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“A VAGUE, INVARIABLE DELIGHT”:
EZRA POUND’S “MIDDLE-AGING CARE” AND BERNARD
HART’S PSYCHOLOGY OF THE COMPLEX

Abstract: This article compares Ezra Pound’s use of the word “complex,” a term he employs to define imagism, with British integral psychologist Bernard Hart’s use of the term. Pound cites Hart in “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” as the source of the term. This study first surveys the prominent role of emotion in Pound’s literary theory before it investigates how George Mead’s Quest Society introduced Pound to British integral psychologists like Hart. Finally, it considers the influence of British integral psychology on two of Pound’s poems. While living in London among the burgeoning school of what Arthur McDougall calls British “integral psychology,” Pound borrowed terms from this school to compose two poems that express contrasting understandings of the term “complex,” namely, “Middle-Aged: A Study in an Emotion” (1912) and “Villanelle: The Psychological Hour” (1915). As this study demonstrates, in “Middle-Aged” the emotional content of the imagist complex revitalizes the speaker’s creativity, whereas in “Villanelle” the speaker deteriorates into hysteria via the Hartian complex. A careful analysis reveals that, while “Villanelle” adheres more closely to Hart’s sense of the term “complex” as a pathogenic, destructive concept, “Middle-Aged” expresses a different, more constructive understanding of the term in accord with Pound’s usage in “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste.”

Keywords: Ezra Pound, Bernard Hart, Pierre Janet, Sigmund Freud, British psychology, complex, emotion, imagism, modernism, *Personae*, “Middle-Aged: A Study in an Emotion,” “Villanelle: The Psychological Hour”.

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«ВОСТОРГ НЕЯСНЫЙ, НЕИЗМЕННЫЙ ...»:
ТРЕВОГИ «СРЕДНЕГО ВОЗРАСТА» У ЭЗРЫ ПАУНДА
И ПСИХОЛОГИЯ КОМПЛЕКСА БЕРНАРДА ХАРТА

Аннотация: В статье сравнивается использование слова «комплекс» для характеристики имажизма Паундом с использованием этого термина британским интегральным психологом Бернардом Хартом. Паунд указывает на Б. Харта как автора термина в своем манифесте «Несколько запретов имажиста». В статье сначала исследуется роль эмоции в литературной теории Паунда, а потом история знакомства Паунда с британской интегральной психологией, в частности, с Бернардом Хартом. Затем рассматривается влияние британской интегральной психологии на два стихотворения Паунда. Когда Паунд жил в Лондоне, на его глазах формировалась школа, которую Артур Макдугал назвал британской интегральной психологией. Из нее Паунд позаимствовал некоторые термины, чтобы создать два стихотворения – «Достигнув средних лет. Опыт изучения чувств» (1912) и «Вилланелла: психологический момент» (1915), в которых противопоставлены разные трактовки слова *complex*. Как будет показано в статье, в первом стихотворении эмоциональное содержание имажистского «комплекса» способствует творчеству лирического героя, а во втором «комплекс», наоборот, доводит героя до истерии. Тщательный анализ показывает, что если в стихотворении «Вилланелла» понимание термина «комплекс» близко к его пониманию Б. Хартом как чего-то деструктивного и патологического, то стихотворение «Достигнув средних лет...» выражает другое, более конструктивное представление – в том же духе, в каком использует этот термин Паунд в своем манифесте «Несколько запретов имажиста».

Ключевые слова: Эзра Паунд, Бернад Харт, Пьер Жане, Зигмунд Фрейд, британская психология, комплекс, эмоция, имажизм, модернизм, *Personae*, «Достигнув средних лет. Опыт изучения чувств», «Вилланелла: психологический момент».

