Mauberley as Memorial:

Ezra Pound and the Aftermath of the First World War

by

Todd Carmody

A thesis presented for the B.A. degree

with Honors in

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Abstract

      Ezra Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is commonly regarded as the poet's farewell to London and the aesthetics he developed there. Originally published in 1920, the poem functions also as a memorial to the First World War and postwar British culture. Like other WWI memorials, *Mauberley* tries to make sense of a seemingly incomprehensible moment in history. The object is not to present historical fact, but rather to reorganize and sort through the past in order to get at the essence of what actually happened, the underlying truth. Pound argues that an inherent social dishonesty causes both war and the marginalization of art and sculpts his memorial to convey this truth, where others might maintain a nationalistic or religious understanding of the war. This essay explores the ways in which *Mauberley* both participates in and questions British memorial culture, focusing specifically on how the poem's attempt to find meaning in the war is ultimately unsuccessful, at least in traditional terms.

      Mauberley is the crystallization of a memorial impulse present in much of Pound's work during and after the war. His prose in particular searches for language with which to represent the war and the culture which produced it. In *Mauberley* he comes closest to realizing this goal. He spends a considerable amount of poetic energy explaining how the violence and economic corruption characteristic of both war and modern art are due to society's pervasive dishonesty. The world the poem describes is one of chaotic and continuous change in which Pound would cling to eternal verities. But his memorial, however, is hopelessly mired in the superficiality it denounces.

      The form of *Mauberley* is in frequent conflict with the grisly picture of war the poem presents. The regular stanzas and frequent end-rhyme have a decidedly ironic effect, but one that's symptomatic of a larger inability to deal with the war. Pound forces an unwieldy event into a regular and comprehensible frame, trying to tidy up the frayed, unsightly edges of an unpleasant situation to gain control over what he sees happening to himself and to his generation. In doing so he distorts reality much like the artists the poem condemns.

      Many WWI memorials tell stories; they rehearse the tale of tragedy from beginning to end, finding justification often in nationalism and religion. *Mauberley*, on the other hand, finds little consolation in these traditions and instead strings together fractured and disjointed narratives that disfigure the truth in other ways. The contradictions between *Mauberley*'s commemorative goals and what it actually achieves force the question: *Can something as horrible as the First World War really be memorialized?*

      In the end, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* fails by the standards both of war commemoration and Pound's own truth-telling focus. The poem can't offer the reader closure in regards to WWI, presenting only abortive attempts, and is no truer a picture of the war than the traditional monuments whose validity it questions. But the poem's inadequacy is not necessarily due to a lack of skill or insight on Pound's part. Rather, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* may be the best memorial one can construct to the First World War and the society which produced it. It is as if Pound is throwing his hands up, saying *This is postwar Europe. This disjointed, chaotic, and ugly mess is what we've got to work with.*

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Ezra Pound and British Memorial Culture

In a letter dated 9 November 1914 to Harriet Monroe, editor of *Poetry*, Ezra Pound wrote:

> This war is possibly a conflict between two forces almost equally detestable.
> Atavism and the loathsome spirit of mediocrity cloaked in graft. One does not
> know; the thing is too involved. I wonder if England will spend the next ten years
> in internal squabble *after* Germany is beaten. It's all very well to see the troops
> flocking from four corners of [the] Empire. It is a very fine sight. But, but, but,
> civilization, after the battle is over and everybody begins to call each other thieves
> and liars *inside* the Empire. They took ten years after the Boer War to come to.
> One wonders if the war is only a stop gap. Only a symptom of the real disease.
> (*Letters of Ezra Pound* 46-7)

Pound, writing in London at the onset of the First World War, is baffled by the violence across the Channel. He doesn't buy into the battlefield polemic of good vs. evil, Britain vs. Germany; at stake are issues far less tangible than political boundaries. The true essence of the war is cloaked, "the thing" too involved in mundane nationalism for anyone, onlooker or participant, to tell what's really going on. Pound conjectures what deeper conflict lies at the heart of the war, but admits dejectedly, "One does not know." He *does* know, though, that the war is neither the cause of nor the resolution to civilization's fundamental flaw. Even after the fighting has ended, internal conflict and confusion will persist. To Pound, the war is but a symptom of the real disease, a disease that cannot be cured without first being diagnosed.

In 1920, just a year after Armistice Day, Pound published *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, a sequence of poems situated thematically in postwar England. In what is commonly taken to be a personal farewell to London, Pound presents a landscape of disillusion and uncertainty that

recalls the "internal squabble" he predicted six years earlier in the letter to Monroe. But *Mauberley* is not simply a montage of realistic description. It is a memorial to early twentieth century Europe. Like other modern memorials, *Mauberley* attempts to make sense of a problematic and seemingly incomprehensible moment in history. In these poems, Pound struggles to understand the disease he believes is ailing modernity, a disease responsible not only for the Great War, but also for the impasse to which modern art has come. Pound blames society's pervasive dishonesty for violence both on the battlefield and on the written page. In the course of this essay I will explore the ways in which *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* both participates in and questions postwar British memorial culture. I will focus in particular on the ways in which the poem attempts to find meaning in the war but is ultimately unsuccessful, at least in traditional terms.

Mauberley is a war memorial in which war comes up very seldom. The sequence is nonetheless very much about war in the same way that all poetry written directly after the war can be said to be war poetry. Pound himself saw how wound up *Mauberley* is in postwar British culture and included the following footnote in the 1926 edition of *Personae: The Collected Poems of Ezra Pound*:

> The sequence is so distinctly a farewell to London that the reader who chooses to
>
> regard this as an exclusively American edition may as well omit it and turn at
>
> once to page 205. (185)

If uninterested in the war, the reader is better off skipping ahead. The brutality of the war resonates in every poem, particularly in passages dealing with the modern creative process. Art and war are commemorated alongside each other, and the text of the poem could be inscribed on a memorial to either.

The commemorative goals of *Mauberley* are those common to most WWI memorial sculpture and painting. The object is not to present historical fact, but rather to reorganize and sort through the past in order to get at the essence of what actually happened, the underlying truth. The memorial is traditionally a place of resolution where gaps are filled and tragedy given meaning, and WWI memorials are no exception. Answers to fundamental questions are often presented in familiar and comforting imagery, religious and/or nationalistic. London's Cenotaph (Figure 1), for example, argues a nationalistic understanding of the war. It was originally erected
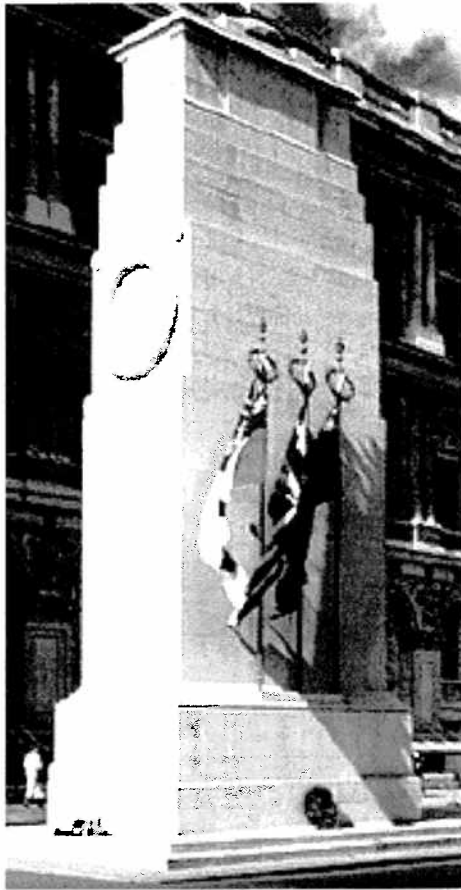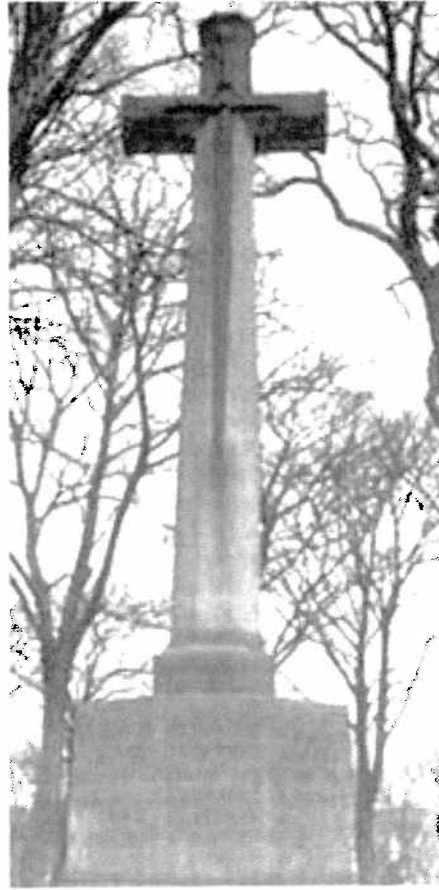

