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News That Stays News

Literary studies exist atop the Arnoldian fault: that is, works of literature are presumed to have social value, but they must be inaccessible to some degree or there would be no need to study them and no need for the structures of authority that study produces. The critical industries that have grown up around Pound, Joyce, Stein, and on a small scale around Zukofsky are poised upon a particularly tense section of this fault: the labor required to make *The Cantos*, *Ulysses*, *"A,"* and Stein's writing legible has to be justified, ultimately, by the value that the writing embodies, but that value has most often to be transmitted through hearsay as the writing remains illegible or semilegible for any reader who is not a Poundian, Joycean, Steinian, or—if such a category exists yet—a Zukofskian. Unlike, say, Dickens, where criticism disturbs the consumable clarity of the surface to reveal additional meaning beneath, with these four, unreadability is the raw material that is turned into the finished product of significance, which then gives the works their social importance.[1] But it is striking that such critical mediation has to be made on behalf of writers who often made strong claims for the immediacy of their writing.

The notion of genius in its modernist incarnation is bound up with this strain between presence and obscurity. The modernist genius is not the classic spirit of place, or the producer of universal simplicity, or the Romantic recluse, or the anticipatory figure of national unification. Rather, in a split affirmation of specialization and centrality, an aura of illegible authority surrounds the modernist genius, offering a lure for endless study. But in a critical context, genius is an embarrassment. The kind of remark Goethe made about Beethoven brings criticism back to its Romantic youth most uncomfortably: "To think of teaching him would be an insolence even in one with greater insight than mine, since he has the guiding light of his genius, which frequently illumines his mind like a stroke of lightning while we sit

in darkness and scarcely suspect the direction from which daylight will break upon us."[2] Gaping awe and situating oneself in darkness are no longer popular critical stances. When its attributes are stated with such bold drama, the transcendent impetuosity of genius with its lightning flashes seems quite close in spirit to the old ads for Tabu, the "Forbidden Fragrance," where the picture freezes the narrative one frame beyond the Grecian Urn, so to speak: here Truth and Beauty have consummated their affair. The female pianist's back is arched, and her fingers still linger above the keyboard as the male violinist has seized her mouth in a passionate kiss, his violin grasped in one hand. They probably were playing the "Kreutzer."

I'm calling on such a kitschy image because it suggests some of the attributes or effects of genius—freedom, thrill, immediacy, corn. But don't such nonintellectual connotations make genius an odd notion to apply to a fairly heterogeneous group of modernists, each of whom seems emphatically intellectual and non-Romantic? The term does have a more sterilizing philosophical genealogy. Commenting on Kant's definition of genius as that "which gives the rule to nature," Charles Altieri writes that genius is "the mind's elaboration of something fundamental to natural energies. . . . [I]ts role is not to create a capacious personal ethos. . . . [It] cannot be reduced to purposes or subjective interests."[3] But the personal capaciousness of the author is crucial to the writing I will be reading. This may leave me open to accusations of cultural elitism, as well as theoretical naiveté, given that one of the most influential essays of the past few decades, "What Is An Author?" was generated out of Foucault's discomfort at having used the proper names of authors in an unproblematized fashion.[4] Nevertheless, I find genius usefully provocative in focusing on, not the idea of the author, but these particular authors' trajectories, both on the page and through social space. It is central to Stein's self-presentation, Pound's politics, Joyce's and Zukofsky's encyclopedic torsions. Genius is an emblem for the desires that drove all four to conceive of such ambitious writing structures or strategies.

