluded that the mastery of Dante consisted in representing with his poetry a school of poetic style, which every poet of different languages could refer to, and for this reason he could be seen as a universal poet; Dante’s allegorical method guaranteed great poetry, because its nature made it possible to simplify the style, creating a visually clear poetry; and the *Divina Commedia* was a work of human feeling possibilities, where the emotions ranged deeply and widely. Given that the *Comedy* needed full comprehension to be understood, Eliot claimed that this comprehension was more complete if the other works of Dante were taken into consideration, in particularly the *Vita Nuova*, because in this early writing the poet showed the future intentions for his main work, the *Comedy*, and its method. He believed that this youthful work was made of a mixture of reality and allegory, and it stood for three different experiences of Dante: a real experience, as a sort of admission, an imaginative one, related to dreams, and an intellectual one, linked to thought; the essential experience seemed to be connected to Dante’s goal, that is to use the encounter with Beatrice as meaningful of an attraction to God. Eliot claimed that the *Vita Nuova* was not a work of vision, but a work of catholic philosophy, due to Dante’s matured knowledge of medieval tradition and previous texts and authors.

3.3 Dante as the craftsman of poetry

In 1950³² Eliot wrote a critical essay about what Dante meant for himself and what kind of influence he had had on his works; he felt the necessity to explain why for more than forty years Dante had represented the model for his poetry. He said that when he wrote his work *The Waste Land*, he added to his text several notes, so that the reader could notice and understand references and allusions to Dante; he continued affirming that he tried to imitate directly Dante's poetical exercise when he wrote *Little Gidding* (1942), but he met difficulties in the English form, because he could not find a parallel structure to the *terzina dantesca*, able to work without rhyme. He said that only in the Italian language could the rhyme achieve its expected effect, and so to produce a similar result he opted for an alternation of feminine and masculine terminations:

II
Ash on and old man's sleeve
Is all the ash the burnt roses leave
Dust in the air suspended
Marks the place where a story ended.
Dust inbreathed was a house -
The walls, the wainscot and the mouse,
The death of hope and despair,
This is the death of the air.
(Eliot 1942, now in Eliot 1909-1962, vv.1-8, p.216).

Eliot believed that the *Divina Commedia* should be translated with *terza rima* and not with *blank verse*, because a different meter implied a different way of thinking and no English form was able to reproduce the *Comedy's* meaning exactly. In order to abide by the original will of the poet it was better to translate it in the original form adopted by the poet; in Dante's *Divina Commedia* translated in *blank verse* something was missing in the final result, something got lost. Even though the work was translated in *terza rima*, Dante's words worked better in his mother tongue, because they fully expressed what the poet meant, whereas in a foreign language the sense and the significance worked in a subtly different way. Therefore Dante appeared easy to read and to assimilate, but he was extremely difficult to imitate in a language different from the author's native one; Eliot said that Dante's style was so precise, clear, perfect, where each word was taken as being functional to itself and to the whole composition, that he fell into the facility of writing with vagueness and

32 This critic essay and its analysis refer to Eliot 1950, now in Sanesi 2001.

imprecision. After forty years of experience with Dante, Eliot claimed that no poet – not even Virgil – was able to dedicate each of his own efforts to study poetry, and even the art of poetry, knowing the ropes insomuch as he was the craftsman of poetry. Eliot suggested that a poet who wanted to learn and to try to emulate Dante had to be slave of his language; the poet developed a responsibility towards the tongue and its variations, and for this reason he was a classic poet. His poetical writing functioned as example for the poets who were his followers, but his greatest grade of excellence represented the difficult obstacle for anyone who tried to confront himself with it; in particular, Dante's broad use of the emotional sphere allowed him to explain the unintelligible through an accurate language, therefore the readers could see more shades of the same emotion, because Dante refined the instrument – that was his language – to express them.

The ideology of Eliot's style was anchored in formal research, and the rhetoric became his way of translating the poetic expression; his poetry – in the same way ambiguous and hard, hefty and rich in metaphors – revealed a style which showed the influence of Dante's poetry, inasmuch as Eliot translated the poetic aim into a visual image (Calimani, 1997). Unlike Dante, who was considered a classical poet, Eliot produced a text which had no univocal interpretation, and this did not represent the feature of classical poetry; for this reason, Eliot appeared as a conservative and classical critic, but in his own production he seemed to be more innovative, a modernist poet.

3.4 Dante like Virgil

Eliot thought that in the English literature of the eighteenth century no author could be seen as a classic; unlike Dante's medieval spirit, who wrote a classic – the *Divina Commedia* – in a modern European language, Eliot believed that the reason of this was that «we are oppressed by the limited range of sensibility, and especially in the scale of religious feeling» (Eliot 1944, p.18). Eliot also saw in Dante the example of a maturity of style, because he was a genius who used the language and realized its genius, and this did not happen to any English author, past and contemporary; the poet and his language were the two necessary elements to define a classic, because the poet exhausted the ground he cultivated – that is the language – and only the exhaustible language could produce a classical poet. Thinking of English literature and language, Eliot concluded that the *comprehensiveness* was the last feature of the classic, and according to this «the classical must, within its formal limitations, express the maximum possible of the whole range of feeling which represents the character of the people who speak that language» (Eliot 1944, p.27); when the

literary work had correspondences in other foreign literature, it had also the characteristic of *universality*. Eliot deemed that no modern language could create a classic, probably because it had not the universality which Latin owned; so he turned to Dante, because this latter inherited from his guide – Virgil – a classical maturity.