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Pound's often quoted definition of the image in imagist poetry reads, "An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." [Pound 1935a: 4]. Most references to this passage stop there and neglect Pound's important qualification: "I use the term 'complex' rather in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart, though we might not agree absolutely in our application." [Pound 1935a: 4]. Besides Hart, Pound does not mention who these "newer psychologists" are, and his confessed hesitancy to use the term "complex" leaves us wondering whether or not Pound does agree with Hart in his "application" of it. This study will attempt both to address to what extent Pound's use of the term accords with or deviates from Hart's and to discuss what such findings imply for our understanding of Pound's imagism. It will also highlight the emotional element of the complex in order to emphasize the role of emotion in imagism. While Pound's relation to religion, politics, and philosophy has received ample treatment, this study will investigate his connection to theories of emotion and the complex in British integral psychology. It will demonstrate how essential an understanding of Bernard Hart's theory of the complex is to understanding the turmoil of middle-age in Pound's "Middle-Aged: A Study in an Emotion" (1912) [Pound 1990b: 250] and in "Villanelle: The Psychological Hour" (1915) [Pound 1990c: 155-156].

Emotion in Pound's critical writings

Pound's critical writings assert the role of emotion in poetry as essential, and given emotion's place in the Hartian complex, we cannot ignore its importance to imagism in particular. "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," "Only Emotion Endures," and "The Serious Artist" (all of which appear in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, edited by Eliot) not only develop Pound's poetic theory, but also presume certain understandings of emotion, albeit underdeveloped. In "Only Emotion Endures" Pound explains poetic resonance via lines of poetry that correspond with and communicate emotions. These examples include:

William Carlos Williams's "Postlude", Aldington's version of "Atthis" and 'H.D.'s "Waves like pine tops ..."; Hueffer's "How red your lips are" ...; his sense of the prose values or prose qualities in poetry;... These things have worn smooth in my head and I am not through with them ... It may be that their content is too much embedded in me for me to look back at the words. [Pound 1935b: 14]

Of his closest colleague, Pound writes, "I am almost a different person when I come to take up the argument for Eliot's poems." [Pound 1935b: 14] Without clarifying what he means by such phrases as "prose qualities in poetry" or "their content is too much embedded in me," Pound lets his examples convey his principle, namely, that a poem will endure insofar as its emotion endures and that the continued presence of a line in readers' mental life proves the emotional value of that line.

"The Serious Artist" again stresses the centrality of emotion in poetry while discussing the relationship between other sciences, including psychology, and the "science" of poetry [Pound 1935c: 42]. Pound claims that the science of poetry "provide[s] the data for ethics":

These data are sound and the data of generalizing psychologists and social theoreticians are usually unsound, for the serious artist is scientific and the theorist is usually empiric in the medieval fashion. ... The serious artist is scientific in that he presents the image of his desire, of his hate, of his indifference as precisely that, as precisely the image of his own desire, hate or indifference. The more precise his record the more lasting and unassailable his work of art [Pound 1935c: 46].

Here Pound places human emotion under the purview of poetry rather than psychology. He argues that the generalizations of psychologists regarding human emotion are unsound because they are imprecise. They do not report on the individual case, and thus their conclusions may not apply to any given individual. Instead, psychologists use the method of the biologist, which is fine for the biologist, but inappropriate for studying humans because, even if the majority of people want "two acres and a cow," "it would . . . be inequitable to give to all men two acres and a cow" since some are exceptions to the rule [Pound 1935c: 42]. In Pound's view, psychology is itself unsuitable for the study of emotion because "[t]he arts give us our data of psychology, of man as to his interiors, as to the ratio of his thought to his emotions, etc., etc., etc.." [Pound 1935c: 48]. Poundian poetry, then, competes with psychology regarding the nature of emotion even as Pound himself borrows terms from psychology to describe poetry. This competition resides in the center of Pound's deviation from Hart's sense of the term "complex."

For Pound, even though poetry cannot prescribe human behavior, it can prescribe how to make good or bad art. Consistent with "Only Emotion Endures," "The Serious Artist" asserts that the emotional content of a poem

defines it, and a poem's ability to communicate that content via its form is what makes it good or bad. Pound prescribes the process of composing adequate verse as follows:

You wish to communicate an idea and its concomitant emotions, or an emotion and its concomitant ideas, or a sensation and its derivative emotions, or an impression that is emotive ... You begin with the yeowl and the bark, and you develop into ... words in a rhythm that preserves some accurate trait of the emotive impression ...

When this rhythm ... seems truly to bear the trace of emotion which the poem ... is intended to communicate, we say that this part of the work is good [Pound 1935c: 51].