It also is a symptom if not a solution for their improbable demands for social authority. I am not primarily interested in the personal dimension of these demands, but in how they play out on the page and over the writing career. Genius can be a charged compliment, and I would like to avoid empty debate and not praise or

blame Pound, Joyce, Stein, and Zukofsky for being or posing as geniuses. They all, one way or another, seem to have been quite aware of the category, however. Pound and Stein did display themselves as geniuses, Joyce perhaps less blatantly, Zukofsky only in a recessed, bitter way. In fact, in one passage in *"A"* he seems expressly to exclude himself from my grouping. Examining a collage made by his young son, he calls it "A realizable desire / Of a genius / In the branch of a tree, / A thought the same as the bough." Then he comments to his wife: "A valentine for our genius / Celia— / No false pride— / Merely our tutelary spirit" (*A*, 241). This invokes the older sense of *genius loci,* where genius is a guardian spirit of a given locale. But in Zukofsky's writing, as we will see, avowal and disavowal are particularly closely linked. In spite of Zukofsky's insistent retreat to a domestic space, reading the totality of his work will situate him in the problematic public territory where genius struggles for authority.

Other modernists who conceivably could be included here—Eliot, Williams, HD, Moore, Stevens—differ primarily in that the limits of form are much more a part of their writing. They produced poems, rather than life-writing. There is a sense of finiteness and social location that is not there in Pound and Stein, certainly. Zukofsky and Joyce were quite conscious of the formal structures of their writing, but this is on the local level; globally, their encyclopedic ambitions were ultimately at odds with this.

Although differing more widely than the blanket term "modernism" would suggest, these works share a common root: *The Cantos, Ulysses, "A,"* and Stein's books were written to be masterpieces—bibles, permanent maps or X rays of society, blueprints for a new civilization, or demonstrations of the essence of the human mind. However, the social narratives by which these displays of genius were to communicate their values, not only to their often-minute audiences but beyond to society at large, were difficult to follow. Being difficult to follow is central to genius.

Pound's career demonstrates a desire to fuse use value with aesthetic value, but the use that is being imagined doesn't leave much room for other social uses. His justifications for good writing often begin by detailing the clarity of perception and social hygiene that such writing can provide, but as he warms to his subject it turns out that at the higher levels of excellence writing is not a tool of social

perception at all, but is itself all that needs to be perceived: "The book shd. be a ball of light in one's hand" (*GK*, 55). *The Cantos* was to be this ball of light that would somehow transform society, but the "somehow" indicates how obscure the transformative process was if the glow of that light was not already perceived.

Initially, Joyce might seem to represent the other extreme: *Ulysses* was not an intervention in society, it was instead a definition of the world. But while in its representational and stylistic mimesis *Ulysses* seems to embrace the world completely, the demands it makes on its readers are so great that it remains separate, a work that requires endless devotion to be read accurately.[5] With *Finnegans Wake,* of course, the demands are intensified. But Joyce was not simply aloof; the numerous remarks on current events woven among the letters of *Finnegans Wake* are symptomatic of Joyce's nostalgia for social location.[6]

These attempts to sublate society into art led to a deeply conflicted sense of audience. On the one hand, an individual was addressed; this reader was imagined variously: often for Pound and Zukofsky as a student; for Stein, as herself or Alice B. Toklas; for Joyce, as the sufferer of an ideal insomnia. But these writers were not just looking to establish a well-defined, congenial audience of experts; they were addressing a larger body as well, "the public," which I put in quotes because in Pound's case this might be a combination of Italy, America, England, Mussolini, and even (for a few months) Roosevelt; for Zukofsky, the poor and Ezra Pound; for Stein, Bennett Cerf, Picasso, and the American army; for Joyce, either Dublin or anywhere but Dublin.[7] But while these positive projections of audience verged on the imaginary, the negative aspect of the public was clear enough: the public occupied the alien territory of mass literacy, where writing became a commodity.[8]