When in 1950 Eliot paid homage to Dante, he said that his debt towards Dante consisted in three lessons that he had learned from him: firstly the great poet must be a servant of his language, secondly the true poet must be a catalyst of emotions which a common man cannot experience in an entire way, and thirdly the emotions must be perceived through visions; actually, Eliot inherited another lesson from Dante, which is «what we may call Dante's metaphors of mediation, especially his Virgil-figure – the figure of a mediator between the two worlds which, without such a mediator, would be irreconcilable» (Hay 1983, p.51). In turn Dante learned the three lessons from Virgil, in fact becoming his disciple Dante could be the servant and the master of his poetical language; although Beatrice was the one who showed the beatific vision to Dante, Virgil was the one who indicated the way to him, as if he were a Christian guide. Moreover, Dante developed an idea of Europe as a whole depending on Virgil's belief. So Eliot's debt to Dante was also a debt to Virgil, because «Virgil's special virtue is mediation – *linguistically* between yesterday's use of language and tomorrow's; *emotionally* between “depravity's despair and the beatific vision”; and *culturally* between the Roman origins of the world community and later approximations of his ideal» (Hay 1983, p.52). According to Eliot's critical position about Tradition, Dante could exploit it through the guide of Virgil «re-enacting the past, discovering the future, and crowning the present with self-mastery» (Hay 1983, p.52); in fact Dante knew the past in the *historical sense* of Virgil, because he was Dante's *pastness of past*, but also his *present* inasmuch as Virgil was with him during the journey in the netherworld; Virgil not only guided the man Dante but also the poet Dante, allowing him to write with the awareness of literature as a whole. Dante's new work positioned itself among the past ones, modifying the ideal order, and Virgil knew – understanding that Dante's destiny was in another world – that Dante-present-poet modified Virgil's past as Virgil's past had modified Dante's perception of the present (and past); furthermore, «Eliot has accounted not only for the vitality of *tradition* as intermediary between the alien worlds of the dead past and the new work to be born but also for the process of creating a poem – or poetry itself – as such a mediator, between two other alien words: the alien self, or personality of the poet, and the new creation of a poem» (Hay 1983, p.54). Poetry, as a way to escape from emotion and personality – is the mediator between the man-poet who suffers and the writer-poet who creates poetry; like Virgil who guided the man Dante and his poetry towards the divine world, Eliot used his role of poet and critic in order to come to the threshold of mysticism. In the *Comedy* Dante defined himself as God's scribe,

«seeing his poem as *one* scripture that is efficacious in “saving us”» (Hay 1983, p.55); the metaphors of mediation which Eliot used in his works came from Dante's theology of the *Comedy*.

The *Hollow men* (1925) was the poem which exemplified Eliot's inherited idea of mediation, because he drew upon «Dante's image of Beatrice's eyes as a figure of mediation between three “kingdoms” that represent the whole. For Dante, Beatrice alone could embody the divine nature of Christ – the perfect mediator between God and man – because Beatrice had seen the beatific vision and Dante had seen her with his own eyes» (Hay 1983, p.61); in Eliot's poem the poet was afraid of these eyes because they had seen God:

I
[...]
Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom³³
Remember us – if at all – not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
(Eliot 1925, now in Eliot 1909-1962, vv.13-17, p.89)

The hollow men cannot see God because they are blind, and they suffer without having a mediation; they know that Beatrice's eyes can be their hope:

IV
The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
[...]
Sightless, unless
The eyes reappear
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose
Of death's twilight kingdom
The hope only
Of empty men.
(Eliot 1925, now in Eliot 1909-1962 , vv. 1-2, 10-16, p.91)

Unfortunately, «the eyes can at least be an *illusory* mediation between poetry and “something more divine”» (Hay 1983, p.62); so Eliot used Dante as guide and mediator for his works as Virgil was for Dante. But as Dante left Virgil during his journey, so Eliot did with Dante himself, abandoning his mediation when he wrote the *Four Quartets*, probably because this work was a sort of Dante's Paradise³⁴.

33 Here Kingdom with the capital letter indicated the Paradise, while with the normal letter it meant Purgatory or Hell.

34 In 1965 at Harvard, in the ceremony hold in commemoration of Eliot, Douglas Bush traced a parallel between Eliot's and Dante's works, saying that *The Waste Land* represented the *Inferno*, *Ash Wednesday* Dante's *Purgatorio*

3.5 The interest for Dante

For the Seventh Centenary of Dante's birth the conference *Congresso internazionale di Studi Danteschi* took place on April 1965 at Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, where Eliot had to give the opening lecture of the conference, but he died prematurely in January of the same year; «the choice of Eliot amongst the other contenders for the honour of opening this historic congress came as no surprise, for in no other modern poet have the works of Dante been so clearly and fruitfully influential, and by no other modern critic of poetry had Dante been so consistently upheld as a paragon of style» (Higgins 1970, p.129). Eliot was interested in Dante because he embodied the modern spirit, inasmuch as he considered language and form as concrete matters as the medieval genre and style; moreover Dante defined the poetical faculty as the poet's attitude of managing the poetical inspiration, the imitation of other sources from past and contemporary tradition, and the regular poetry in itself: this was what Eliot thought the poet must possess. Dante's most influential work was the *Comedy*, from which Eliot acquired the central precept for his poetic theory; Eliot was attracted by Dante's way of handling tradition and of creating poetry in an inter-textual process, since Dante developed an «intimate knowledge of the surviving works of the best of the poets who had preceded him – Provençal and Sicilian, but more especially Virgil, Ovid, Statius, and Lucan, and of course [...] St. Jerome as translator of the Vulgate Bible» (Higgins 1970, p.132). Although Dante did not involve the historical sense of the *pastness of the past*, he was extremely aware of its *presence*; Dante knew that the great works generated by a creative mind were timeless, and for this reason he elaborated the concept of the Noble Castle in *Inferno* IV, referring to the great ancient Greek and Roman literature:

Venimmo al piè d'un nobile castello,
sette volte cerchiato d'alte mura,
difeso intorno d'un bel fiumicello.
Questo passammo come terra dura;
per sette porte intrai con questi savi:
giungnemmo in prato di fresca verdura³⁵.
(Dante, *Inferno* IV, vv.106-111).

In particular Eliot focused on Dante's skill of using parts of the past authors' works in his own production – for example adapting Virgil's lines in his own poem – and he took possession of this

and *Four Quartets* the *Paradiso* (Bush 1966, p.98).

35 From an allegorical point of view, the castle represents the philosophy in its classical meaning, that is the human practical and theoretical erudition, whereas the seven circles of stonework symbolize the seven parts of philosophy or rather physics, ethic, politics, mathematics, economics, ontology and dialectics (Sapegno, 2004).

poetical attitude; «for Eliot the presence of time past was most substantially embodied in the figure of Dante, as much as Virgil represented for Dante the evidence of the “simultaneous existence,” and relevance of the old literature» (Higgings 1970, p.133).

Eliot felt the necessity to have and follow a master for his writing, and this need was inherited from *Inferno* I, where Dante praised Virgil’s qualities:

«Or se' tu quel Virgilio e quella fonte
che spandi di parlar sì largo fiume?»
[...]
«O de li altri poeti onore e lume
vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore
che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume.
Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore;
tu se' solo colui da cu' io tolsi
lo bello stilo che m'ha fatto onore [...]»
(Dante, *Inferno* I, vv.79-80, 82-87).