Put another way, Pound argues that the images of good art accurately correspond with their emotional impetus, while “[b]ad art is inaccurate art” that “makes false reports” about the emotions corresponding to particular images [Pound 1935c: 43]. So, while “Only Emotion Endures” establishes that a poem is only as good as its emotional content, “The Serious Artist” dares to set out an evaluative standard for art. This standard arises out of an understanding of the role of emotion. In sum, because poetry is a science whose proper subject is “man, mankind, and the individual,” poetry—and not psychology—has the ability to establish the value of human artifacts [Pound 1935c: 42].

Pound, Hart, and British integral psychology

In addition to these passages from “Only Emotion Endures” and “The Serious Artist,” “A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste” defines imagism in reference to emotion and the complex and makes explicit Pound's connection to “the newer psychologists” of British integral psychology. Published in the March 1913 issue of *Poetry*, the essay begins with an explanation of what Pound means by *image*, an explanation which demonstrates the fraternal bond between psychology and poetry in an obvious attempt to advertise the relevancy of his poetics: “An ‘Image’ is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. I use the term ‘complex’ rather in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart, though we might not agree absolutely in our application.” [Pound 1935a: 4]. Pound's awareness of British integral

psychology begins in the spiritual rather than the academic theatres of the discipline.¹ It is worth outlining the genealogy of British spiritualism and integral psychology in order to establish the connection between Pound and the entire family tree of prominent figures in the two related, though often opposed, branches of this family. As the renowned historian of psychology Henri Ellenberger argues in *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, America and Europe exchanged both scientific and spiritual knowledge, leading to the intellectual milieu Pound would immerse himself in as a young man [Ellenberger 1970: 84]. While European mesmerism began to infiltrate America in the mid-1800's, the "spiritism" that had arisen in America "crossed the Atlantic, invading England and Germany" before "it swept over France, and soon reached all parts of the civilized world." [Ellenberger 1970: 84]

In 1857 one "convert to spiritism," Hippolyte Rivail (writing under the pseudonym "Allan Kardec") composed *The Spirits' Book*, a systematic guide to what had emerged as a new religion [Ellenberger 1970: 84]. Based on Kardec's guide, the famously influential Russian occultist and medium Yelena Petrovna Blavatskaya (Mme. Blavatsky) established a short-lived spiritist society in Cairo in 1871 [Cranston 1993: 105-106]. A few years later in 1875 she started the Theosophical Society with Henry Steele Olcott and William Quan Judge in New York [Melton 1990: 458-461]. For the final three years of her life from 1889 to 1891, Blavatsky employed George R.S. Mead as her personal secretary. At the time, Mead was a young man who had joined the Theosophical Society in 1884 upon completing his studies at Cambridge [Surette 1994: 289-290].

Mead left the society in 1909 after a sexual molestation scandal involving Charles W. Leadbeater, a one time "curate in the Church of England" who had converted to Buddhism [Surette 1994: 17] [Mead 1926: 292-299]. Though the society's president, Olcott, accepted Leadbeater's resignation in 1906, "a secret organization in the Theosophical Society, known as 'The Esoteric Section' or 'Eastern School,'" aligned itself with Leadbeater [Mead 1926: 292-299]. When Olcott died in 1907, the new president, Annie Besant, who had previously led the Esoteric Section, readmitted Leadbeater [Mead 1926: 292-299]. Poet W. B. Yeats was a member of this Esoteric Section from which he was expelled in 1890 after complaining that "Mead, whose

¹ Though I have already established the historical connection between Pound and these "newer psychologists" of the British integral school elsewhere, it is worth deepening that connection by discussing Pound's familiarity with the society of spiritualists that led to his awareness of Bernard Hart. See [Forman 2019].

intellect is that of a good size whelp, was a little over righteous as usual.” [Surette 1994: 17]. Not content with the “danger” and “inner rot” of “these bemused ‘occultists’,” around seven-hundred members of the Theosophical Society quit its ranks, some of whom founded a new organization under Mead’s guidance [Mead 1926: 292-299]. Called the Quest Society, this group produced a publication call *The Quest* that ran from 1909-1931, along with “some half-a-dozen public lectures a term at Kensington Town Hall.” [Mead 1926: 292-299]. In 1912 one of these lecturers, who had also contributed an essay titled “Psychology and the Troubadours” to the journal, was the twenty-seven-year-old Ezra Pound [Surette 1994: 131-132].