This fallen realm of circulation evoked reactions ranging from condescension to phobia, but beyond this there were more complex evasions and refusals: while the stylistic displacements all four exhibited can be explained as scientistic demonstrations of the writer's craft, they can also be seen as attempts to forestall commodification. The same argument holds for indefinability with respect to genre. If genres are, as Fredric Jameson puts it, "social contracts between a writer and a specific public,"[9] then Pound and the others were not signing any contracts. But to be in circulation, to reach the public,

was also an attractive proposition, offering a way out of the marginality to which these writers at times found themselves consigned. Stein's later popular writing actively courts the public, and in light of this, her hermetic work can be read as addressed in a more complex sense to the reporters who mocked her. Near the beginning of his career Zukofsky wrote a manifesto. Pound wrote journalism continually; more than that, *The Cantos* often aspires to be a superior species of journalism while attempting to remain an epic. Many of Pound's heroes, such as Malatesta, Adams, Jefferson, and Mussolini were figures who, to Pound's way of thinking, were immersed in the social world, absorbing and mastering at a glance all information that came at them. Joyce mocked the discourses of mass culture in *Ulysses,* but the book would be very different without them. And the fact that *Ulysses* was banned is evidence of how directly the public felt itself addressed.

One index of these contradictions with regard to audience is the notorious difficulty of these works, which has led to their current status where their principal readers are writers, critics, and captive audiences of graduate students (with some sacrificial undergraduates thrown in). This now seems so obvious a fact that it is easy to feel that originally the public was never considered. But the referential, formal, and syntactic singularities of this writing that now seem riddles so provocatively addressed to specialists can also be read as the conflicted vehicles of polemics, appeals, and pronouncements aimed at, if not exactly addressed to, the writers' contemporaries. Adorno describes modernist works as "windowless monads . . . unconsciously and tacitly polemiciz[ing] against the condition of society at a given time."[10] But Adorno's term carries a ring of self-sufficiency that ignores the tension generated in these works as the authors deal with the social world insistently while with equal insistence they place themselves above it. Their works have become monads through the effects of history as much as by the writers' own choice, have many windows, and their polemics are far from unconscious or tacit. Adorno himself comes much closer to this anti-monadic view while articulating his vision of criticism: "The greatest fetish of cultural criticism is the notion of culture as such. For no authentic work of art and no true philosophy, according to their very meaning, has ever exhausted itself in itself alone, in its being-for-itself. They have always stood in relation to the actual life-process of society from which they have distinguished themselves."[11]

Pound's slogan that "literature is news that STAYS news" (*ABC*, 29) seems more accurate to the condition aspired to, though it's doubtful that he intended the paradox involved. When "news"—information affecting the sphere of exchange where commodification is the key process—"STAYS news," when it stops circulating and is transformed into "eternal" literary value, it can freeze into some remarkable shapes:

CHAPTER XXIV

If men have not changed women and children have.
If men have not changed women and children have.
If men have not changed women and children have.

CHAPTER XXV

If men have not changed women and children have.
Men have not changed women and children have.
Men have not changed women and children have changed.
Simon Therese could and would would would and could could did and would would would and could could did and could would. He would if he were not to be taught to be letting it down and being on it as it is it is it that it is that it is attached.

LCA, 176–77

. . . between the usurer and any man who
wants to do a good job
(perenne)
without regard to production—
a charge
for the use of money or credit.
"Why do you want to
"—perché si vuol mettere—
your ideas in order?"
Date '32

C 87, 583

BEAUFOY

We are considerably out of pocket over this bally pressman johnny, this jackdaw of Rheims, who has not even been to a university.

BLOOM

(indistinctly) University of life. Bad art.

BEAUFOY

(shouts) It's a damnably foul lie, showing the moral rottenness of the man! *(he extends his portfolio)* We have here damning evidence, the *corpus delicti,* my lord, a specimen of my maturer work disfigured by the hallmark of the beast.