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

in Whitehall for the Peace Day Military parade on July 19, 1919 to celebrate the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. The first incarnation was temporary and constructed of wood and plaster made to look like stone. As part of the Armistice Day ceremonies in 1920, it was redone in stone

and made a permanent feature of Whitehall. The movement of the monument is upward, as if

reaching to heaven, while the massiveness of its stone construction suggests the contribution of

the lost soldiers is of eternal importance. A wreath and three flags crown their achievement in

emblems of national pride, and the inscription calls them "The Glorious Dead." Other

monuments, like the Cross of Sacrifice, designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield for the Imperial War

Graves Commission, blur religious and nationalistic imagery similarly (Figure 2). Fighting for

one's country and dying for one's faith are here very much the same thing. The cross equates the

soldier's death with a Christ-like self-sacrifice (*Memorials of the Great War* 129) and the sword

that runs down its face suggests that the fallen soldiers died for Britain as part of a divine plan.

For artists like Pound, however, nationalism and religion were empty traditions. He and

others had to forge a commemorative language of their own. As an attempt to do so, *Mauberley*

questions at times the concept of memorialization itself. It asks *How can something as*

horrifying as war be commemorated? and *Should it be done at all?* Pound complicates the

nationalistic and religious impulses of many WWI memorials by presenting what he believes to

be the truth of the war and the culture which produced it. The truth, he argues, is that a dishonest

society has manipulated politics and faith in order to justify the consequences of its greed and

continues to do so.

In *A War Imagined* Samuel Hynes goes so far as to name two separate kinds of

memorialization. The first he calls simply monument-making. These are attempts by a society

to deal with the needs of those who survive a war. Monuments like the Cenotaph and the Cross

of Sacrifice reassure the public that the dead died willingly and do not resent their sacrifice.

These are "official acts of closure" that embody "ideas about war— heroic, romantic, histrionic,

occasionally tragic" (270). Then there are anti-monuments. These are works that search for

war's reality without appealing to nationalistic abstraction or religious grandeur. They are

"aggressive rejections of the monument-making principles" (283). Hynes's insight here is

invaluable but his terminology misleading.

It should be obvious that a poem like *Mauberley* or a painting like Wyndham Lewis's *A*

Battery Shelled (Figure 3) contemplates the war in language different than that of an official

monument. *A Battery Shelled* presents the war as an inhuman realm of chaos much opposed to

the rigid order of Whitehall's Cenotaph. But the same purpose is being served. It makes no

sense to call one memorial a "monument" and the other an "anti-monument" when both seek an

understanding of the war. Both are attempts at closure, the only difference being that one is (in

Figure 3.

Hynes's language) "official," sanctioned by the government, and the other isn't. Thus, Pound

tries to fill in the gaps and make whole the experience of the early twentieth century in

Mauberley in much the same way a patriotic sculptor might.

Memorials are sites not only of memory, but also of reconstructive definition. Once

tragedy has been defined in stone, on canvas, or in verse, it is easier for the living public and

future generations to cope. Many memorials of the Great War offer a concise explanation, a

narrative of the who, what, and why that led to tragic loss and ask, most importantly, what does it

mean now? By focusing on the violence and corruption of war, works of art like Stanley

Spencer's *The Resurrection of the Soldiers* (Figure 4) assert that there can be no justification for

Figure 4.

such loss of life and denounce war altogether. The disarray and violence evoke the utterly

ordinary, unheroic world of military life and prevent us from giving these deaths any larger

meaning. Other memorials like *Die Eltern* (the parents) by Käthe Kollwitz, which portrays two

parents mourning a son lost in WWI, define the war's significance in more personal language

(Figure 5). Here, the strongest felt sense of loss is by no means nationalistic, but rather that of

the closest human bond broken (*Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* 168-171, 108-116).

Definition is no less important to Ezra Pound. *Mauberley* attempts to define the social

conditions that lead to war and the marginalization of art, arguing that the violence inherent both

in war and art is due to the dishonesty of the modern world. Old men's lies and economic deceit

send the younger generation abroad to be slaughtered just as dishonest artists rob their subjects

of life. The bayonet and the artist's brush are both weapons of murder. *Mauberley*'s narrative of

the war and events leading up to the current impasse in poetry make understandable a situation

Figure 5.

that seemed to Pound incomprehensible in 1914. As a memorial, it offers an ambitious

interpretation of an amorphous subject by pinpointing the cause of the tragedy. The closure it

imparts empowers the poem as Pound's farewell to postwar London, clearing the path for artistic

and social progress.

That *Mauberley* was Pound's farewell is well known, but the poem has yet to be considered as a memorial to the past. Most of the critical attention paid *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* focuses on the poem's confusing and often chaotic verse. Pound uses multiple personae and cryptic allusions that make it unclear who is speaking when or even what is being spoken about. For this study, however, that confusion does exist is more important than any stab at its elucidation. Pound's memorial fails as an attempt to clearly define the social conditions responsible for the violence of war and art. The poem is hard to understand by virtue of its being a memorial aimed at permanence. Whether a sculpture in a public park or an anthologized poem, a memorial's significance changes over time. Some memorials built originally to commemorate and educate are valued years later only for aesthetic reasons. Others built to ensure cultural remembrance actually aid in the process of forgetting. Memorials take on a life of their own. *Mauberley*'s attempts at defining the eternal verities underlying the downfall of the modern world are essentially only time-specific observations whose importance begins to fade the minute they are made. The poem denounces the dishonesty of the modern world but is inextricably bound in it. Pound realized this and wrote Felix Schelling in 1922 that *Mauberley* "is a mere surface," not an exploration of the deep-rooted truths shaping society (*Letters of Ezra Pound* 180) and spent much of his career trying to distance himself from it.

To read *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* as a memorial to postwar England is to read more fully the context in which the poem is situated. *Mauberley* is the crystallization of a memorializing impulse present in much of Pound's writing during and directly after the war. I begin then by looking at pieces of Pound's earlier prose that point to the need for a memorial like *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*.

The War on Modern Art

On October 1ˢᵗ, 1916, Pound published "The War and Diverse Impressions. Mr. Nevinson Thinks

That the Public Is More Interested in the War than It Is in Art" in *Vogue*. The article details an

exhibition of war paintings at the Leicester Galleries in London. Claiming "this impression must

be common to all of us," Pound comes to agree with Nevinson about the public's indifference to

art. But in doing so he makes a number of critical gestures that seem to run counter to his often

dogmatic prose. That he contradicts himself is hardly noteworthy; someone who wrote as

voluminously as Pound cannot be expected to remain consistent all of the time. In "The War and

Diverse Impressions," however, he softens his usually polemic prejudices not out of respect for

Nevinson or mere capriciousness. Pound willfully spares Nevinson the harsh judgment readers

familiar with his prose might expect out of reverence for the painter's subject matter.

"Mr. C.R.W. Nevinson," Pound writes, "has seen the war" (74). The exhibition of his

paintings assembled at the Leicester Galleries is "manifestly an exhibition for the wide public,

and not for the connoisseur in new movements" (74). It seems odd that a poet whose critical

work is often uncompromisingly elitist would write favorably of such an exhibition.[1] Pound's

praise of Nevinson's seemingly haphazard combination of opposed schools of modern art rings

especially foreign. Pound was one of the founding figures of vorticism, a movement growing

out of the emotional focus of imagism, that detested the superficiality of impressionism and

futurism.[2] But in "The War and Diverse Impressions," Pound actually praises Nevinson's use of

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1. In *"Voi Altri Pochi": Ezra Pound and his Audience, 1908-1925*, Mark Kyburz writes that Pound thought "the serious artist should make no compromise with the contemporary (philistine) reading-public; it is requisite to renounce popularity and suffer alienation in order to achieve the pragmatic function of art" (37).
2. In *Gaudier-Brzeska*, Pound thought futurism and impressionism very much related, and very much opposed to Voriticism: "The two camps always exist. In the 'eighties there were symbolists opposed to impressionists, now you have Vorticism, which is, roughly speaking,

impressionistic and futuristic techniques in depicting the war. He doesn't go so far as to discredit vorticism but seems to admit that no single existing school of art can successfully encapsulate the experience of the war. Nevinson's inconsistent technique is as good an attempt as any strictly vorticist project.