«From Virgil Dante learned most notably the poet's noblest task as the conscience of his age, and only secondarily perhaps [...] ideals and standards of poetic style» (Higgings 1970, p.134); from the Italian poet Eliot partly assimilated the impersonal attitude of the poet within the poetical process, to the detriment of the sublimity of the poetry: in fact, in the episode of *Inferno* XV – where Brunetto Latini was damned among the sodomites – Dante showed that in order to create the great poetry the direct use of emotion is not necessary, because an innate emotion comes into that situation; as Eliot noticed, «the emotion of the passage resides in Brunetto's excellence in damnation – so admirable soul, and so perverse» (Eliot 1920a, p.166). In particular, Eliot analyzed this passage:

Poi si rivolse, e parve di coloro
che corrono a Verona il drappo verde
per la campagna; e parve di costoro
quelli che vince, non colui che perde.
(Dante, *Inferno* XV, vv.121-124).

And he defined this as a feeling linked to an image, as the spontaneous product of the poet's mind; the emotional structure of the *Comedy*, supported by the allegory, was the aspect of Dante which seduced Eliot at most. Another distinctive characteristic of Dante's poetical art was the use of a simple diction, and for this reason he was the *best craftsman* of poetry for Eliot – epithet used by Dante for Arnaut Daniel in the *Inferno* and then used by Eliot again as a dedication to Pound in *The Waste Land*.

«Belief does not necessarily add to our understanding; indeed, belief is all too often blind where it should take cognizance, in this and other more vital matters. If Dante's concern was to promote belief, it was to be done through the understanding, the sinner to be made fearful through knowledge of the “jealousy” of God's character (*Inferno*), and made hopeful through knowledge of the existence of God's clemency (*Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*)» (Higgings 1970, pp.138-139); Eliot's value consisted in understanding Dante's work, inasmuch as he recognized the importance of the *Comedy* as the concrete expression of Dante's belief, – because Dante showed belief as it were something tangible, so that everyone could understand it and maybe increase his own belief – recognizing Dante's will of creating a work which was able to communicate its religious intention; moreover, Eliot comprehended Dante's poetry itself, because sharing his same religious spirit, he was able to appreciate the poetical art of writing of his master without dwelling on the act of faith.

Eliot perceived the philosophical passages of the *Comedy* as complementary elements of the poetry and part of the imaginative spirit of the poet; they were part of a wider formulation and were the opportune material for Dante's poetic use, because he employed philosophy «not as matter for argument, nor as his own comment» (Higgings 1970, p.140), but as *something perceived*. This perception became part of the emotional structure of the poem and of the work.

With his work of critic and poet Eliot showed the mastery of his mentor to the contemporaries, because he recognized in Dante «the precision of diction, the clear visual imagery with precise poetic function, the exploitation of the “objective correlative”, a wide range of emotional reference and expression in which the extremes of spiritual and moral experience are made material for the corresponding exercise of our sensibilities» (Higgings 1970, p.145); Eliot also explained Dante's capacity of displaying his thought in his poetry, blending it with the emotional structure of his work. Eliot did not recognize himself as a scholar of Dante, in fact most of his contribution for the study on Dante derived from his poetical writings; «Eliot is a link between the disappearing age of confidence and the bewildered present» (Higgings 1970, p.146), and he grasped the modernity of Dante, because his poetical qualities «were the universal and imperishable qualities of the art of poetry as we understand it at present» (Higgings 1970, p.146). Eliot recognized the *Comedy* not only as a social, political and theological statement of the Middle Ages, but as a great work of poetry.

4. Eliot's art of creating poetry

4.1 Medieval contents

Eliot's critical production and its consequent poetical creation became the means through which the reader, in particular the American one, could get closer to the Romance Middle Ages; Eliot represented the «trait d' union» (Falconieri 1975, p.79) between Dante and the reader, instilling in this latter a thirst for medieval knowledge. Inasmuch as «Il Medio Evo, per l'europeo è distante ma sempre presente; per l'americano non esiste» (Falconieri 1975, p.79), American literature and critics must give credit to Eliot for having introduced the medieval universe of Dante into the scholars literary attention, showing them a detailed analysis of the author thanks to the explanation of the poetic and stylistic choices of the medieval writer at issue; Eliot recognized the medieval tradition, and he made the American readers feel the necessity of taking possession of it. He focused on the perfect stylistic forms of that period, which were the allegory, the universality of Dante's language and the meaning of mystic visions; the novelty of Eliot consisted in the assimilation of Dante's poetic within his works, showing how tradition could be handled and used for a modern purpose. Focusing on his poetical production, the *Waste Land* and the notes added by Eliot revealed a relation with medieval culture; Eliot wrote that «not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Westons' book on the Grail Legend: *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge)» (Eliot, in Berto 1945, p.88), thus adding a medieval base to his work. The *Waste Land* was the representation of «'la dolorosa selva' of Dante's *Inferno*, (XIV, 10), certainly the Perilous Forest of Celtic myth [...] and of metrical romance (like Chrétien de Troyes 'Yvain or the *Middle English Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*» (Shapiro 1940, p.202); according to the Celtic mythology the Perilous Forest was a sterile land which the resourceful hero had to pass through in order to reach the Otherworld or to obtain the Holy Grail; «the theme is shown in *Perceval le Gallois on le Conte du Graal* (Branch VII, Title 11), an Old French romance of the early thirteenth century. And in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, one of Eliot's favorite works» (Shapiro 1940, p.202). In the *Le Mort Darthur* (book XVI chapter III) there was a passage close to Eliot's conception linked to the Perilous Forest:

And therefore they returned into waste countries, that signifieth death, for there shall die many of them: everych of them slay other for sin, and they that shall escape shall be so lean that it shall be marvel to see them.

On the other hand, Eliot went against a medieval topos in the opening poem of *The Waste Land*, *The burial of the dead* (1922); here he offered a re-reading of the *Pervigilium Veneris*, «a short, third- or fourth-century Latin poem celebrating the festival of Venus and the awakening of nature in spring» (Shapiro 1940, p.203), overturning the Middle Ages topos of the praise to Spring and showing a cruel season which awoke nature and human from their wintry torpidity:

I.
April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
(Eliot 1922, now in Eliot 1909-1962, vv.1-4, pp.63).

What most indirectly influenced Eliot's assumption of religion was the medieval philosophy which permeated Dante's thought: in *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) – where Eliot depicted the assassination of Thomas Becket – and then repeated in *Fourth Tempter*, Eliot wrote:

TEMPTER
You know and not to know, what it is to act or suffer.
You know and not to know, that acting is suffering.
And suffering action. Neither does the actor suffer
Nor the patient act. But both are fixed
In an eternal action, an eternal patience
To which all must consent that it may be willed
And which all must suffer that they may will it,
That the pattern may subsist, that the wheel may turn and still
Be forever still.
(Eliot 1935, Part I, p.43).