A VOICE FROM THE GALLERY

Moses, Moses, king of the jews,
Wiped his arse in the *Daily News.*

U, 15.837–48

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and the nation's draft my window's: soldiers killed
in small *squirm*ishes (the newspaper's misprint): whose
the hernia of a book: that the devils
not be driven into swine or Jerusalem rabbinate
like the Curia kidnap a little scholar:
the weight of the wait: how many books
can a man read: man unkind womb unkind:
alter ego *jünger* ego: "reality" grammarian added an
ity: philosophize: if I cannot live their lives
for them, to write their costive posies is whose (?) "lie":
fool horse Sophi if these lines were broken
down into such jewelled shorts word for word
they might exceed The Decline and Fall of
the American Poem by six folios,

A 18, 394

Such writing was also, at times, an attempt at public intervention. It might be declared to be the agent of social transformation, as with Pound, and with Zukofsky in the first half of his career. It might be declared the evidence of a society already transformed whether people knew it or not, a position Stein takes at times. For Joyce by the time of *Ulysses,* creating the conscience of his race might only mean creating a guilty conscience in Ireland for rejecting him. The gamut runs from bitterness to a fairly insane optimism, but in all cases the writing was urgently addressed to its contemporaries even though the message was delivered in a form that was "far ahead" of its time. How society was to catch up, aesthetically or politically, to writing that it by and large didn't read and couldn't understand if it did read was a mystery, one that is still there on every page.

In all four cases, narrative is an insoluble crux. *The Cantos* can't end or even progress. Pound's stories of great men setting their marks on history consistently fade into impalpability if not failure; the stories themselves grow more and more compressed, often, finally, into a phrase or single word. The Marxist political narrative that animates the first half of *"A"* collapses with the advent of the Second World War, leaving Zukofsky to assert that the quite disparate writing of the second half of the poem forms a natural, musical "poem of a life." Stein simply dismisses narrative by opposing it to the instantaneous present of genius; nevertheless, once her fame as a genius is established, she continually presents the unnarratable story of her success. *Ulysses* is a narrative, but as the book progresses the relations of the writing styles to that narrative become increasingly vexed. By the end, the cultural references are encyclopedic and the story told, but the one totality clashes with the other.

AESTHETICS AND THE JOB MARKET FOR GENIUS

While I will be reading the writing of Pound, Joyce, Stein, and Zukofsky as demonstrating the tensions inherent in the social position of the writer, I first want to acknowledge how difficult it is to place their works in any argument that does not ultimately lead back to the works themselves: they are articulated to such a pitch of singularity that attempts to include them in other discourses are doomed to a rather daunting amount of translation. In fact, translation of various kinds dominates the criticism.

Explication has been primary. The writing seems to cry out for handbooks: beyond the massive syntheses they attempt, *The Cantos*, *"A,"* and *Ulysses* bulge with explicability at almost every word—references, repetitions or analogies of various dimensions, hermeneutic paradoxes—and even with the simpler-seeming texture of much of Stein's work, it takes a great deal of space to spell out the minute rhythmic changes and sudden opening-out of semantic vistas that are constantly occurring.

Appreciation often becomes a second kind of translation. Hugh Kenner stands out as particularly adept at turning *The Cantos* and other modernist works into stories of literary value at its peak. But Kenner's work is all translation: in his hands *The Cantos* becomes

informative, anecdotal, fun, and even coherent (at least in places).[12] But such translation masks a basic feature of the original: never was literary value less perceptible to most readers. In *The Cantos*, anecdotes are severely truncated, reference is almost always elliptical, often to the point of paranoia, and the guarantee for coherence is finally Pound's consciousness—Kenner's ultimate object of celebration.[13]

A third type of translation uses the works as examples of linguistic processes that are widely representative, if not universal. Lacanian readings where the Joycean subject is dissolved into pure linguistic displacement, or where Pound illustrates the (tragic) impossibility of reaching through the symbolic back to the imaginary, or readings where Stein exemplifies antipatriarchal narrative or description—these are quite free translations in that they universalize their originals, whereas only an extreme need for singularity could have produced anything like *Ulysses*.[14] If Joyce's writing is paradigmatic of the traces left by the linguistic structure of the unconscious, then *Ulysses* (not to mention *Finnegans Wake*) becomes an exemplary instance of language—in other words, an authentic essence of language, an X ray of the real language of men.