> [Nevinson] has painted about the war in a half-dozen different styles, dating from any period in the last twenty years. We have impressionism pure and simple, and we have the well-known brand of futuristic kaleidoscope, and we have Mr. Nevinson in his rough lump-sugar surface, and Mr. Nevinson smooth, and the bewildered but fundamentally conscientious critic may search in vain for a unity or for any reason for all these changes. (74)

But it is Nevinson's subject matter, not his technique, that is most confusing; his inability to shape a coherent or unified whole from the messy enigma of the war is culturally symptomatic.

> No one has yet achieved a calm and unified conception of the war. Is it any surprise that Mr. Nevinson, painting just after the heat of the thing, should not yet have hit on a simple single and masterly style which would render all his impressions? (74)

Pound acknowledges the difficult task facing all artists in wartime England and is willing to reassess the tenets of his artistic beliefs, probably because he feels he *has* to in order to gain some understanding of the war.

The First World War is indeed something of a special case for Pound. In his defense of Nevinson's inconsistency, Pound makes an implicit connection between realistic representation

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expressionism, neo-cubism, and imagism gathered together in one camp and futurism in the other. Futurism is descended from impressionism. It is, in so far as it is an art movement, a kind of accelerated impressionism. It is a spreading, or surface art, as opposed to Vorticism, which is intensive" (90).

of the war and the painter's emotional purchase on the events depicted. As opposed to abstract vorticist painting, where representation and emotion are sometimes irreconcilable[3], painting the emotional impact of the war *necessarily involves some representational technique*. Thus, when Pound argues "the public should see, in the painting[s], Mr. Nevinson's record of the war, the war set down as he saw it, a personal record," he has conflated two categories vorticism often keeps distinct (75). To understand the war one must be able to represent it accurately in terms of both its emotional and sensory impact.

But this is by no means the gospel with which Pound will resolve the personal or cultural aftermath of the Great War. "The War and Diverse Impressions" is an unsigned diary of experimentation, Pound attempting to understand the ongoing war. Though the advocacy of truth-telling becomes a prominent theme in much of Pound's writing and the basis for *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, Pound's confidence seems to falter by the end of "The War and Diverse Impressions." For all his praise of Nevinson, Pound is unconvinced, unsure in the end he's any closer to being able to memorialize the war. He is again ready to preach vorticism, telling his readers precisely how to view Nevinson's paintings. But he hasn't given up his search.

"War Paintings by Wyndham Lewis" appeared in the *Nation* February 8th, 1919, three years after Pound wrote "The War and Diverse Impressions." Though Pound writes persuasively in support of Lewis, I don't think we're to mistake any sense of finality or confidence in statements like "Mr. Lewis's pictures are the most thoughtful exposition of the war that any painter has *yet* given to us" (547, my emphasis). In many ways, this review differs greatly from

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3. Consider, for example, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska speaking to Pound about the sculpted *Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound* before unveiling it: "You understand it will not look like you, it *will … not … look …* like you. It will be the expression of certain emotions which I get from your character" (*Gaudier-Brzeska* 50).

that of Nevinson's wartime painting, but both share one broad tendency: the advocacy of

representational art. Pound distinguishes the paintings assembled at the Goupil Gallery from

Lewis's "abstract" work, considering "the present work an advance, or at any rate, not an artistic

retrogression" (547). Pound is careful, however, to distance Lewis's paintings from sentimental

representational art, citing emotional appeal as the dividing line. Lewis's is "good art because

the sense of the tragedy is not flung at you in cheapening haste," (546). Sentimental art, on the

other hand, cannot present real emotion effectively:

> the horrors of the Wiertz gallery were painted with polemic intention, but the
>
> painting of horror cheaply [;] the superficial representation of horror merely
>
> causes the painting to be hidden, or the beholder to turn his eyes elsewhere. (546)

Just three years earlier, in "The War and Diverse Impressions," however, Pound displayed no

such contempt when speaking of these graphic war paintings. In fact, he admires Nevinson's

work because it resembles that displayed at the Wiertz:

> You have here a hospital ward to compete with the best horrors in the Wiertz
>
> Gallery; you have a pretty fragment of face in the peaceful Piccadilly of the
>
> "Return to London." You have a really fine energy and brute force in the mass
>
> and angle of the heavy machine-gun. ("The War and Diverse Impressions" 74)

Where Pound before found a clear and important link between personal emotion and

representation of the war, in "War Paintings by Wyndham Lewis" personal emotion at any level

is deeply suspect.[4] Pound praises Lewis for avoiding satire, "which has no place in the treatment

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4. The influence of T.S. Eliot is clear here, as regards the depersonalization of art. Eliot writes in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," originally published in 1920: "The point of view which I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul: for my meaning is, that the poet has, not a "personality" to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences

of tragic situations," as well as vulgarity, and states flatly, "neither would the expression of any personal emotion have been adequate for the subject" (547). Good art is the "work of a man who has endured war without being dazzled; and without being driven into excited incoherence" (546). It should offer a dispassionate lens through which to assess the war, a notion in blatant conflict with the "personal record" Pound saw approvingly in Nevinson's paintings just three years earlier.

We should recognize in the disagreement between the two articles not necessarily a decisive turn in Pound's thought about the war and its causes. Instead we should note that even in 1919 Pound is still looking for the right techniques with which to represent the war. In both articles he opens himself up to the possibilities of movements he shunned earlier in his career and reconsiders the merits of vorticism. He comes to conclude that some amount of representation will be involved in much work on the war. Pound is centering in on what he will need to be able to memorialize the war, to gain closure and move on. Articles like these and others show just how vital an understanding of the war was to Pound. They are preparation for the memorial he will try to construct in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, where the necessity for representation in painting the war is transformed into the desire to tell an entire society why the Great War was really fought and what it means to postwar England.

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combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality" (56).

Mauberley *In Brief*

The discussion of *Mauberley* as a memorial won't necessarily ensure a systematic and full

discussion of the poem from beginning to end, so some outline of the sequence seems necessary

here. As succinctly phrased by K.K. Ruthven in *A Guide to Ezra Pound's* Personae,[5]

> *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is in two main parts. The first … deals with Pound's
>
> personal experience of the London literary scene, attempts to account historically
>
> for the discrepancies between private vision and public taste, and implies that the
>
> literary efforts of pre-Raphaelite and nineties poets were abortive. The second
>
> section, running from "Mauberley 1920" through the final "Medallion," deals
>
> with the *impasse* of aestheticism and concerns a fictitious minor poet called Hugh
>
> Selwyn Mauberley. (125-126)

The poem concerns itself first with the deaths to be memorialized, beginning with E.P.'s ode for

the selection of his sepulcher. Like the figure of Mauberley, E.P. is not Pound, but as George

Bornstein points out, "the fecundity of parallels [between the two] suggests that in both masks

Pound externalized, and perhaps exorcised, a feared alternate identity- E.P. of what he had been,

Mauberley of what he might become if he remained in England" (*Postromantic* 61). Bornstein

and others have identified three distinct speakers, E.P., Mauberley, and Pound himself, but

frequently disagree as to who is speaking when. Espey, on the other hand, in *Ezra Pound's*

Mauberley, claims Pound and Mauberley as the only voices present. It is not my purpose to

enter an already crowded debate. More central to my argument is how the war resonates in

---

5. I am indebted to K.K. Ruthven's *A Guide to Ezra Pound's* Personae in much of what follows,
particularly for the elucidation of some of *Mauberley*'s more obscure references, as well as
translations from Greek, French, and Italian.

Mauberley's confused and often puzzling rhetoric. We have the sense right away that Pound's project of memorializing the past is already getting away from him.

The opening ode introduces E.P. as a character "out of key with his time," whose goals of reviving poetry in the early twentieth century are ill-fated from the start (1).[6] E.P.'s age, in subsequent poems marked simply by roman numerals, is characterized as one of heavy industrialization, where manufactured products are preferred to the work of artists, and a "tawdry cheapness" looms everywhere (III 11). Here Pound is establishing the social disease of which war is only a symptom. When the war appears then, in poems IV and V, it is a sure affirmation of the failure of E.P.'s poetic practice. He was never able to deliver that which the "age demanded" and so is forced into social inconsequence (II 1).