In this passage Eliot showed the archbishop who could not have chosen just any path, because «He can will his martyrdom only in making his will subservient to that of God, in losing his will in the will of God» (Shapiro 1940, p.205); at the same time these verses expressed a medieval dichotomy of God's foreknowledge and man's will. The wheel had a symbolic value in the Middle Ages, and it was associated to Fate, Fortune or God; in this case the wheel represented God, and it could *turn and still forever still*, inasmuch as God was upholder and cause of human being, «the Unmoved Mover» (Shapiro 1940, p.202). But if the wheel constituted God's will and decisions, in what way could man act according to his own will? Medieval theologians and philosophers tried to answer to this existential question, and after them many poets became interested in resolving it;

Dante was one of them, and in *Paradiso* III he wrote about God's will and the human one:

Anzi è formale ad esto beato esse
tenersi dentro a la divina voglia,
per ch'una fansi nostre voglie stesse,³⁶
(Dante, *Paradiso* III, vv. 79-81).

In *Inferno* VII, Dante asked what Fortune consisted of, given that Good depended on it:

«Maestro», diss'io lui, «or mi di' anche:
questa Fortuna di che tu mi tocche,
che è, che I ben del mondo ha sì tra branche?»
(Dante, *Inferno* VII, vv.67-69)

And Virgil answered human ignorance saying that Fortune was the celestial Intelligence:

«[...] Colui lo cui saver tutto trascende,
fece li cieli e diè lor chi conduce
sì ch'ogne parte ad ogne parte splende,
distribuendo igualmente la luce»
(Dante, *Inferno* VII, vv.73-76).

With the *Inferno* verses Dante expressed his consideration about the nature of Fortune, going against its common medieval representation as the blind Goddess who distributed the goods casually, and consequently in an unjust way; Dante described Fortune as the minister of God, His celestial intelligence which acted according to God's will. Because of this impartial decision of Providence, humans had to accept what God had decided for him (Sapegno, 2004).

In *Inferno* XV Dante reiterated the image of Fortune which turned its wheel:

«[...] Tanto vogl'io che vi si manifesto,
pur che mia coscienza non mi garra,
che a la Fortuna, come vuol, son presto.
Non è nuova a li orecchi miei tal arra:
però giri Fortuna la sua rota
come le piace, e ' villan la sua marra».
(Dante, *Inferno* XV, vv.91-96).

36 With these words Dante meant that - it is fundamental to respect God's willpower in order to maintain this state of bliss, so that all our wills can identify themselves into God's one, becoming one only will - (the paraphrase referred directly to Sapegno 2004).

Eliot evoked this theme in his *Murder in the Cathedral* as the central motif of the poem:

The New Year waits, destiny waits for the coming.
(Eliot 1935, Part I, p.11).

Then the Chorus expanded the concept saying:

Destiny waits in the hand of God, shaping the still unshapen:
I have seen these things in a shaft of sunlight.
Destiny waits in the hand of God, not in the hands of statesmen
Who do, some well, some ill, planning and guessing,
Having their aims which turn in their hands in the pattern of life.
(Eliot 1935, Part I, p.13).

So the Chorus affirmed that Fortune was related to God's will, and then the Third Priest suggested that it was better to leave things as they were, as the wheel would decide:

For good or ill, let the wheel turn.
The wheel has been still, these seven years, and no good.
For ill or good, let the well turn.
(Eliot 1935, Part I, p.18).

The Chorus of people was worried, so they asked:

Archbishop, secure and assured of your fate, unaffrayed
among the shades, do you realize what you ask, do you
realize what it means
To the small folk drawn into the pattern of fate, the small
folk who live among small things,
(Eliot 1935, Part I, p.20-21).

The Character of Becket realized that his destiny was marked by the wheel of Fortune when he claimed:

I shall no longer act or suffer, to the sword's end.
Now my good Angel, whom God appoints

To be my guardian, hover over the swords' points.
(Eliot 1935, Part I, p.48).

And then, for finding a meaning for his destiny of martyrdom, he said:

A Christian martyrdom is no accident. Saints are not made by accident. Still less is a Christian martyrdom the effect of a man's will to become a Saint, as a man by willing and contriving may become a ruler of men. A martyrdom is always the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways. It is never the design of man; for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, and who no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr.
(Eliot 1935, Interlude, p.53).

Then it seemed that Becket surrendered to his killers, as the decision was made far-back:

It is not in time that my death shall be known;
It is out of time that my decision is taken
If you call that decision
To which my whole being gives entire consent
(Eliot 1935, Part II, p.79).

Eliot expressed his assumption of time in several poems, such as in *Ash Wednesday* (1930):

I
Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place
I rejoice that things are as they are.
(Eliot 1930, now in Eliot 1909-1962, vv.1-5, p.95).

And in *The Rock* (1934):

VII
Then came, at a predetermined moment, a moment in time and of time,
A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call history:
transecting, bisecting the world of time, a moment in time but not like a moment of time.
A moment in time but time was made through that moment:
for without the meaning there is no time, and that moment of time gave the meaning.
(Eliot 1934b, now in Eliot 1909-1962, vv.1-5, p.177).

and also in *Burnt Norton* (1935), where he explained in verses his idea of Tradition:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.
(Eliot 1935, now in Eliot 1909-1962, vv.1-3, p.189).

Eliot showed his interest in medieval philosophy in two poems linked together, *The Hollow Man* (1925) and *Ash Wednesday* (1930): in the former Eliot said about Shades:

V
Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow.
[...]
Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow.
[...]
Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow.
(Eliot 1925, now in Eliot 1909-1962, vv.5-9, 13-15, 17-23, p.91-92).

while in the latter he recounted about the Word of light:

V
If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;
Still is the unspoken word, the word unheard,
The Word without a word, the Word within
The world and for the world;
And the light shone in the darkness..
(Eliot 1930, now in Eliot 1909-1962, vv.1-7, p.102).

In this way Eliot resumed the medieval dichotomy of light and darkness, because «The Word, the light, represents the medieval transcendentals of truth, good, Logos; the Shadow represents their contraries: falsehood, evil, death» (Shapiro 1940, p.210); for this reason in human life both Light and Shadow coexisted, because «Death must somehow take a part in the Birth» (Shapiro 1940,

p.210). The fusion of this binomial couple was present in other two poems, *Journey of the Magi* (1927) and *A song for Simeon* (1928) and in the former Eliot wrote:

This: were we lead all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I have seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.
(Eliot 1930, now in Eliot 1909-1962, vv.36-44, p.110).