Such claims of original, authentic universality extend but do not alter the standard Romantic pattern. For Wordsworth, while authentic language could be heard in the countryside, no one but the poet could write, that is, purposefully wield, the real language of men, and the reader had to put all specialization aside in order to share in the authentic and generalized humanity of the poet, which in fact could only be experienced while reading.[15] A similar dynamic occurs in the writing of these modernists (and it is reinforced by most critics): the language of the writing is universal, but the nonwriter is only a distant follower of the writer's activity. Joyce in *Ulysses* uses the language of "every" segment of society (and in *Finnegans Wake* he uses "every" language), but no one else can actively use that singular code, "Joyce's language." Much of the power of *Ulysses* comes from Joyce's masterful use of "lower" orders of language, but they are redeemed only by their transformation in the hands of the master. Not only is the artist's language beyond ordinary social use, no one can read it without training: to read it accurately is, if not a life's work, at least a full-time job. Of course, it can be argued that this is a job that can supply a synoptic, rather

than a specialized, view of the modern world—the Arnoldian position; but, again, this argument only makes sense if one has spent a great deal of time translating these works into their universal content.

I want to suggest that these works be read in the original, without accepting the ancillary coherence supplied by the handbooks. This is not to say that the handbooks should be ignored, but rather that at a certain point it is necessary to forget the soothing coherence they add to the words of *The Cantos* or *Ulysses.* Rather than explicating, evaluating, selecting out thematic coherence, or using the works of these four writers to articulate an argument as to the nature of language, I want to keep strange the strangeness of their verbal surfaces and extreme rhetorical strategies, and at the same time see how this intensely specialized language is continually at the service of the most ambitious attempts at totalization and social authority.

These contradictions arise from attempts by these writers to unite various originary realms—the gods, the human mind, the order of nature—with a fallen or at least a finite historical everydayness. While their writing practices are, in theory, a thaumaturgy powerful enough to accomplish this, at the same time it is important to remember their often-marginal social position. While these works may have been written to express the originary, paradisal space where genius creates value, they do not travel directly to the mind of the ideal reader, the critic who accepts the transcendent claims of these works and the subsequent labor involved. They end up on a published page, in social space, between the author and the bored, cowed, intrigued, illuminated, rejected, plural readers in society. *The Cantos* is a "poem including history," true enough, but history includes *The Cantos* as well.

The polyvocality that critics often have found on their surfaces is traceable not so much to the struggles of various social strata as Bakhtin would have it but to the pressure the writers felt to master all of society, to write masterpieces. It can be said that *Ulysses* is a Bakhtinian carnival, that *The Cantos* displays the permanent open-endedness of language, that *"A"* is a nontotalizible sequence of disparate poetic strategies, and that Stein's works embody a determined effort to avoid closure by continually articulating a radically punctual present. But beyond this, these works display a powerful sense of proprietary control over both language and society. The aim is to

abolish the distinction between writing and the world and to fuse social and literary value. The manner in which this fusion is to take place can vary from the complex attempt to duplicate, criticize, and master all of society that *Ulysses* represents to the opposite extreme, where Stein's writing can at times look arbitrary, without systematic reference to rhetorical conventions, as if Stein had boiled the act of writing down to the elemental "*I* [genius] *write* [a transcendent not a social activity] *words* [a masterpiece]." But at either extreme this ambitious fusion easily falls into relativism. For all but devout readers, *Ulysses* and *The Geographical History of America* are highly specialized literature.