"Yeux Glauques" introduces images of artistic production gone awry. Pre-Raphaelite painters struggle with transforming a woman into an artistic image braving time, but end up robbing their subject of its life. Here "begins *Mauberley*'s analysis of the evolution leading to the current impasse in poetry" (*Postromantic* 62). The conflict is one between the professed goals of an artistic movement like imagism or vorticism and its actual accomplishments. The painters in "Yeux Glauques" attempt to create timeless beauty but do so at a heavy cost. This theme is revisited in "Envoi (1919)," where the poetic speaker, often taken to be Pound himself, argues for the immortality of art in language that seems to threaten the artistic subject with violence, and again in "Medallion," the poem with which *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* concludes. Therein, the speaker, generally thought to be Mauberley, attempts to sculpt the face of a woman in eternal beauty, only to watch "the eyes turn topaz," a faded color of lifelessness (16).

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6. Unless otherwise marked, all citations from *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* are from *Personae: The Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound*. New York: New Directions, 1990. 185-202.

The poems in between "Envoi (1919)" and "Medallion" are again labeled in roman numerals, but are part of the poem titled "Mauberley (1920)."[7] The speaker here is Mauberley, though the poem takes up many of the same issues that concern E.P. earlier. In fact, the similarities between E.P. and Mauberley, while justifying the confusion as to who's speaking when, bolster claims made by Bornstein and Ronald Bush among others that E.P. and Mauberley were both expressions of Pound's self-conception. The poem "The Age Demanded," part of "Mauberley (1920)," takes its title from poem II, but is more blunt in stating outright the looming "social inconsequence" of poetry only hinted at by E.P (8).

Even from a summary as simple as the one offered above, it should be clear that Pound's aesthetic concerns for his poetry in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* are inextricably linked to his perception of contemporary social problems. These problems, stemming from industrialization, the brazen influence of capitalism, or simply the lack of public interest, are responsible for or continuous with the barren state of the arts in postwar London. Pound's poetics, the imagism typified by a volume like *Lustra*, a poetics concerned with influencing society[8], is unable to help the situation. When E.P.'s attempts to "resuscitate the dead art / of poetry" are dismissed as "Wrong from the start" in "E.P. Ode Pour l'Election de Son Sepulchre," Pound condemns at once both E.P.'s aesthetics and the age that renders them useless (2-4). As a memorial then, *Mauberley* attempts to come to terms with both the social and artistic deficiencies of the period.

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7. Following convention, I will use "Mauberley (1920)" when referring to the poem with which the second half of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* opens and *Mauberley* when speaking of the whole. Because poems in both halves of *Mauberley* are labeled with roman numerals, the poems in "Mauberley (1920)" will contain the world Mauberley in the title before the roman numeral to avoid confusion. For example, Poem II refers to the second poem of *Mauberley*, while "Mauberley II" refers actually to the fifteenth.
8. In a letter to Felix Schelling, Pound wrote, "It's all rubbish to pretend that art isn't didactic. A revelation is always didactic" (*Letters* 180).

The violence done against art is as vivid as the shocking description of the war; closure must be had in regards to both in order for progress to be made.

The Symptoms and the Disease

Before delving deeper into the mechanisms of memorialization, I think it necessary first to

examine more specifically the social conditions presented in *Mauberley*. It is important for

Pound to be able to define these "symptoms" so that his memorial can be of some didactic

purpose. If *Mauberley* can successfully anatomize the culture from which war and stillborn art

result, the poem could begin to educate readers and reform society. The world of the poem is

one of chaotic and continuous change. Pound blames industrialization and capitalist economics

for its spiritual destitution. They are in his mind both the product of and the instruments by

which dishonesty is propagated in postwar England.

History

As is frequently the case in modernist literature, history plays a problematic role in *Mauberley*.

The poem's reverence for the past might lead us to think of it as an escapist memorial,

threatening to separate the aesthetic and social arguments, should we miss the irony. In both the

poetic and the social spheres, there is no going back. Though E.P. is "bent resolutely on

wringing lilies from the acorn," on producing something aesthetically pleasing from some kernel

of modern experience, he finds it impossible ("E.P. Ode Pour L'Election de Son Sepluchre" 7).

His techniques are "out of date" (6). The world is changing at such a rapid pace that to cling to

the aesthetics successful in generations past is to deny progress and doom oneself to social

inconsequence. The image of the poet being held in the chopped seas is especially relevant here:

> Idmen gar toi panth, os eni Troie
> Caught in the unstopped ear;
> Giving the rocks small lee-way
> The chopped seas held him, therefore, that year. (9-12)[9]

---

9. Greek in Roman characters quoted from *Ezra Loomis Pound (1885-1972)*.

The Greek is from the sirens' song in the *Odyssey* (XII 189) and means "For we know all the

toils that [are] in wide Troy" (qtd. in *A Guide to Ezra Pound's Personae* 129). The desire to

write poetry in the "old" tradition is here the seductive promise of beautiful music. Unlike

Odysseus, who plugs his ears to shut out the enchanting song, E.P. is unprotected and quickly

succumbs. His fate is a pained stasis. He is held against the rocks while the chopped seas flow

past in irregular, abusive waves. E.P. symbolizes both the 90's aesthete clinging to techniques

no longer effective as history moves ever more violently forward and the average citizen in

postwar Europe faced with the incomprehensible war behind and its aftermath ahead. In both

symbolic capacities, the stasis of E.P.'s position is tragic; as far as the poet can see, the water is

choppy in both directions.

The need to memorialize, then, is not simple preservation. The imagist poet and the

postwar European must gain closure with regards to the past if the seas ahead are to be calmed.

Neither "obscure reveries" nor "classics in paraphrase" will cut it any longer; the psychic

demands of the First World War call for a break with the past (II 5, 8). Paul Fussell in *The Great

War and Modern Memory* is so bold as to claim that memory after WWI is essentially ironic and

that it separates past history from the modern period irreconcilably. I invoke Fussell not because

of the historical accuracy of his assertion, but rather to suggest that his response to WWI is

similar to Pound's. Though Fussell is more polemic, situating the divide cleanly at the outbreak

of war, whereas Pound thought the process an ongoing one, to both men the immediate past is

something alien. New methods of poetry, like new methods of remembering, are necessary

because of the changes.

Mass-Production and Capitalism

But why is history moving at such a frightening pace, as to make identification with the past

impossible? What exactly has happened to make the past so alien? The marginalization of art,

like the terror of war, is caused by industrialization and capitalism in *Mauberley*. Pound gives us

a useful metaphor of progress in poem III to show how these circumstances are related. The

poem is worth quoting in part:

> The tea-rose tea-gown, etc.
> Supplants the mousseline of Cos,
> The pianola "replaces"
> Sappho's barbitos.
>
> Christ follows Dionysus,
> Phallic and ambrosial
> Made way for macerations;
> Caliban casts out Ariel.
>
> All things are a flowing,
> Sage Heracleitus says;
> But a tawdry cheapness
> Shall outlast our days. (1-12)

In each couplet of the first two stanzas, the movement is from an artifact or figure of the

idealized past to its replacement in the vulgar present. The "tea-rose tea-gown" represents the

affectations of a society choosing superficial fashion over the timeless beauty of ancient Greek

tapestry. Similarly, the music of Sappho, the product of a woman's full sexuality, is replaced by

the mass-produced pianola ("It Draws one to Consider Time" 68). The mention of Christ

suggests that modernity is a world of suffering quite opposed to the joyous reveries of the ancient

past. K.K. Ruthven describes the next couplet by paraphrasing Shakespeare: "the gross

supplants the ethereal in this brave new world" (*A Guide to Ezra Pound's Personae* 131). The

third stanza does well in summing up Pound's assessment of London during the decade or so he

lived there. History is in constant motion here as well, and now it seems that things can only get

worse. It is as if the flow Heracleitus described feeds into the whirlpool of the twentieth century,

accelerating dangerously faster and faster as it revolves around the vortex of "cheapness" it will

never escape.

In the stanzas that follow, Pound speculates on the causes of the overall social decline,

stressing economic factors:

> Even the Christian beauty
> Defects– after Samothrace;
> We see *to kalon*
> Decreed in the market place.
>
> Faun's flesh is not to us,
> Nor the saint's vision.
> We have the press for wafer;
> Franchise for circumcision. (13-20)

The artistic viability of Christianity is lost after the cults at Samothrace that celebrated the

Cabiric mysteries die out, and beauty (*to kalon*) is dictated by the economy. This is a point not

to pass lightly. The proliferation of mass-produced consumer goods puts into question the

necessity of individually crafted works of art. Artists can no longer be exclusively interested in

Beauty (the faun's flesh) or the Good (the saint's vision), but must focus their attention rather on

matters of a more mundane nature. They must concentrate on ways to sell themselves to a public

little concerned with art. Many moderns found themselves in this position and thought it best to

take over all means of production to ensure their survival. Virginia and Leonard Woolf, for

example, started the Hogarth Press in their Bloomsbury basement ("the press for wafer"), and

T.S. Eliot, after serious trouble finding a place to publish *The Wasteland*, began the *Criterion*,

("Franchise for circumcision"). Pound himself is known today as much for selling modernism to

the world as he is for his poetry.