While in the second one he said:

Now at this birth season of decease,
Let the Infant, the still unspeaking and unspoken Word,
Grant Israel's consolation
To one who has eighty years and no to-morrow.
(Eliot 1930, now in Eliot 1909-1962, vv.22-25, p.111).

«On this side of the Shadow are the inchoate entities of this life, unrealized, potential: idea, motion, conception, emotion, desire, potency, essence; on that side of the Shadow are the realized equivalents of these: reality, act, creation, response, spasm, existence, descent» (Shapiro 1940, p.210). According to the medieval distinction between man's and God's essence, only the second one embodied whether essence and existence, and given that man's actions were realized in the perfection of God's act, the compositional action of the poet finds its fullness in God alone; therefore, Eliot showed this distinction in his poems: «in man, the idea; in God, the reality. In man, the conception; in God, the creation» (Shapiro 1940, p.211). It was probable that Eliot inherited this philosophic concept from the reading of medieval works or directly from the *Comedy* of Dante.

4.2 Manipulating Dante's Hell

In his verses Eliot appears incoherent compared with his critical positions, inasmuch as he maintained the same logical thread for his whole literary criticism, while it seems as if he changed his mind when writing poetic verses, as if he did not agree with his critical position; he claimed that «I should say that in one's prose reflexions one may be legitimately occupied with ideals, whereas in the writings of verse can only deal with actuality» (Eliot 1934a, p.28). He felt different from other authors who wrote poetry with religious contents, because he created devotional verses adding what he really felt to the emotion which he would feel; so he had the capacity of writing poetry with an intense religious emotion.

In 1917 Eliot began his poetical career with the poems collection *Prufrock and Other Observations*, in which he showed his debt toward Dante since the first poem, *The love song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, started in this way:

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
(Eliot 1917, now in Eliot 1909-1962, vv.1-2, p.13).

Actually the poem started with two *terzine* of Dante, which stood between the title of the poem and the beginning of it:

S'i' credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza più scosse
Ma però che giammai da questo fondo
Non tornò vivo alcun, s'i' odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.³⁷
(Dante, *Inferno* XXVII, vv.61-66).

This epigraph is a functional part of the poem itself, because it is «an allusion to an area of event in the *Divine Comedy* which, if it is truly and formally integrated into Prufrock, provides us with a

37 «If I thought my answer were to one who would ever return to the world, this flame would shake no more; but since, if what I hear be true, none ever did return alive from this depth, without fear of infamy I answer thee»(Locke 1963, p.52).

means of reading the poem with greater understanding» (Locke 1963, p.52). This is the VIII *bolgia* of the VIII Circle of the Inferno, where fraudulent counselors were punished; among them Guido da Montefeltro was serving the sentence, because he «had given to Pope Boniface VIII evil counsel which had enabled this new leader of the modern Pharisees to capture a town on which his avarice had fixed, is punished, like Ulysses, by being enclosed in a flame» (Locke 1963, p.52), and Dante told Guido's story with the words used by Eliot for the epigraph. At the beginning of his poem Eliot used *then* as a consequential conjunction:

Let us go *then*, you and I

So the conjunction meant that something had happened before, and it was the consequence of what preceded; Guido was aware that no one stayed alive in Hell, so no one could return alive from it. Guido's words became Prufrock's words within the text of the poem; when this latter said *you and I*, Prufrock embodying the position of Guido, we can assume that *you* corresponds to Dante. «Guido is to Dante as Prufrock is to Dante» (Locke 1963, p.55), such a logical conclusion cannot work; but if *I* referred to Prufrock, *you* could be the *alter ego* of Prufrock himself: so «Guido is to Dante as Prufrock I is to Prufrock II» (Locke 1963, p.55). Although *you* and *I* were not Dante and Guido, «something of Guido remains in Prufrock, something of that speaker in Dante's poem gets into the one by Eliot. And something of Dante also enters into *you* which once we have learned the alchemy is transmuted into an *I*» (Locke 1963, p.57). Prufrock did not mutter to himself, so the poem was not a soliloquy, but instead a dramatic monologue; furthermore the poem delivered an ironic construction, inasmuch as the poem was named *Love Song*: the title translated into Italian was *Cantica d'Amore*, and the term *cantica* was linked to Dante's work, because the *Comedy* was divided into three parts called *cantiche*: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. *Prufrock* should be a *cantica* of hate, not of love, and «the irony is that here in Prufrock's Hell, as in Dante's, there is no love» (Locke 1963, p.58); in this poem, as in Dante's one, the character has lost his power of reasoning and it is the only situation in his whole hellish afterlife in which he speaks in a rational way. The first image delivered by the opening lines of Eliot's poem was the following:

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table;
(Eliot 1917, now in Eliot 1909-1962, vv.1-3, p.13).

Supposing that this image was the preparation for what it would follow, the epigraph suggested

that this image too was linked to Dante's *Comedy*, because if Prufrock's world was a sort of Hell then «Dante might well be the source of the image of the hospital» (Locke 1963, p.59), inasmuch as *canto XXIX* of Dante's *Inferno* was comparable to a *lazzaretto*³⁸:

Qual dolor for a, se de li spedali
di Valdichiana tra 'l luglio e 'l settembre
e di Maremma e di Sardigna I mali
fossero in una fossa tutti 'nsembre,
tal era quivi, e tal puzzo n'usciva
qual suol venir de le marcite membre.
(Dante, *Inferno* XXIX, vv.46-51)

In these verses Dante compared the sinners of the *X bolgia* to the victims of malaria who were in hospital, while in Eliot's poem the first verses were a metaphor for another kind of Hell, the hospital indeed; more in this poem rather than in any other the integration of Dante's verses was a functional part of the structure of the poem itself, because by putting these six verses taken from the *Comedy* as epigraph Eliot «forces [the] interpretation in one direction rather than in another» (Locke 1963, p.59).

In *The Hollow Men* (1925) the characters were the portrait of disembodied humans, «walking corpses [...] their emptiness is the vacuity of pure mind detached from any reality» (Miller, 1965):

I
We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
[...]
Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;
(Eliot 1925, now in Eliot 1909-1962, vv.1-2, 11-12, p.89).