The urge to bring the world under the sway of art can seem to put the writing of these four squarely in the category of the avant-garde. There are other similarities as well: Pound, at least when he's involved with *Blast,* looks a bit like Breton; early in her career Stein garnered a notoriety much like that of the Dadaists and Surrealists; and, if avant-garde art is thought to be difficult, a page from Tzara can look rudimentary when compared with most pages from these four. But it is important to distinguish them from the avant-garde. Here, I am using the limited but useful distinction of Peter Bürger, who defines the avant-garde as a series of tendencies that aim at overcoming the separation of art from everyday life.[16] However, this reunion involves an attempt to dismantle the institution of art and the aesthetic as an acknowledged cultural sphere. So, compared with Pound, Tzara *is* rudimentary. His recipe for a Dadaist self-portrait—picking newspaper cuttings out of a hat—while funny, was not ironic: the point was that anyone could produce a Dada work—though "work" is a misnomer in this case. On the other hand, no one but Pound could write *The Cantos.* Of the four, Stein is perhaps the closest to the avant-garde, and the complaints by Lewis, among many others, that her writing was childish prattle are a symptom of this. But as I will show, Stein's work is emphatically predicated on her own genius, and genius does not exist for the avant-garde as Bürger defines it.

While their valuations of the aesthetic were different, both the avant-gardistes and the high modernists faced roughly the same mass of potential readers. Where the avant-garde would call forth shock or scorn, the high modernist text when read naively would be more likely to produce perplexity, discomfort, and shame in the face

of the infinite rereading required by Joyce, or the lifetime of research demanded by Pound. Although it could easily be argued that this naive reading would be worthless, it would be more accurate to consider it a constitutive feature of these works. The blankness that they proffer the neophyte needs to be considered as an integral part of their meaning, and not simply to be blamed on inadequate readers, schools, or societies. This is in the spirit of Benjamin's "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism,"[17] but I would like to eliminate the pejorative connotations in Benjamin's vocabulary. In the case of difficult modernism there is no document of refined criticism that is not at the same time a chasm of anxious boredom for many readers.

Near the end of *The Cantos,* Pound writes "without ^{2}Mùan ^{1}bpö / no reality" (*C 112,* 798). Having read the studies, I can translate this, and when I do the emphasis falls on "reality": Pound is again pointing to the transcendent essence of the world; he is referring to ceremonies of the Na-khi, an instance of his interest in the East and ritual; the ceremonial stories involve suicide, and the Na-khi have in fact died out: this rhymes with the despair of Pound's old age, his final silence and the broken ending of *The Cantos.* But the coherence this translation provides masks the more obvious significance of the lines, which is only visible on the (illegible) surface: the reader has no direct access to "without ^{2}Mùan ^{1}bpö / no reality," in other words, no direct access to reality as Pound defines it. The first time Pound mentions "without ^{2}Mùan ^{1}bpö / no reality," he adds, "There is no substitute for a lifetime" (*C 98,* 705). Such valuations of the artist's life and consciousness, no matter how deeply tinged with irony, humor, bitterness they may be, are opposed to the shock and playfulness that the avant-garde used to break down the walls of high culture. Schematically: for Tzara *you* could draw words out of a hat; to read (let alone to write) *The Cantos,* there is no substitute for Pound's lifetime.

While the deep split between reader and writer, or between the social material used by the writer and the forms imposed on it, was similar in the four cases, it did not produce similar results. With generalizations about modernist language still common, it is important to emphasize that there is little formal congruence between the work of any of these four. Stein's stripped-down syntactic geometries are utterly different from the social and literary complexity