The fear that such economic preoccupation might harm true artistic production motivates

much of *Mauberley*, particularly poems like "Mr. Nixon." Issues of truth telling are so closely

aligned with those of economics in this poem as to be almost indistinguishable from one another.

Mr. Nixon is a contemporary of Pound's for whom writing is strictly an economic activity.

> I never mentioned a man but with the view
> Of selling my own works. (14-15)

He reminds the speaker of an acquaintance whose advice was not to "kick against the pricks,"

and he recommends Pound give up writing in verse (22). The fears voiced in the opening ode

are here realized, but not as a threat of social inconsequence. The question is now one of

economics that finds artistic success a function of reception rather than of personal creativity.

"And no one knows, at sight, a masterpiece" (18), Nixon declares. A masterpiece to the kinds of

people Pound is parodying here (Hugh Kenner has suggested that Arnold Bennett served as the

model for Nixon) is something that sells well, regardless of its content. Nixon himself seems

aware of the distinction between economically viable writing and artistic writing when he says,

"as for literature / It gives no man a sinecure" (16-17). One must write a masterpiece, not

literature, in order to make one's living as a writer.

The poem that follows, poem X, describes a writer on the opposite end of the artistic

spectrum. The stylist, rather than spending time buttering up reviewers and molding his product

to be maximally profitable, seeks refuge from economic and cultural pressures to focus closely

on his craft.

> Beneath the sagging roof
> The stylist has taken shelter
> Unpaid, uncelebrated,
> At last from the world's welter (1-4)

The stylist's social inconsequence is here praised, especially when poem X is coupled with "Mr.

Nixon." Though *Mauberley* may have been Pound's farewell to London and much of the

aesthetic he developed there, it is indeed a fond farewell. Many critics have suggested the stylist was probably modeled after Ford Madox Ford, but I think we would do well to see an idealized representation of Pound himself in this poem. If the world were different, Pound probably would have been happy with the life of the stylist. But the symptoms described here were the outcroppings of a disease very real to Pound, and he could no longer wholly endorse nor portray uncritically the socially disengaged artist.

> The haven from sophistications and contentions
> Leaks through its thatch;
> He offers succulent cooking;
> The door has a creaking latch. (9-12)

Not only is the physical space or social privilege that allows the stylist to work threatened by the invasion of worldly concerns. His hut or shack is a haven from "sophistications and contentions," and with the entrance of the social, the stylist may lose his or her ability to accurately contemplate and relate the truth. Pound here is focusing the attack he began in "Mr. Nixon" and poem III on the abuses of language at the hand of frivolous or merely "pretty" art. The threat of the world for the stylist is the corruption of his or her refined style, a direct assault on the project of clear and concise contemplation of the thing that imagism called for.

The poem breaks off before the moment of contact, before the world breaks in on the isolated stylist. Pound leaves us asking what will happen, whether when the creaking door swings wide the world will partake of the stylist's succulent cooking or subjugate him or her completely. In poem XI we're given the answer. Ruthven describes poem's focus as on the "woman whose erotic instincts are stillborn or suppressed by her environment" (139). The reference here is to the Greek *Milesian Tales*, famous for their licentiousness. The subject of this poem is so far removed from such erotic roots as to be but a collection of empty gestures.

"Conservatrix of Milésien"

> Habits of mind and feeling,
> Possibly. But in Ealing
> With the most bank-clerkly of Englishmen?
>
> No, "Milesian" is an exaggeration.
> No instinct has survived in her
> Older than those her grandmother
> Told her would fit her station.

The negative influence of society, here embodied in the mundane clerical preoccupations of a London suburb, is a censoring force. The feminine conservator or preserver of erotic desires and traditions, confined by rigid social constraints, loses the primal instinct she once stood for. This is the fate that Pound sees for the stylist of the previous poem once the creaking latch is undone. It is a fate that sees natural human instincts bowing under the pressure of public opinion. The truth has been sacrificed in the name of decency, and Pound describes the suppression of natural drives in a metaphor of patriarchal oppression.

In defining the symptoms he wishes to memorialize, Pound presents a world of violence and brutality, but not one of chaos. The world of the poem is governed by the omnipresence of dishonesty. The mass-production of a capitalist economy that ushers in an age of "tawdry cheapness" has far-reaching consequences. In the loftiest sense, the public is being duped into accepting inexpensively produced replacements for divine notions of beauty. Economic stress and the competition of factories and industrial plants make it impossible for the artist to create anything that transcends the here-and-now. At its deepest, this social dishonesty even infiltrates basic human nature, dehumanizing a woman of natural sexual instincts into a passionless object.

The murderous capacity of this culture is mirrored in its art. There are many poems within the *Mauberley* sequence that portray the artistic process, and in each the artist uses the tried-and-true methods of imagism but can render only a lifeless image. In "Yeux Glauques" Pound describes allegorically the abuse suffered by art in his own time by describing the

criticism endured by pre-Raphaelite painting in the nineteenth century. He tells us that while

Rossetti, Swinburne, and other pre-Raphaelite poets were being abused, their less-talented

accusers were being praised. One of the accusers, W.E. Gladstone, Pound writes in his *Guide to*

Kulchur, had a "general attitude to life" that was "ridiculous" (262-3). The influence of these

people was nevertheless deep enough to contaminate the beauty sought by Pound and others.

The faun's head is an allusion to a poem by Rimbaud that Pound said symbolized "the sort of

beauty that we are, in this particular month and year, in search of" ("The Approach to Paris"

726). It is no coincidence that this is the same beauty sought by the pre-Raphaelites in "Yeux

Glauques."

> Foetid Buchanan lifted up his voice
> When that faun's head of hers
> Became a pastime for
> Painters and adulterers.
>
> The Burne-Jones cartons
> Have preserved her eyes;
> Still, at the Tate, they teach
> Cophetua to rhapsodize;
>
> Thin like brook-water,
> With a vacant gaze.
> The English Rubaiyat was still-born
> In those days. (5-16)

R.W. Buchanan published a pseudonymous attack on the pre-Raphaelite "Fleshly School of

Poetry" in the *Contemporary Review* in 1871. Sir Edward Burn-Jones was a painter whose

Cophetua and the Beggar Maid hung in the Tate Gallery in London. Pound accuses Burn-Jones

of reducing the faun's eyes to a "vacant gaze" and once called the Tate a "sink of abomination"

(*Gaudier-Brzeska* 95). These men are incapable of transforming a woman into a timeless artistic

image and instead produces a lifeless, two-dimensional portrait.

Pound also finds fault with the pre-Raphaelite movement. The lines "The English Rubaiyat was still-born / In those days" (15-16) refer not only to the cold reception Edward Fitzgerald's version of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* received. When we look forward to the image of "pickled fetuses and bottled bones" in "Siena Mi Fe" (1), it seems Pound is also suggesting that pre-Raphaelite poetry, like nineties poetry, "was an abortive production" (*A Guide to the Personae of Ezra Pound* 135). Pound approved of their questing spirit, but faulted them for passivity ("the half-ruin'd face, / Questing and passive...."). Pound's anxiety, however, has much to do with his own artistic craft. Both E.P. and Mauberley struggle with the same problems Pound attributes to the pre-Raphaelites. The violence against "poor Jenny" in "Yeux Glauques" mirrors, according to Bornstein, "the poem's own rigid association [that] foils genuine dynamism even while it recreates for us an image of Pre-Raphaelite woman" (*Postromantic* 63). That is, E.P. robs his subject of life just like the pre-Raphaelites and their accusers. Mauberley too is unable to bestow life upon his creations. In the final poem of the *Mauberley* sequence, "Medallion," he transforms a living person into the "metallic deadness of an *objet d'art*" (*Guide* 146).

> The face-oval beneath the glaze,
> Bright in its suave bounding-line, as,
> Beneath half-watt rays,
> The eyes turn topaz. (13-16)

Art mirrors life and vice versa. The war in *Mauberley* is also a space in which the dishonesty of the world manifests itself in economic corruption and violence. Soldiers are sent to die for the greed of their fathers. The economic institution of capitalism funds the war as a profitable venture; it deals in the trade of mass-produced machinery, weapons, and human lives. I know of no better synopsis of poem IV than Samuel Hynes offers in *A War Imagined*, and we

would do well to follow his lead, adding also an emphasis on language's dual presence in the

poem as both victim and causal agent in the First World War.