Both Leon Surette (*The Birth of Modernism*, 1993) and Demetres Tryphonopoulos (*The Celestial Tradition*, 1992) give extensive and definitive—albeit unorthodox and controversial—accounts of Mead’s influence on Pound’s early career and on his *Cantos* as a whole [Tryphonopoulos 1992] [Tryphonopoulos 1990: 73-96]. While a discussion of Mead’s theories of occultism lies beyond the scope of this present project, I will at least offer a supplement to Surette and Tryphonopoulos’ treatment of Mead and Pound. By the time Pound met Mead in 1911 [Surette 1994: 131-132], Mead had become disillusioned with Blavatsky in particular and with the theosophical movement in general, and he remarked that occultism was “a view [he] now [held] most firmly to be fundamentally false.” [Mead 1926: 291]. By the time he founded the Quest Society in March of 1909, then, Mead “was ... utterly disgusted with the Theosophical Society, its innumerable dogmatic assertions, its crooked methods and reprehensible proceedings.” [Mead 1926: 296-299]. In his new society “[e]sotericism’ and ‘occultism’ were to be eschewed as corrupting rather than helpful” in favor of “a clean society, an association that should be genuinely undogmatic ... and truly honest ...” [Mead 1926: 297]. If Pound dabbled in the occult as Surette and Tryphonopoulos suggest, he did not do so under the tutelage of George R.S. Mead, who was outgrowing his infatuation with the occult around the time Pound moved to London in 1908 (unlike W.B. Yeats, who sustained his own interest). Nevertheless, Surette and Tryphonopoulos rightly argue that Mead facilitated the environment that Pound quickly assimilated into, an environment which included Pound’s future wife, Dorothy Shakespear, along with T.E. Hulme, W.B. Yeats, Wyndham Lewis, Rebecca West, Harriet Shaw Weaver, and Dora Marsden.

For Pound, the Quest Society served as the forum that introduced him to the debate between spiritualism and psychology. As Patriciae Rae observes in *The Practical Muse*, the same edition of *Quest* that published

Pound's "Psychology and the Troubadours" in 1912 also contained a review of J. Arthur Thompson's *Introduction to Science* which defended spiritualism from psychology's encroachment and argued that science may determine the "how" but can say nothing about the "why" of phenomena [Rae 1997: 257]. Two editions previously, in *Quest 2*, an anonymous reviewer discussed Bernard Hart's theory of the complex found in *Subconscious Phenomena* [Rae 1997: 259-260], a collection published in 1910 which also includes essays from psychologists Hugo Münsterberg (professor of Eliot at Harvard), Théodule Ribot, Joseph Jastrow, Pierre Janet, and Morton Prince. Because of the book review's focus on Hart and because of Pound's association with the publication, this review certainly exposed Pound to the emerging field of British integral psychology and to Hart in particular, whom he references by name in "A Few Don'ts." Because Arthur McDougall's 1926 *An Outline of Abnormal Psychology* labels Hart's group "the school of integral psychology," this study refers to this group as the British integral school [McDougall 1926: 24].

Hart and the British integral school's theory of emotion and the complex

Hart's "The Conception of the Subconscious" constitutes the sixth and final essay in *Subconscious Phenomena*, the book which exposed Pound to British integral psychology [Hart 1910a: 102-140]. His essay attempts to resolve the question of whether the subconscious is a subject proper to science or to philosophy by disagreeing with both Münsterberg's understanding of physiology as a means for exploring psychology [Münsterberg 1914] [Münsterberg 1910: 16-32] and with such philosophical theories of emotion as Bergson's, Bradley's, and Joachim's [Bergson 1913] [Bradley 1914][Joachim 1911: 471-497]. In sum, Hart's theory of emotion accounts for mental illness in a way that many contemporary theories do not [Hart 1908: 473-490] [Hart 1910b: 431-452] [Hart 1931].

