1. **THE COMING OF WAR; ACTÆON**

An image of Lethe,
    and the fields
Full of faint light
    but golden,
Gray cliffs,
    and beneath them
A sea
Harsher than granite,
    unstill, never ceasing;
High forms
    with the movement of gods,
Perilous aspect;
    And one said:
"This is Actæon."
    Actæon of golden greaves!
Over fair meadows,
Over the cool face of that field,
Unstill, ever moving
Hosts of an ancient people,
The silent cortège.


The image of Actæon here has muted down the violence of his story in favour of a suspended moment, viewed across the Elysian fields; despite latent harshness this is an aesthetically distanced prospect, a spectacle of rôle-reversal where the central figure is only by the last ceremonious word transformed from hero to victim, elated triumph resited as funerary procession: the unspoken ritual word is 'sacrifice'. The balance of poised alternate indentation holds its energy as a charge within the shape of its own motion, suggesting an Ovidian transformation scene from early Italian painting such as by Antonio del Pollaiuolo (c.1431/2-1498), 'Apollo and
Daphne' (London, National Gallery NG 928), well reproduced in e.g. Patricia Lee Rubin and Alison Wright, Renaissance Florence; The Art of the 1470s (London, 1999), pl. 88 (p. 337): this is 'fair Dafne of sea-bords, / The swimmer's arms turned to branches' (Canto II), also invoked in The Lady Valentine's affected citation (Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, 1920, XII); for Ovid's narrative see Golding's translation (ref. given overleaf), I, 546-607 & ff. Diana and Actæon are represented together in Titian's 'The Death of Actaeon' (c.1565; London, National Gallery NG 6420), Diana in erotic triumph and her hounds in the background leaping upon their victim; but Titian's more fluent mythography did not rouse Pound's interest (for learned survey see Malcolm Bull, The Mirror of the Gods; Classical Mythology in Renaissance Art [London, 2005], Chap. 7: 'Diana' (on Ovid's version, pp. 279-80 and ff). In Canto IV the earlier muted violence becomes explicit, but the overlap of phrasal culmination and one fable against another is again offset by cadences constantly lifting, by anticipative upturn and adept matching of prosodic indents.

2. It was the time of day
That mid between the East and West the Sunne doth seeme to stay;
When as the Thebane stripling thus bespake his companie,
Still raunging in the waylesse woods some further game to spie.
Our weapons and our toyles are moist and staind with bloud of Deare:
This day hath done enouh as by our quarrie may appeare.
Assoone as with hir scarlet wheeles next morning bringeth light,
We will about our worke againe. But now Hiperion bright
Is in the middes of Heaven, and sears the fields with firie rayes.
Take up your toyles, and cease your worke, and let us go our wayes.
They did even so, and ceast their worke. There was a valley thicke
With Pinaple and Cipresse trees that armed be with pricke.
Gargaphie hight this shadie plot, it was a sacred place
To chast Diana and the Nymphes that wayted on hir grace.

. . . . .

That day she having timely left hir hunting in the chace,
Was entred with hir troupe of Nymphes within this pleasant place.
She took hir quiver and hir bow the which she had unbent,
And eke hir Javelin to a Nymph that served that intent.
Another Nymph to take hir clothes among hir traine she chose,
Two losde hir buskins from hir legges, and pulled of hir hose.
The Thebane Ladie Crocale more cunning than the rest,
Did trusse hir tresses handsomly which hung behind undrest.
And yet hir owne hung waving still. Then Niphe nete and cleene
With Hiale glistring like the grash in beautie fresh and sheene,
And Rhanis clearer of hir skin than are the rainie drops,
And little bibling Phyale, and Pseke that pretie Mops,
Powrde water into vessels large to washe their Ladie with.
Nor while she keepes this wont, behold, by wandring in the frith
He wist not whither (having staid his pastime till the morrow)
Comes Cadmus Nephew to this thicke: and entring in with sorrow
(Such was his cursed cruel fate) saw Phebe where she washt.
The Damsels at the sight of man quite out of countnance dasht,
(Because they everichone were bare and naked to the quicke)
Did beate their handes against their brests, and cast out such a shrike,
That all the woods did ring thereof . . . .


3. And by the curved, carved foot of the couch,
    claw-foot and lion head, an old man seated
Speaking in the low drone...:
    Ityn!
Et ter flebiliter, Itys, Ityn!
And she went towards the window and cast her down,
    'All the while, the while, swallows crying:
Ityn!
    'It is Cabestan's heart in the dish.'
'It is Cabestan's heart in the dish?
'No other taste shall change this.'
And she went towards 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 Rhodez
Caught in the full of her sleeve.
...the swallows crying:
'Tis. 'Tis. Ytis!

Actæon...

and a valley,
The valley is thick with leaves, with leaves, the trees,
The sunlight glitters, glitters a-top,
Like a fish-scale roof in Poictiers
If it were gold.
Beneath it, beneath it
Not a ray, not a sliver, not a spare disc of sunlight
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,
Lifting, lifting and wafting:
Ivory dipping in silver,
Shadow’d, o’ershadow’d
Ivory dipping in silver,
Not a splotch, not a lost shatter of sunlight.
Then Actæon: 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 Actæon,
'Hither, hither, Actæon,'
Spotted stag of the wood;
Gold, gold, a sheaf of hair,
Thick like a wheat swath,
Blaze, blaze in the sun,
The dogs leap on Actæon.
Stumbling, stumbling along in the wood,
Muttering, muttering Ovid:
'Pergusa... pool... pool... Gargaphia,
'Pool... pool of Salmacis.'
The empty armour shakes as the cygnet moves.