> The whole Myth of the War is encapsulated in nineteen lines; first the motives for
> going:

> > Some quick to arm,
> > some for adventure
> > some from fear of weakness,
> > some from fear of censure,
> > some for love of slaughter, in imagination,
> > learning later ...
> > some in fear, learning love of slaughter [...][10]

> then the war itself, in three lines:

> > Died some, pro patia,
> > > non "dulce" non "et decor" ...
> > walked eye-deep in hell

> and the "turn," in a single line:

> > believing in old men's lies, then unbelieving

> and the return to England, disillusioned and betrayed:

> > came home, home to a lie,
> > home to many deceits,
> > home to old lies and new infamy;
> > usury age-old and age-thick
> > and liars and public places. (341)

The war began in part because of the spuriousness of the older generation, parents willing to

offer up their sons to maintain a tradition of lies and deceit. Pound is hardly alone in asserting

this; diatribes against war profiteers and nationalists alike appear frequently in any discussion of

WWI, historical or contemporary. The press and governmental censorship take much of the

blame for the transmission of untruths about the war, both then and now. Commentators like

Paul Fussell mark the effects of WWI on language in the newfound popularity of euphemism,

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10. Hynes's ellipses are here bracketed off in order to differentiate them from Pound's.

passive voice, and irony. Fussell notes that English civilians had no idea what was going on across the channel, gathering information only from censured news reports and letters. "A lifelong suspicion of the press was one lasting result of the ordinary man's experience of the war," Fussell claims (*The Great War and Modern Memory* 316).

In looking at the *Mauberley* sequence, particularly those poems that deal explicitly with the theme of artistic creation, it seems that the abuses of language have been internalized. Pound provides us with frequent accounts of artistic creation gone awry. Instead of imbuing their subjects with life, these artists inadvertently kill them. The stroke of the brush and the sweep of the pen across the page are acts akin to the pulling of a trigger on the battlefield. The violence that Pound sees as pervasive in British society both before and after the war is perhaps the symptom that encompasses all the others. Industrialization and capitalism, and the dishonesty inherent in both, are at the same time products of and causal agents in the speeding up of history, the sense that humanity is past the point of no return. To return to the image with which the discussion of cultural symptoms began, we see E.P., a stick-figure representing an entire generation, battling for survival as the chopped seas of history rush by. He throws his arms in every direction and fights with the water, fighting to keep from drowning. Violence is an instinctual response to change, a survival mechanism common to poet, soldier, and civilian alike.

But violence profits no one. This much Pound has learned from the war. His response, one I've traced from the beginning of the war to its end, has been to seek closure in regards to the violence of the past. *Mauberley* doesn't take refuge in the traditional symbolism ready at hand. The poem instead urges us to recognize the dishonesty behind the violence and economic corruption and work for reform. If things are left unchanged, the water ahead will remain as choppy as it was behind:

There died a myriad,
And of the best, among them,
For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
For a botched civilization,

Charm, smiling at the good mouth,
Quick eyes gone under earth's lid,

For two gross of broken statues,
For a few thousand battered books. (Poem V)

The Sculpture of Rhyme

Thus far, I have used the terms monument and memorial almost interchangeably in describing sites of memory linked to the First World War. In *The Texture of Memory*, James E. Young makes an important, if subtle, distinction between the two that should inform further discussion of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* as a poem of commemoration. He decides to "treat all memory-sites as memorials, the plastic objects within these sites as monuments. A memorial may be a day, a conference, or a space, but it need not be a monument. A monument, on the other hand, is always a kind of memorial" (4). The text of *Mauberley* itself, the words on the physical page, then, is a monument. A formal analysis of the poem in its memorializing context should treat it as such. Pound's poetic techniques become like the sculptor's, attempts to form meaning by chiseling away at a block of raw material. Hugh Kenner has in fact used the phrase "poet-as-sculptor" in reference to Ezra Pound (*The Poetry of Ezra Pound* 123), and Michael North goes farther to describe Pound's poetics as essentially a series of sculptural metaphors. In *The Final Sculpture* he writes:

> Pound's own use of the carving metaphor reveals more than an admiration for
>
> sharp lines and solid forms. Only this metaphor combines the removal of
>
> excrescence, the abrasive cleaning so close to Pound's heart, with the act of
>
> restoration, of presenting the old anew. To preserve by elimination, to restore a
>
> tradition by cutting away unnecessary sophistications is Pound's most basic
>
> concern. (103)

Like the memorial sculptor, the poet works with a huge mass of varied cultural material, through which he or she must sort, deciding what to preserve and what is better left forgotten. For Pound the process is one of digging through layers and layers of untruth and coming to the hard facts.

Though he claims in poem II that his age isn't interested in "the 'sculpture' of rhyme," that is in many ways what Pound delivers in *Mauberley* (12). Dealing with issues as amorphous and threatening as the First World War and other symptoms of a cultural disease from which he sees no possible return, Pound must make his subject matter manageable and concrete if *Mauberley* is to succeed as a memorial. One can see Pound's frontline of attack visually on the page. The poem is in many regards an exercise in form, but not mere poetic calisthenics. Pound had to find a way to encapsulate something as ugly as the war and its causes in order to make them understandable. The violence present in the opening ode, when E.P. is struggling for survival in the waters of history, for example, is written in rhyming quatrains. Pound isn't interested simply in the terror of a poet finding him or herself out of place or out of date. He is just as interested in what is to be learned from such a situation. To do so he must force an unwieldy event into a regular and comprehensible frame. Pound is trying to tidy up the frayed, unsightly edges of an unpleasant situation to gain control over what he sees happening to himself and to his generation.

The rhyming quatrains continue through poems II and III, but end abruptly with poem IV. This is the poem in which Pound deals most directly with the war. There is no hint of a formal pattern here. Instead, the violent chaos of the war is echoed in the irregular rhythms and dissonant cadences. The formal inconsistencies continue through poem V, which deals with postwar English culture. The rest of the poems before "Mauberley (1920)," however, resume the seemingly regular form, written in either rhyming quatrains ("Yeux Glauques," "Siene Mi Fe'," "Brennbaum," poem X-XII), rhyming stanzas of various lengths ("Mr. Nixon"), or rhyming septets ("Envoi (1919)").

Pound undermines the formal consistency of these poems by using anti-climactic rhythms and abortive, empty rhymes. The very existence of rhyme and regular stanzas, given the thematic content of these poems and the sparse language, calls attention to the glaring contradiction between form and content. It is as if Pound is asking *Can this really be done?* Irony, of course, abounds in *Mauberley*, but it doesn't negate every memorializing gesture. Irony is an essential part of Pound's response to the situation at hand. He seems keenly aware of the futility of memorializing the war. Pound is at once mocking and participating in British postwar memorial culture in what is an almost tragic capacity. He realizes there can be no success in what he's doing, but feels it necessary to proceed anyway, ever hopeful that he *will* come up with the techniques necessary to memorialize the war.

The rhythms of "E.P. Ode Pour L'Election De Son Sepulchre" imbue the poem with this sense of hopelessness. The lines accelerate towards an unseen goal and arrive anti-climactically. They are so disjointed that they never seem to build any momentum or regularity.

> For three years, out of key with his time,
> He strove to resuscitate the dead art
> Of poetry; to maintain "the sublime"
> In the old sense. Wrong from the start—
>
> No, hardly, but seeing he had been born
> In a half savage country, out of date;
> Bent resolutely on wringing lilies from the acorn;
> Capaneus; trout for factitious bait; (1-8)

In the first two stanzas Pound uses punctuation to break up the rhythm. Pauses and caesuras after commas, semi-colons, and dashes disrupt almost every line. The phrasing is awkward, almost as if these lines are being read aloud by someone out of breath. And when Pound does allow the rhythm some regularity, when anticipation builds, it is shortly dispersed. When reading "He strove to resuscitate the dead art," the blunt "Of poetry" that follows is an emotional

let-down. Similarly, Pound undercuts the emotional impact of "Wrong from the start" with a
dash and follows it with the fumbling, prosaic syntax of "No, hardly, but seeing he had been
born" (5). As if his creative capacity is already spent, the final line of this stanza resorts to
simple listing. Pound shows us just how dead the art of poetry really is: it can create but abortive
attempts at emotional engagement.