Hart's contribution begins with a survey of "the historical development of the theory of the subconscious" and then determines whether or not any of the various senses of the term *subconscious* meets the requirements of modern science "for admission within its portals." [Hart 1910a: 103] According to Hart, psychology arose out of philosophers' desires—such as those of Münsterberg – to apply to the mind the same "method of the inductive sciences" which had hitherto been applied to the body [Hart 1910a: 103-105]. Such a project hoped to "obtain continuity" with regard

to “the apparent discontinuity and irregularity of psychical experience.” [Hart 1910a: 103-105] In short, beginning with Leibnitz, Schopenhauer, Helmholtz, and Hartmann, the idea of the subconscious arose in order to account for “small elements lying outside [our conscious life’s] main stream, but which nevertheless produce an effect.” [Hart 1910a: 105]

As the discipline of psychology emerged, various conceptions of the subconscious arose to account for different phenomena related to the same problem of consciousness. Both the “French School of Morbid Psychology” and the “Zürich School” conceived of the subconscious in Prince’s second sense, namely, as the dissociated subconscious [Hart 1910a: 107-109]. The French School (which Ellenberger calls “The Salpêtrière School” after the hospital where Charcot established a following) included Jean-Martin Charcot and Pierre Janet, while the Zürich School included Freud and Jung [Hart 1910a: 107-109] [Ellenberger 1970: 89]. Still others, such as Hugo Münsterberg and Karl Lange, “denied that [the psychical] could be made amenable to the method of science” and so substituted “physiological definitions” for psychological ones [Hart 1910a: 109]. We may add William James’ 1884 theory from his essay “What is an Emotion?” to the latter school in light of his argument that relates emotion to a physiological process governed by the motor and sensory centers of the brain [James 1968: 17-36].

Hart’s primary task, then, is to reconcile the scientific certainty of physiology with the uncertainty of psychology or, as Hart phrases it, “whether the subconscious is to be regarded as a brain fact or as a mind fact.” [Hart 1910a: 110-111] In order to reconcile this divide, Hart first considers what is required for a theory to be scientific. In other words, he explores “the general properties of scientific concepts,” properties outlined in Karl Pearson’s 1892 *Grammar of Science* [Hart 1910a: 111-112]. According to Pearson, “science is simply a mode of conceiving things,” a mode “characterized, not by its content but by its method of investigation.” [Hart 1910a: 112-114]

In other words, science is not a subject confined to the exploration of certain phenomena, say, chemical or biological, but rather it is a mode of understanding, a mode which can be applied to any “human experience,” or what James calls “the flux of sensible reality.” [Hart 1910a: 112] This mode takes the form of laws which account for a given phenomenon and any variation therein by revealing “some simple treatment which will resume an indefinite number of sequences in a single formula” whether verbally or mathematically expressed [Hart 1910a: 113]. In deciding whether any sense of the term “subconscious” is scientific, then, Hart must determine if some

formulation of the term matches the general mode of science, i.e., whether the subconscious can be made into a law.

According to Hart, the mode of science can take two possible forms that cannot be integrated but which are equally important: physical or psychical [Hart 1910a: 115-121]. Both of these modes are scientific because each has its own phenomena (i.e., experiential facts) and conceptions (i.e., models invented by the mind "to explain the phenomenal result") [Hart 1910a: 119-120]. For instance, phenomena consist in such data as nerves, colors, or chemicals, while conceptions include "nerve current," "waves, atoms, the force of gravity." [Hart 1910a: 119-120] The subconscious, of course, is an example of the latter. It is a conception invented "in the scientific treatment of the psychological series." [Hart 1910a: 120] Therefore, though the subconscious may be conceptual and not experiential, it may still be scientific if it can be expressed in a law that does not violate the separation between the physical and the psychical.

Hart applies five criteria to contemporary theories of the subconscious in order to determine which theory deserves the appellation "scientific:" 1) the theory must be of one of the two modes of science, i.e., either physical or psychical, 2) the theory must uphold the law of cause-and-effect, 3) the theory must be expressible in a law, 4) the theory is not bound to mere perception but can permit concepts even contrary to perception (e.g. "weightless and frictionless" constructs), and 5) the theory must not mix the physical and the psychical [Hart 1910a: 121-122]. According to these criteria, Hart rules out five of Morton Prince's six senses of the term *subconscious*, namely, the physiological subconscious, the subconscious memory, the simple subconscious, the subliminal subconscious, and the subconscious self. He leaves only "the doctrines of [Pierre] Janet and [Sigmund] Freud" on the dissociated subconscious [Hart 1910a: 122-127].