For the repeated swallow-cry compare the allusional multiplicities of the nightingale laments in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, discussed in J.P. Riquelme, *Harmony of Dissonance; T.S. Eliot, Romanticism, and Imagination* [Baltimore, 1991], pp. 67-70 and esp. note 27 (p. 313); the differences between Pound and Eliot here are reciprocally diagnostic. Also, the connection of swallow to nightingale in the mythic subtext is close: after the terror done to Philomela, Procne escapes vengeance by transformation into a swallow, his sister Philomela by like shift into a nightingale. Thus the swallow twitter, 'tis, 'tis, imitates the punning affirmative, spilling the secret which cannot be spoken, the connection between parallel layers of fable stitched close by shared horror below the surface of moving beauty: 'Vidal is poet and protagonist; his mind, like Pound’s, produces a shorthand of correspondences ...' (Kearns, *Guide to Ezra Pound’s 'Selected Cantos'* , p. 29; the whole discussion is acute and intelligent). Amid the matching of one extended form in the contours of another there are also minute local confirmations: the double arch of the stone window replayed in the billow of her sleeve, already fanning and waffing, this last term itself a tacit homage to Gavin Douglas:

For Venus efter the gys, and manor there
Ane active bow, apoun her schulder bare
As sche had bene, ane wilde huntreis
With wind waffing, hir haris lowsit of trace.

For a somewhat lurid characterisation of Eliot’s horror-story undercurrents see Ronald Schuchard, *Eliot’s Dark Angel; Intersections of Life and Art* (New York, 1999), p. 124. For Eliot’s unpublished 1918 paper on ‘The Interpretation of Primitive Religion’ see Ronald Bush, *The Presence of the Past; Ethnographic Thinking / Literary Politics*, in Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush (eds), *Prehistories of the Future; The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism* (Stanford, Cal., 1995), pp. 36, 377. For the method of construction by myth and the control that this may (or may not) bestow, see Eliot’s celebrated essay ‘Ulysses, Order, and Myth’, review of James Joyce, *Ulysses*, in *The Dial*, LXXV.5 (Nov. 1923), reprinted e.g. in Frank Kermode (ed.), *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot* (London, 1975), pp. 175-8, which pointedly invokes Yeats and *The Golden Bough* as precursors of ‘the mythical method’ while making no mention at all of Pound. Pound had discussed *Ulysses* in his ‘Paris Letter’ for *The Dial*, LXXII.6 (May 1922), reprinted in *Literary Essays*, ed. Eliot, pp. 403-9. Pound’s precursors for Joyce here were Flaubert’s *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and *Tristram Shandy*, with the emphasis on technique; the Homeric parallels are ‘chiefly his own affair, a scaffold, a means of construction, justified by the result, and justifiable by it only’ (*Literary Essays*, p. 406); in like spirit: ‘Joyce has set out to do an inferno, and he has done an inferno’ (p. 407). But Pound’s ‘technique’ is not less than Eliot’s ‘control’: ‘the aim of technique is that it establish the totality of the whole. The total significance of the whole’ (*Guide to Kulchur*, p. 90). On Eliot’s essay see also Michael North, ‘Eliot, Lukács, and the Politics of Modernism’ in Ronald Bush (ed.), *T.S. Eliot; The Modernist in History* (Cambridge, 1991), esp. pp. 175-77. For a condensed retrospect on the idea of the modern, quoting ‘No other taste shall change this’, see George Oppen’s poem ‘Memory at “The Modern”’, dating from October 1963 (when Pound is still alive), collected in George Oppen, *New Collected Poems*, ed. Michael Davidson (New York, 2002), p. 295, and see also p. xxxv, n. 5; Pound’s 1934 Preface for Oppen’s *Discrete Series* is printed on pp. 3-4, and this collection is briefly described on pp. 357-8.

Pound’s early views about myth and the ‘structure’ of myth are regularly referred to the psychology of vital perception, often erotic or luminous with sudden clarity: ‘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. . . . Certain it is that these myths are only intelligible in a vivid and glittering sense to those people to whom they occur’ (‘Psychology and Troubadours’, in *The Spirit of Romance*, Chap. V, p. 92). Compare Pound’s catechism, ‘Religio, or The Child’s Guide to Knowledge’ of 1918: ‘When is a god manifest? / When the [eternal] states of mind take form’; *Pavanes and Divisions* (New York, 1918), reprinted in *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, ed. William Cookson (London, 1973), p. 47; and see also p. 50, Sect. III.


There is a fine discussion of Ovidian themes in twentieth-century poetry in Charles Tomlinson, *Poetry and Metamorphosis* (Cambridge, 1983), and of this Canto on pp. 66-71. Compare Kearns: 'Ovid, mistakenly thought of as a prettifier, never turns away from horror or from passion' (*Guide to Ezra Pound's 'Selected Cantos*', p. 29). On whether the generic frame of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is properly grand epic, or not, see Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone*, pp. 115-134.

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