They are separated from each other, they try to express themselves but they are only able to whisper something meaningless; they are separated physically and emotionally from nature, living in a dead place:

IV
[...]
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley
This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms

In this last of meeting places

38 It is the hospital for people who were affected with contagious illnesses or incurable diseases.

We grope together
And avoid speech
Cathered on this beach of the tumid river.
(Eliot 1925, now in Eliot 1909-1962, vv.3-9, p.91).

With this poem Eliot proposed «an eloquent analysis of the vacuity of subjective idealism [...and he] offers a fleeting glimpse of a way out of emptiness» (Miller, 1965); the image of these men who live in a sort of external world referred to Dante's *Inferno* III: *Limbo*: in this pre-Hell there are the souls of wretched people who have never known God, living without praise or blame; in life they had no aim, inasmuch as faith did not fill their heart and their mind, so they spent their existence looking after themselves only:

[...] «Questo misero modo
tengon l'anime triste di coloro
che visser senza 'nfamia e senza lodo.
Mischiate sono a quel cattivo coro
de li angeli che non furon ribelli
né fur fedeli a dio, ma per sé fuoro.
(Dante, *Inferno* III, vv.34-39).

They are destined to this pre-Hell for eternity, because their salvation is denied by their life without Christ; unlike Dante who described these unconscious sinners as the ones who «have no hope of another death» (Miller, 1965):

Questi non hanno speranza di morte,
e la loro cieca vita è tanto bassa,
che 'nvidiosi son d'ogne altra sorte.
(Dante, *Inferno* III, vv.46-48).

Eliot's modified Dante's image suggesting that his «hollow men understand dimly that if they endure the death which is prelude to rebirth they have some hope of salvation» (Miller, 1965):

IV
[...]
Sightless, unless
The eyes reappear
As the perpetual star
Mutlifoliate rose
Of death's twilight kingdom
the hope only
Of empty men.
(Eliot 1925, now in Eliot 1909-1962, vv.10-16, p.91).

4.3 Eliot's *manifesto* of modernity

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock represented Eliot's *manifesto* of modernity and it is directly linked to Dante's *Inferno* XXVII, inasmuch as Eliot understood that Dante's *canto* was «a preview of a typically “modern” drama» (Harrison 1987, p.1045), whose modern mark was based on irony and on the meaning of comedy. In Dante's work, Guido da Montefeltro was a false counselor, and for this reason he was punished according to the *contrappasso* rule: «the sinners here are each enveloped in a flame – a “tongue” of fire through which he or she speaks and which probably symbolizes his or her abuse of the Pentecostal gift of truthful speech» (Harrison 1987, p.1045). *Inferno* XXVII is linked to the previous *canto* because most of the *Inferno* presents pairs of characters connected by a common sin: the sinners of *cantos* XXVI and XVII were both punished for having misused shrewdness, going against morality, but «the gap between one *canto* and another delineates an abyss, a historical crevice, that separates the modernity of Guido da Montefeltro from the antiquity of Ulysses» (Harrison 1987, p.1045). Through a monologue Ulysses told his story to Dante, but he did not describe the reason for his infernal position, that is his sin of fraud and trick, he told him about his fatal fault, when in his old age he crossed the pillars of Hercules, a «signal to men to venture no further» (Harrison 1987, p.1046); he persuaded his men to continue this hazardous endeavour, but after months of sailing, his ship approached a storm, which sank it. What characterizes this *canto* is Ulysses' s high style, because he told his story according to a great epic narration and he demonstrated himself to be a master «of the rules of classical rhetoric» (Harrison 1987, p.1047). The majestic venture of Ulysses³⁹ was matched with the small contemporary event of Guido da Montefeltro; this latter stood in this place because in life he was a fierce Ghibelline who converted and followed the Franciscan friar. Pope Boniface VIII called him to get an advice about how he could crush the town of Penestrino and destroy its stronghold; since the Pope had promised him an absolution for his sinful life, Guido provided fraudulent advice, and given that the promise was false, Guido was damned in Hell. As the style of the two soliloquies appeared different, so the historical and psychological different experience divided the two sinners: Ulysses drew attention to the external settings of his event while Guido showed the landscape of his soul; in particular Guido's monologue «follows a “stream of consciousness” that continuously turns back upon itself in a series of self-reflexive qualifications and fragmentations that remind us of modernist techniques of mimetic disorganization» (Harrison 1987, p.1050). This *canto* represents an example

39 The analysis of *Canto* XXVI referred to the critical comment by Sapegno 2004.

of modernist literature, inasmuch as «Guido's speech, placed conspicuously alongside Ulysses' classical performance, represents precisely such subversion of standard literary conventions – a rhetorical *contaminatio*» (Harrison 1987, p.1050); furthermore, Guido's anxieties and conscious guilt belonged to Prufrock, and this psychological subjectivity represented the modernity of both personalities. «The freedom of the will lies in the will's responsibility for its own freedom» (Harrison 1987, p.1052), and Dante underlined Guido's modernity in his possibility of choice: Ulysses – overlooking his fault for having involved his friends in his hazardous venture – had no possibility of salvation for his afterlife, because he lived in a pre-Christian era, and all those who did not receive baptism could not rise in the presence of God; in fact in *Inferno* IV Dante positioned *Limbo*, that was the place for souls who, although free from sin, did not live according to the Christian religion. So Ulysses assumed «this tragic grandeur in *Inferno* XXVI because of his exclusion from personal salvation [while Guido found] himself included in the scheme of salvation history and for that reason excluded from the spirit of tragedy» (Harrison 1987, p.1053); Guido depended on «the Christian stage of the “comedy”» (Harrison 1987, p.1053). The tragedy was inherited in the Middle Ages from Aristotle's *Poetics*, and its meaning was linked to the original sin of the Bible, inasmuch as tragedy represented the fall of a right man into an adverse fate; «the subjective innocence of the hero shattering against an inexorable objective order of fate dramatizes the universal [...] human fallibility in the rigorous sense of impotence in the face of necessity» (Harrison 1987, p.1053); in the Christian doctrine the guilt – which every man and woman received when he/she was born – was a natural and not personal state of fallen nature. Christ's advent gave mankind the possibility to release itself from this tragic state, redeeming itself from the destruction of original sin; «Guilt [...] is transferred from the objective order of fate to the subjective order of man's free will» (Harrison 1987, p.1054), thus men and women could choose their destiny, and their salvation was based on their personal decision. The *Comedy* was Dante's attempt to progress from a tragic state of guilt to a state of grace, where the free will of the character allowed him to get a reward or a punishment from divine justice. Eliot defined the modern time as a period in which people had lost the real meaning of the term education, so they acted thinking that «the mere accumulation of 'experiences', including literary and intellectual experiences, as well as amorous and picaresque ones, is [...] valuable in itself» (Eliot 1934a, p.34); he distinguished himself from his modern time because he recognized and recovered the modernity of the *Comedy*: he trained through Dante's knowledge and intellect, so thanks to the absorption of his concept of modernity, Eliot could develop his modern work, creating a bridge between Dante's *manifesto* and his own.