present in any phrase of *Ulysses,* not to mention the subjective crash courses in the history of Indo-European displayed in the words of *Finnegans Wake.* Joyce and Zukofsky rewrote fanatically, whereas Pound and Stein were committed to spontaneity, Stein reacting to each new bare word, Pound improvising against a midden of books (physically there or not). But this doesn't unite Pound and Stein: nowhere in their literary work do these two sound remotely alike (their public pronouncements are another story however: both could be village explainers). She writes in sentences, often long, anomalous ones, while Pound, as *The Cantos* progresses, uses sentences less and less frequently. Stein uses a simple vocabulary; Pound certainly doesn't—he hardly writes in English for many lines at a time, and when he does it is more often than not eccentric and archaic. For Pound language is all reference; for Stein reference is "not really exciting" (*LIA,* 190–91). A single myth is used in *Ulysses* as a continuous grid, with irony a permanent though variable effect; Pound's eclectic and discontinuous use of myth always marks moments of transcendence; Zukofsky and Stein never use myth. *Ulysses* and *"A"* change styles at discrete intervals, but to very different purposes. Joyce's changes can be read as contributing to an enlarged sense of mimesis—either of quotidian reality or of Homeric myth—and thus as organic; or he can be seen as taking on newspapers, all of English prose, the Church, pulp narratives, and music in an attempt to meet every challenge to the autonomy and centrality of his own writing. On the other hand, the formal shifts in *"A"* are, with some early exceptions, emphatically nonorganic: artificial, arbitrary, and playful.[18] Even Pound and Zukofsky, generally regarded as master and disciple, display senses of poetic language that are finally quite opposed. Pound finds an originary presence in each word, so that his use of syntax becomes minimal as *The Cantos* progresses. Zukofsky, however, refashions English into something of a second language, so that far from registering any primal fullness, each word is often overcoded, belonging simultaneously to the semantic statement on the surface and to a translational, mathematical, or alphabetic game. Pound's exactitude has a theocratic basis: language is to be a reverent trace of state authority and divinity; for Zukofsky accuracy is the result of human labor: one of the ways this shows up in *"A"* is in the hypertrophied syntax.

On the literary-biographical level, there are obvious differences in politics: Pound was a Fascist; Zukofsky a Marxist; Joyce some-

thing of a socialist or anarchist—though in all three cases, their conception of the writer as definer and creator of social value left little room for the sense of commitment to any political movement implied by the suffix "ist." Stein's relation to politics was, to reverse the Freudianism, underdetermined: she can be called a feminist if one ignores her early Weininger-inspired misogyny, as well as the sexism of her salon arrangements and her sense of herself as belonging more to the category of genius than of woman. In her last years she displayed a *Saturday Evening Post*–like pro-Americanism. If some of her pronouncements on such subjects as "money" and "negroes" are marshaled together, she could be labeled a patrician.[19] But her views finally extended no further than her own position as a writer who was not a member of a profession, guild, or social group of any kind, but was a singular genius. Pound's allegiances, which were disastrously public, might seem the opposite of this, but his politics, too, were ultimately as imaginary as hers. I say this although I think it can be shown quite clearly that Pound was a Fascist (an eccentric one, though quite committed; he was not just a polite sympathizer like Eliot before the war), that his work never wavered in its support of Mussolini from the late twenties on, and that Fascism (along with anti-Semitism) was not an unfortunate virus, but that his writing, early and late, was founded on the need for the kind of social authority that Fascism seemed to represent. Nevertheless, Pound's politics were finally solipsistic, making sense only when viewed from the center of his writing.

So it is not by virtue of similarities of language or form or political orientation that I am grouping these four together. The disparity that they display can justify charges such as Perry Anderson's that modernism "is the emptiest of all cultural categories."[20] But the grouping I am proposing is useful precisely because of the singularity of the attempts of its members to build a more complete, if not utopian, world in writing. These efforts displayed a hierophantic conception in which writing floated down from a higher world of order that was fully accessible only to the genius-writer and that could be only partially revealed even to the devout reader. This power imbalance can be inverted, however, and looked at from the context of the market for print, where the writer, far from having any power, was an unacknowledged producer inhabiting a precarious market niche. It's not surprising then that these writers claimed such authority for

their art and their status as artists while having only problematic social authority for most of their contemporaries. Within the confines of their discipline, they might be considered experts, masters of their craft, geniuses; outside those confines, there were pigeonholes with less complimentary labels: charlatan (Stein); pornographer (Joyce); nonentity (Zukofsky); or madman and traitor (Pound).