Pound uses rhyme as well to reflect the current impasse in poetry. Traditionally
speaking, end-rhyme is an important rhythmic device that connects each line with the next,
building readers' anticipation. In *Mauberley*, however, the jarring and anti-climactic rhythms are
not smoothed over by end-rhyme. If anything, the poem seems more ironic because many of the
lines do rhyme. End-rhyme also traditionally has a thematic function in verse, a way of
connecting words or images in interesting and insightful ways. In much of *Mauberley*, Pound
uses end-rhyme to his advantage, drawing insightful parallels as a means of memorializing. In
"Yeux Glauques," for example, Pound uses end rhyme to incorporate ideas of capitalism and
violence into artistic production:

> Gladstone was still respected,
> When John Ruskin produced
> "King's Treasuries"; Swinburne
> and Rossetti still abused. (1-4)

By linking the words "produced" and "abused," Pound subtly comments on the compromise of
true art under economic pressure, hinting that both and art and social progress in postwar
England are inherently violent phenomena. End-rhyme is used similarly in the second stanza of
poem XII that deals with Lady Valentine, where Pound likens "fashion" to "passion," hinting
that both are social constructions. Such rhymes one might easily call idea-rhymes.

But there are also many uninsightful end-rhymes in *Mauberley*, words linked solely by
acoustic similarities. These rhymes are often hollow, as if the poet is trying to maintain a rhyme

scheme for form's sake alone. Many such rhymes appear in "Mauberley (1920)." Spoken through Pound's Mauberley persona, the figure whose poetics Pound may have feared would eventually be his, these poems are the work of a poet so involved with formal issues that meaning, not to mention relevance, is often of little concern. In "Mauberley II" Pound encapsulates the speaker's poetics in a single quatrain:

> –Given that is his "fundamental passion,"
> This urge to convey the relation
> Of eye-lid and cheek-bone
> By verbal manifestation; (19-22)

Should we miss the quotation marks with which Pound questions Mauberley's emotional connection with his art, Pound also incorporates his disdain into the rhyme scheme itself. Rhyming "relation" with "manifestation" and "passion" offers the reader only aesthetic pleasure. The rhyme is empty of meaning. Unlike the rhymes of "Yeux Glauques," Mauberley's rhymes do little to explore a deeper thematic or emotional connection and seem useful only in fulfilling a formal requirement. If anything, these rhymes point out the lack of passion in Mauberley's craft. Mauberley is also

> Incapable of the least utterance or composition,
> Emendation, conservation of the "better tradition,"
> Refinement of medium, elimination of superfluities,
> August attraction or concentration. ("The Age Demanded" 45-48)

In short, he is capable only of a misguided pursuit of beauty. The beauty he produces is of value only to himself, and is in reality only a collection of superfluities of little consequence or meaning. He is blinded by formal beauty to the point where he rhymes words like "tradition" with "composition" and "concentration," making comparisons that are insignificant and mundane.

The question that Pound runs into so frequently in *Mauberley* is also asked countless times by those involved in memorializing projects elsewhere in the arts: *Can this be done? How*

can any work of art commemorate or effectively memorialize the devastation of war? The

answer is difficult. Holocaust survivors, Young writes in *The Texture of Memory*, often

complain that holocaust memorials are too abstract and removed from the actual experiences of

victims to have any meaning. "'We weren't tortured and our families weren't murdered in the

abstract,' the survivors complain, 'it was real'" (9). But purely representational art, Pound and

others have argued, ignores the emotional impact of the past. In recent years cultural critics have

agreed, and the very idea of monument building has been thrown into question. Returning again

to the holocaust, debate over the erection of a holocaust memorial in Berlin has been ongoing

these last ten years. The plans are done, a plot across from the Reichstag building bought and

readied for construction, but still no work has begun. A national broke out began in newsprint

and at public gatherings between novelist Martin Walser (against) and Jewish leader Ignatz

Bubis (for). Bubis demanded the Jewish victims of the concentration camps be commemorated.

Walser argued what is now a common sentiment: to build a memorial would be the first step

towards forgetting (*Die Walser-Bubis Debatte* 7-17).

Narrating Tragedy

Memorials tell stories. They give us the who, the when, and often the where of a historical event, but most importantly they give us the why. Monuments like the Cross of Sacrifice narrate Britain's part in the First World War from a definite beginning to a clear and meaningful end. Soldiers went to battle because their nation needed them and died as part of God's larger plan. Other memorials, as we've seen, tell it differently, but are no less engaged in the act of narration. The closure offered by WWI memorials like London's Cenotaph and Käthe Kollwitz's "Die Eltern" is that of knowing the story has an end, even if it is one of sadness and loss.

Pound once wrote of *Mauberley* as his "attempt to condense the James novel" (*Letters of Ezra Pound* 180). The poem is indeed a collection of narratives strung together in an attempt to commemorate the tragedies of the early twentieth century. In sizing up the economic pressure that effectively censors artistic production, for example, Pound tells the story of Mr. Nixon. Readers are also told the stories of the stylist and the conservatrix among others. But as we've seen, none of these narratives reach any point of closure; they are left hanging in awkward stasis. We never know what becomes of Mr. Nixon or the person whom he's advising. Likewise, the appearance of the stylist is more a snapshot than a story, breaking off before the world's welter enters. The conservatrix is also a static figure, the lifeless creation of a dehumanizing patriarchy.

The largest narrative in *Mauberley*, however, is in the form of the poem itself, told in three poetic voices. The first twelve poems, up until "Envoi (1919)," are related by E.P. According to Bornstein and others, Pound himself speaks the envoi. Mauberley, then, is responsible for "Mauberley (1920)," the remaining five poems. The characters E.P. and Mauberley are also static and their stories abortive and fragmented narratives. Pound tries to describe the impact of the war on these two figures but the portrait he presents is lifeless and

ineffectual. He creates personae, not characters, much like the artists/murderers in poems like

"Yeux Glauques" and "Medallion." The confusion of the war has seeped into the creative

process and the result is unsettling.

    Mauberley may be thought of as a memorial telling the story of two soldiers gone to war.

The first, E.P., is killed in battle, but never buried. In "E.P. Ode Pour L'Election de Son

Sepulchre" he desperately wants closure to a life that's come to an end, but is forced to linger

halfway between life and death: "Giving the rocks small lee-way / The chopped seas held him,

therefore, that year" (11-12). Mauberley survives the war but is so shell-shocked that he lives

almost completely in a world of his creation. It is a world of

> Thick foliage
> Placid beneath warm suns,
> Tawn fore-shores
> Washed in the cobalt of oblivions; ("Mauberley IV 5-8)

He is but

> A consciousness disjunct,
> Being but this overblotted
> Series
> Of Intermittences; ("Mauberley IV" 13-16)

Like E.P., Mauberley belongs neither to the world of the soldier nor that of the civilian. Both are

caught somewhere in between. This is one of the reasons *Mauberley* fails as a traditional

memorial. It can offer only a disjointed and unresolved narrative of the war. What consolation

can be had in a statue of two soldiers, one frozen forever in the process of dying, and the other

stuck in No Man's Land? There can be no closure where the story has no end.

    The telling of a story itself is a function of memory that Pound is never quite comfortable

with in *Mauberley*. Poem XII deals with the malleability of memory, and E.P.'s inability to find

something permanent with which to satisfy the needs of the London elite resonates throughout.

Here again is the fear that there is no way to be rid of the clutter, no way to understand the war and its causes, no way to know anything precisely. E.P. can offer nothing to console Lady Valentine and her literary society. He is forced instead to watch them abuse both language and memory in creating comforting falsehoods.

In a fashionable literary salon Lady Valentine reads aloud from a translation of Gautier's "Le Château du Souvenir." The poem relates a scene from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. She does so "subjectively," E.P. tells us. He waits in the "stuffed-satin drawing-room" for Lady Valentine's commands, though

> Knowing my coat has never been
> Of precisely the fashion
> To stimulate, in her,
> A durable passion; (5-8)

E.P. watches his poetic goals become obscured by the desires of the modern world. Though he may disagree with Lady Valentine and the fashionable crowd that would bend poetry's search for truth into something purely self-serving, E.P. recognizes that her poetics are not much different than his. Both are involved in telling stories, memorializing that aims at closure. E.P. understands his to be a quest for truth and Lady Valentine hers as one for consolation. Indeed, even the language used to describe Lady Valentine's goals is that of monument-making:

> Poetry, her border of ideas,
> The edge, uncertain, but a means of blending
> With other strata
> Where the lower and higher have ending; (13-16)

She is interested in crafting something consoling from the disturbing reality she sees omnipresent. Poetry to Lady Valentine is the space in which to make concrete the often frightening fluidity of modernity. Though the edges may be uncertain, the monument Lady Valentine erects nonetheless frames in and closes off the high and the low. Poetry is to her, "in the case of revolution, / A possible friend and comforter" (19-20). The "subjective" performance

she delivers is an attempt to make something understandable, if not beautiful, out of a situation as horrid as WWI. The story being rehearsed is Apollo's attempted rape of Daphne, in which Daphne escapes by becoming a tree. Metaphorically, the result of the war and other symptoms of cultural decline symbolized by the lustful and violent god are thereby made palatable, calm, and even desirable. In much the same way that a monument to the Great War pledges that the dead have not died in vain, Lady Valentine argues that something beautiful will come of the violence of war.