Conclusions

1. Medievalism in the twentieth-Century

1.1 Medieval consciousness

Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot dedicated part of their lives to discover, learn and create poetical works starting from the Middle Ages tradition; «medievalism is the offspring of two impulses: the recovery by antiquarians and historians of materials for the study of the Middle Ages; and the imaginative adoption of medieval ideals and forms» (Alexander 2007, p.xxii). The term *medieval* appeared for the first time in 1827, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and after 1830s it began to be used in the place of *Gothic*, which referred to the same historical period but with a negative connotation linked to barbarism; according to its etymological meaning, «the word 'medieval' derives from modern Latin 'medium ævum' [...]; *ævum* is 'age', *medius* the adjective, 'middle'» (Alexander 2007, p.xxvi). In 1854 the term earned a historical meaning thanks to John Ruskin, who delineated it as the period included between Classicism, which ends with the fall of the Holy Roman Empire, and Modernism, which starts from the sixteenth century: the Medievalism; in particular, it has relevance in comparison with the following period, because «'medieval' also designates what is not modern: not a *datum* with dates, but a contradistinction and a negative category of otherness – a shifting category, since 'modern' denotes what is to be found in the present and is supposed, often incorrectly, not to have existed in the past» (Alexander 2007, p.xxvii). In their critical and poetical works, Pound and Eliot were not interested in the historical meaning of medievalism, but they rather focused on the revival of it, showing a conscious adoption of its structures, authors, way of thinking and values; they re-elaborated this material with a different point of view and they became Modernists starting from this new medieval awareness.

1.2 Dante as the cornerstone of Medievalism

Pound claimed that «if we are to understand that part of our civilization which is the art of verse, we must begin at the root, and that root is mediaeval» (Pound 1913b, now in Pound 1934, p.33); for this reason he examined the Middle Ages through Dante as a critical mediator, inasmuch as he studied authors and texts named by Dante in his *Comedy*, or rather the literature of origins, the Troubadour poets, the Italian poets until Cavalcanti and Dante's *Dolce Stil Novo*. On the other hand Eliot focused on Dante as the great example of medievalism, who combined his idea of poetical and critical master; in fact, Dante's critical path enhanced Eliot's critical belief, and Dante's poetical art was the main source of inspiration for Eliot's poetical works. Pound's and Eliot's artistic experiences were tied together through Dante's presence in their formation and poetical writings: the choice to center their critical spirit on Dante was not taken without a good reason; in fact, it expressed an anti-romantic literary position, because the art of poetical writing, which is created with an inter-textual intention of quotation, is the opposite conception on which the Romantic literature is based: poetical inspiration comes from God and poetical expression counts more than technical structure.

Their critical and poetical policy is a meta-poetical process, as the dedication of Eliot to Pound in his *The Waste Land*:

For Ezra Pound, *il miglior fabbro*.
(Eliot, *The Waste Land*).

Eliot borrowed this medieval phrase from Dante's *Purgatorio*, where this latter defined his Provençal master Arnaut Daniel:

fu miglior fabbro del parlar materno
(Dante, *Purgatorio* XXVI, v.117).

Actually, it is a quotation within another quotation, inasmuch as Dante recognizes Guido Guinizzelli as his artistic father, and through Guinizzelli he gave a definition to his Troubadour

progenitor, Arnaut Daniel; Pound, through his master Dante, identified the Provençal poet as his poetical ancestor. Eliot recognized Dante as his master in his critical essays, and with his dedication to Pound, he included himself in this artistic kinship, thus lying on the same level of Pound, through this thick net of quotes. According to a logical proportion, Guinizzelli is to Dante as Arnaut is to Guinizzelli, then Arnaut is to Dante as Arnaut is – through Dante – to Pound, so Arnaut is to Dante as Dante is to Pound; Dante is to Pound as Dante is to Eliot, so Pound is to Eliot as Arnaut is to Dante. «Dante's 'miglior fabbro' has gained a definite article, perhaps because in English it seems to need one. If Eliot calls his friend and editor a better craftsman than himself, he pays him quite a compliment. But the article makes the comparative *miglior* into a superlative, so that Pound becomes not 'better' but 'the best'» (Alexander 2007, p.229); with *fabbro* Eliot praised Pound's qualities as the refined artisan of words and it is «segno di gratitudine per un debito incancellabile di ispirazione, di forma e di metodo» (Boitani 2004, p.300): it was Dante's praise of gratitude to Arnaut, inasmuch as Dante created the *Rime Petrose* and the *Comedy* through the significant example of *trobar clus* and its technical procedure, and it is Eliot's praise to Pound's poetical innovation about the free verse and the poem musicality. At the same time, this acclaim is also a tacit declaration of artistic superiority, because Dante assimilated Guinizzelli's themes and Arnaut's technique and he surpassed them creating a holy poem; Eliot assimilated Pound's poetical lyrics and his inclination to Dante and the medieval tradition in order to create a greater poetry because it is based on a historical sense: like the pupil who exceeds his teacher, «se Pound è Arnaut, Eliot sarà [...] una sorta di Dante» (Boitani 2004, p.301).