What this split embodies is the final flowering, or failure, of the aesthetic solution to the problem of the social position of the artist acutely dramatized by the Romantics. This problem, as it appeared at the end of the eighteenth century, seemed like a central social crux, and both the German aesthetic philosophers and the English Romantics proposed art as the cure for the suddenly all-too-visible displacement, violence, and repression resulting from industrialization and specialization. But there was always a flip side to this analysis, in which the aesthetic solution became the answer not to the problems of society at large but to the career dilemma of the individual artist or intellectual who could not find a place in an industrializing bourgeois society. However beneficial Coleridge's proposal to establish an intellectual clerisy might eventually prove to England as a whole, the most immediate beneficiaries would be intellectuals such as Coleridge.[21] Cynical as this may sound, in Pound's case the self-interest in his calls for educational reform is obvious, given the eccentricity of the proposed curriculum at the Ezruversity.

To repeat an earlier point, these writings were intended as masterpieces, displays of absolute cultural value. But as the productions of private individuals, they can be seen as masterpieces in the older sense: applications for the position of master in a guild. However, it was not the writers' guild Pound and the others wanted to join. Writers for the broad public, figures like Philip Beaufoy in *Ulysses* or middlebrow writers like H. G. Wells, were quite clearly not the company they aspired to keep. They were aiming for admittance to the guild of the genius, and their works were their applications. Once admitted, there were the eternal but intangible benefits to be awarded by the judgment of literary history, and in addition, the theoretical possibility of actual social prestige. Joyce and Stein eventually tasted this worldly success: for Joyce it meant patronage and fame, for Stein a puzzling fame. Pound's wartime radio broadcasts for Mussolini are more comprehensible if looked at from his own point of view, one in which a famous sage is employed to offer advice to a troubled world.

But as Pound's radio broadcasts demonstrate all too glaringly, the nature of the work that this guild performed was problematic: in its excellence and singularity the manufacture of a literary masterpiece was a performance that could not be reproduced. While these four made assertions of mastery that are often repeated (Zukofsky the "poet's poet," Pound having "the finest ear in English since Shakespeare"), can it be said that "*A*," *The Cantos, Tender Buttons, or Ulysses* give evidence of mastery of any craft other than that of their own production? Writing, for all four, was an inimitable practice. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* Stein claims "that in english literature in her time she is the only one. She has always known it and now she says it" (*SW*, 72). There is one living genius per guild.

Olson's lines, "(o Po-ets, you / should getta / job," which make an uneasy and serious joke with lyrics from The Coasters, recognize a situation that had already been experienced by these four.[22] The anecdote of Stein's first meeting with Williams in Paris is illustrative. After small talk about their medical educations—which of course had led to a career for Williams only—Stein showed Williams the mass of her unpublished manuscripts and asked for advice. Williams, who at the time was himself no more published than Stein, said, with characteristic bitterness, to save the best and burn the rest. Stein dismissed this answer—and Doctor Williams—with equal bitterness, saying, "But then writing is not, of course, your métier."[23]

Writing was the métier of Stein and the others. Pound's only stretch of steady employment after World War One was broadcasting for Mussolini. This would have been more evidence of the superiority of Italy: they hired him—that is, they listened to him, at least in theory—while Senator Borah in *The Cantos* sums up his country's failure: "am sure I don't know what a man like you / would find to *do* here" (*C 84*, 551).

If these writers' commitment to the aesthetic solution—one that was growing ever more strained as the market for print diversified—is kept in mind, it can explain both the disparate formal features of their works, which in all cases are most significant when read as social, rhetorical strategies, and the many family resemblances their writing does display. These are far-reaching: all four have a superior relationship to readers and to everyday life; their writing has a tendency to resolve into a record of the writer's mind at work (or play) and hence into a kind of ongoing autobiography (*Work in Progress* is