E.P. is uncomfortable with this kind of memorial and laments the cultural decline: "[the] sale of half-hose has / Long since superseded the cultivation / of Pierian roses" (26-28). The allusion is to Sappho; pierian roses grow near Mt. Olympus where the muses are worshipped. That mass-produced fashion should supplant the symbol of true artistic inspiration speaks very poorly of postwar London. To E.P., Lady Valentine abuses art to falsify the facts in order to comfort herself. She isn't memorializing to remember, but to forget. But if her aim, like E.P.'s, is to narrate a story in the hope of gaining closure, is there much difference?

James E. Young would have us believe there isn't. He writes that "the initial impulse to memorialize events like the holocaust may actually spring from an opposite and equal desire to forget them" (*Texture of Memory* 5). The same is true of memorials dealing with the First World War. But to acknowledge forgetting as a viable means of commemoration is at odds with Pound's professed goal of finding some "seeming verity" (*Gaudier-Brzeska* 85), the causal truths responsible for the disease afflicting the early twentieth century. This is a very real problem to Pound, the poet who feared his imagist craft not only left his subjects cold and lifeless images, but also led him *from* the truth, towards something "subjective."

It is no small coincidence, then, that Mauberley's aesthetics also resemble Lady

Valentine's very closely. Purged from Pound's personality, the persona of Mauberley is an artist figure little concerned with the truth. In "Mauberley IV," Mauberley takes refuge from the human aggression that characterizes the outside world and focuses on the creation of self-serving beauty. Much like Lady Valentine, Mauberley believes what he is doing is in keeping with the highest artistic standards. Beauty at any cost may have been his motto. The world's interference is detrimental to such a goal. The world Mauberley creates, like that created by Lady Valentine, is one of forgetting. Mauberley's aesthetic fantasy takes place on the Molukka Islands, well away from the pressures of the London literary life. His oblivion is the embodiment of the failed imagist project. To its credit, it is a self-contained, penetrating portrait of the emotional freight of an image completely free from the influence of the mundane everyday world. It is by no means, however, didactic, and contains no communicable truth.

This is also a problem facing many structural memorials and monuments. Most memorializing statues stand outside, against the weather, in a public space, outside of both life and time. The park or playground, for example, is not a space of real or influential social activity, but rather a space "removed from the hubbub of life" (*The Final Sculpture* 105). If the purpose of statues is almost always didactic, as scholars like Michael North contend (*The Final Sculpture* 25), how can a statue be effective at such remove? As a memorial, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* operates at such great distance from any real social activity as to be almost completely ineffectual. According to North, the poem "makes the act of sculpture central to a true aesthetic and yet at the same time shows how sculpture helps that aesthetic to cancel itself" (122).

Burying Your Dead

Beginning as early as 1914, Ezra Pound began a search for language with which to describe the war and the culture that produced it. In *Mauberley* he comes closest to realizing his goal, blaming the dishonesty of the modern world for the violence (corporeal, economic, and artistic) that envelops the early twentieth century. His impulse to define and understand is fueled by the desire remedy the situation. The poem's confusion, the fragmented quality of the narration and the formal ironies, however, suggests the process has gone awry. Instead of identifying the fundamental flaw of human society, Pound provides a very localized account of postwar Europe. Recall his footnote to the 1926 edition of *Personae*: if uninterested in postwar London, the reader may as well skip ahead.

Hugh Selwyn Mauberley was in Pound's mind a failure, and he frequently spoke of his disappointment to friends and colleagues. On July 30th, 1920 he wrote Ford Madox Ford, promising to send "my new vericul-opus to yr. new address; believe it contains an 'advance'; by no means as rich as 'Propertius' but it has form, hell yes, structure, and is strictly modern decor" (Lindberg-Seyersted 36). I think Ronald Bush is right in finding frustration and resignation in comments like these:

> Obviously, Pound was ambivalent about the value of both structure and "strictly modern decor" measured against the higher values of *Propertius'* emotional affirmation and its rich interplay of different eras. Forced into analyzing the economic and social basis of London he had come to loathe, he was not happy.
>
> ("It Draws One to Consider Time Wasted" 64)

Instead of dealing with issues of fundamental or eternal importance, Pound finds himself forced to remain on the surface, dealing with the mundane everyday world. His monument achieves no permanence.

But maybe we are better not to read *Mauberley* as a failed memorial, but the best memorial that could be built to commemorate something as harrowing as the First World War. In a sequence filled with abortive attempts at closure and unresolved narratives, Pound throws his hands up, as if to say *This is postwar Europe. This disjointed, chaotic, and ugly mess is what we've got to work with.* But why, if he realized there was nothing concrete or eternally true to be learned from the war, did Pound persist in erecting a memorial? Why was *Mauberley* written? The answer attests to the emotional impact of the First World War on those who lived through it. Pound wrote *Mauberley* because he had to, because like Lady Valentine, E.P., and even Mauberley, he had to bury his dead. He had to deal with the aftermath of the First World War as best he could. Memorials, like funerals, are more for the living than for the dead: both console the survivors. One must bury one's dead in order to continue living, doing so in a manner which gives meaning to both life and death.

The problem of where and how to bury the dead was also a large problem during the war. In *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Jay Winter provides an illustrative example. In 1915 the French government financed the creation of a system of military cemeteries as well as the expansion of existing cemeteries for the burial of soldiers. Soldiers were buried in cemeteries nearest where they had fallen; with a few exceptions, none was to return home. Families of the dead wanted the bodies of their loved ones to rebury and were forced to pay unscrupulous entrepreneurs to retrieve them because the government wouldn't allow it. The people protested, writing letters like this one dated 1919 from an obscure father:

Though they are dead, we want to remove them from those accursed places in

the battlefields. They did their duty. Now we must do ours for them: to let them

rest in peace in the cemetery of their ancestors. To abandon them there, is to

condemn them to eternal torment. (25)

Though he speaks only of the dead, it is clear the writer is also concerned with the interests of

the living. He seems to say that though the war is officially finished, we need to bury our dead

for it to be over. On September 28, 1920, the French government gave in and established the

right of families to claim the bodies of their loved ones and transmit them home at state expense

(22-28).

Pound must also bury the dead in his poetry before he can progress beyond the war,

before he can truly call *Mauberley* his farewell to London. But the process is an ongoing one.

After finishing *Mauberley*, Pound began to revise and add to the three cantos he published in

1917. The process of their composition is complex, and I would point the reader to Ronald

Bush's *The Genesis of Ezra Pound's Cantos* for elucidation. As published in 1917, the first

canto began

> Hang it all, there can be but one *Sordello!*
> But say I want to, say I take your whole bag of tricks,
> Let in your quirks and tweeks, and say the thing's an art-form,
> Your *Sordello,* and that the modern world
> needs such a rag-bag to stuff all its thought in; (*Personae: The Shorter Poems of
> Ezra Pound* 229)

Pound's revision replaces this opening with what now remains Canto I, a translation of a

passage in the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus travels to the underworld to speak with Tiresias.

They meet with the deceased Elpenor, who begs to be buried.

> But first Elpenor came, our friend Elpenor,
> Unburied, cast on the wide earth,
> Limbs that we left in the house of Circe,

Unwept, unwrapped in sepulchre, since toils urged other.
Pitiful spirit. And I cried in hurried speech:
"Elpenor, how art thou come to this dark coast?
"Cam'st thou afoot, outstripping seamen?"
                And he in heavy speech:
"Ill fate and abundant wine. I slept in Circe's ingle.
"Going down the long ladder unguarded,
"I fell against the buttress,
"Shattered the nape-nerve, the soul sought Avernus.
"But thou, O King, I bid remember me, unwept, unburied,
"Heap up mine arms, be tomb by sea-bord, and inscribed:
"*A man of no fortune, and with a name to come.*
"And set my oar up, that I swung mid fellows." (*The Cantos of Ezra Pound* 4)

The process of memorializing the First World War, even after *Mauberley*'s publication, is an

ongoing task for Ezra Pound. Even in the *Cantos*, the dead have yet to be buried. The living

owe it to their fallen comrades and to themselves to perform the necessary rites.

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