The Spirit of Romance shows Pound's attempt to find such a medieval spirit which is able to arrive into the present and to captivate the interest of the modern reader; the work analyzes the cult for poetry in three different literary periods, which Pound defined in this way: «the cult of Provence was [...] a cult of the emotions; that of Tuscany a cult of the harmonies of the mind. The cult of the Renaissance was a cult of culture» (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952, p.223); the medieval part of the work is centred on Dante, inasmuch as Pound followed the criterion of order claimed by Dante in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* and he took into consideration the medieval canon expressed by the Italian poet in his *Comedy*: with this work Pound showed an «attempt to enlist Dante for a reform of poets and poetry, for a reorientation of public taste» (Banerjee 1972, pp.136-137). In the chapter devoted to Dante, Pound declared that the *Comedy* «must not be considered as an epic; [...] it is in a sense lyric, the tremendous lyric of the subjective Dante» (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952, p.153), but then he defined it as «a great mystery play, or rather, a cycle of mystery plays» (Pound 1910, now in Pound 1952, p.154), like a medieval cycle; but it is a mystery play endowed with a precise and polished language, which goes beyond the mere metaphor. Thirty years later Pound diverted his

attention from Dante's medievalism to turn it to Dante's *Dolce Stil Novo*, and starting from here he found out that Dante's base of Modernism came from Guido Cavalcanti, or rather this latter «shows himself much more “modern” than his young friend Dante Alighieri, *qui était diablement dans les idées reçues*» (Pound 1934b, p.346); he asserted that «*Il Paradiso* and the form of the *Commedia* might date from» (Pound 1912, now in Pound 2011, p.4-5) Cavalcanti and his poem *Veggio negli occhi della donna mia*⁴⁰:

e movonsi nell'anima sospiri
che dicono: «Guarda: se tu coste' miri,
vedra' la sua virtù nel ciel salita»
(Cavalcanti, vv.18-20, now in Favati 1975, p.211).

For this reason, Pound's critical and poetical path developed into «un “altro” Medioevo» (Boitani 2004, p.305), because in particular in his last poetical work, the *Cantos*, he made use of Dante's rules and stylistic choices although Dante appeared as a character among many other personalities and not as the leading figure of the work.

The medieval Dante analyzed by Pound exercised a strong influence on Eliot, who built his poetical and critical life on him; Eliot's approach to the Italian poet consisted of a continuous study lasted through his whole literary career, where all his poetical and critical strains were pledged to Dante. The criticism on Dante started in 1920, when Eliot described the *Comedy*, distinguishing between its allegorical structure and its philosophical form; he claimed that philosophy is part of the vision created by the poet, and it does not represent a poetical consideration but the perception of an expression based on thought and feeling. In 1929 Eliot dealt with Dante's main peculiarities, that are his universality, his being European, his allegorical method which conducts to the intelligibility of his work and Dante's imagination linked to visions; the essay of 1950 showed the personal meaning which Eliot gathered from Dante: Eliot's debt to him is explicated in the verses of *The Waste Land*, which he borrowed directly from Dante, and in the indirect imitation of Dante's style and contents in many other compositions, such as *Four Quartets* and *Little Gidding* (Boitani, 2004).

In their poetical approaches to Dante, Eliot and Pound diverged inasmuch as «Eliot generally chooses the most dramatic or lyrical cantos fraught with questions of human ends, while Pound tends towards the most satirical, which define the individual's relation to society as a system of means» (Banerjee 1972, p.137); in particular according to the religious element of the *Comedy*,

40 Cavalcanti, in Favati 1957, p.211.

Pound considered it in a perspective of style, while Eliot believed that Dante's work owned a poetical objectivity and a religious belief, and the former presupposed the existence of the second one. So «Eliot's deployment of the Dantean frame relates directly to the quest for “objectivity” and religious affirmation within an impersonal order [... on the other hand] in Pound's poetry, objectivity remains a quality of personal judgment, centering the microcosm of a poem on a subject, no matter how protean» (Banerjee 1972, p.138).

1.3 Medieval tradition creates Modernism

In a different but interdependent manner, Pound and Eliot were attracted by a fundamental value of the Middle Ages: the value of tradition; it was a medieval assumption that the poet must learn from his predecessors in order to improve as an artist and develop his art. They became aware of this necessity after their educational experience on Dante, because according to a medieval conception, clearly expressed and explained by the Italian poet in his works, «the basic plan for any education of the intellect is, in general, the reading of the books [...] in contradistinction to the conversational method [...] of the Greeks» (Curtius 1953, p.327), as Dante wrote:

«O de li altri poeti onore e lume
vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore
che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume»
(Dante, *Inferno* I, vv.82-84).

The knowledge of the past – the eloquence – was central in the works of both Pound and Eliot: the former tried to acquire the whole past tradition, in order to understand the present and proceed in it, while the last one developed the idea of literary tradition based on a simultaneous existence and order; in order to achieve this consciousness «Pound evokes it by vortices, and Eliot by the “auditory imagination”» (McLuhan 1979, p.572). According to Pound, ancient time provides a strong discipline able to civilize man through the language, so the past allows the poet to take his stand; according to Eliot, thanks to the past the poet can create the anarchy of the present, because comparing past and present on the same level produces an elaborated language and a complex

consequential work, where past and present are melted together and their confines are recognizable only if the referential past and present sources are shared. «They tried to reclaim areas of modern life lost in the previous century» (McLuhan 1979, p.228), and they considered the past as contemporaneous as the present. Pound and Eliot conceived the tradition on the basis of a synchronic matter, and they did not focus on the chronological time but rather on an order of similarity: the cornerstones of tradition were those artistic evidences which disclosed and maintained their greatness independently from their position in time and place; the great past author is considered as contemporary as the great present one, because they communicate in a similar way, sharing a common field (Gardini, 2002). The Modernism of Pound and Eliot took shape from this conception of tradition; by definition, if a writer is defined *modern*, it means that he created his work in a moment subsequent to the past, so a modern writer is the one who can improve his art of writing because he has at his disposal a wide cultural baggage; he distances from his past because, he improves his art thanks to the great models which past tradition offers to him and because he works with more referential sources than the ones which past writers referred to. Without a past knowledge he cannot progress, inasmuch as he would run into the same past mistakes and failures; at the same time temporal barriers are demolished, since the present writer creates nothing new, inasmuch as the artistic possibilities were, are and will be the same, what changes is the different way of explaining them. For these reasons, the modern writer is the one who establishes his modernity in the same ideal simultaneous order as the past, renovating and experimenting the past within his present, because the past is also his present, as his present is a different expressive form of the past. The modern artist is the one who is «interested in innovation, in discovery, in investigation which could lead to new domains of subject-matter and form» (Pajalich-Perrucchini 1987, p.69), but he is also the one who is involved «in a re-consideration of the “past” and a revaluation of tradition» (Pajalich-Perrucchini 1987, p.69). Pound and Eliot re-considered the Spirit of the Middle Ages in order to renovate and innovate their modern present; the modern poet needs to develop the awareness of the great past tradition, because it is the essential means to the creation of his work, in particular the modern artist needs to recover the *Spirit of Romance* because in this latter there is the consciousness of a modern feeling, as shown by the Troubadours and Dante: the writer does not create anything new, it is the modern spirit itself which is able to pass through the temporal barriers, going from the past and reintroducing itself into the present.

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