Hart describes the difference between Janet and Freud in terms of the difference between *phenomenon* and *concept*.² Hart argues that for Janet the subconscious is "a phenomenal fact," not a conceptual one, because by labeling a behavior "subconscious" Janet distinguishes between another person's personality, that is, conscious self, and actions outside the realm of awareness [Hart 1910a: 128]. In other words, the subconscious according to Janet is not a mental construct because it is a fact experienced when we encounter behavior in another inconsistent with that persons' personality,

² For Janet, see [Janet 1993] [Janet 1977]. For Freud, see [Breuer 1957]. Also see [Hart 1910b].

resulting in what Janet calls a “doubling-of-consciousness.” [Hart 1910a: 129] Whereas Janet’s subconscious is an experienced phenomenon, Freud’s unconscious “complexes” are “concepts, constructions devised to explain certain phenomena.” [Hart 1910a: 130-132] These complexes abide in the subconscious and are constituted of “ideas and emotions.” [Hart 1910a: 129-130] A complex “may either cause the direct introduction into consciousness of its constituent ideas and affect” (i.e. emotion-feeling) or indirectly result in “symbolisms, word forgetting, disturbance of the association processes, etc.” [Hart 1910a: 130] Thus, a “single idea or image in consciousness may be conditioned (constellated)” by many idea-emotion complexes emanating from the unconscious [Hart 1910a: 130].

Hart maintains that Freud’s conceptual complex is no less scientific than Janet’s phenomenal subconscious given that both “act according to certain laws” whose results “coincide with the phenomena which occur in actual human experience.” [Hart 1910a: 131] For Hart, Freud’s complex possesses as much credence as “the atomic theory [*sic*] the wave theory of light, [and] the law of gravity . . .” [Hart 1910a: 131] As Hart puts it, “[t]he complex may be said to be the psychological analogue of the conception of force in physics.” [Hart 1910a: 133] Even though these complexes cannot be perceived, much like the force of gravity, they serve to explain phenomena that can be perceived, and are entirely consistent with Janet’s understanding of the phenomenal subconscious. In order to distinguish Freud’s concept and Janet’s phenomenon, Hart suggests “limit[ing] the term subconscious to the phenomenal facts demonstrated by Janet, and [speaking] of Freud’s conception as the ‘unconscious’ . . .” [Hart 1910a: 136-137] Thus, Hart is the first to distinguish between the subconscious and the unconscious.

Hart’s distinction between scientific concepts and phenomena is essential for his understanding of emotions. Hart classifies *emotions* as separate from *affects* [Hart 1910a: 133]. Whereas emotions are unconscious, invented concepts contributing to complexes in conjunction with ideas, affects are phenomena displayed in behaviors consciously experienced by both actor and observer [Hart 1910a: 133]. For Hart and Freud, therefore, our affects have their seat in the unconscious. They are phenomenal manifestations of psychical concepts called *emotions*, no less scientific for being constructs of the mind. According to David Rapaport in “The Psychoanalytic Theory of Emotions,” these theorists consider hysteria akin to emotion because “the conflict underlying both hysterical attacks and emotions is *unconscious*.” [Rapaport 1968: 83-89]. Indeed, Freud and his associate, Josef Breuer, equate emotion and hysteria in “On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical

Phenomenon" when they claim that "affects are inherited hysterical attacks." [Rapaport 1968: 83]. As Rapaport explains, an affect is an "expression of an unconscious idea through the body." [Rapaport 1968: 83]. In this way, Hart applies his distinction between *concept* and *phenomenon* to the terms *unconscious* and *subconscious* and to Freud's *emotion* and *affect*.

Hart's theory of emotion and the complex in *Subconscious Phenomena* serves as a helpful introduction to the theories of Janet, Freud, and the British integral school of psychology, whose understanding of emotion McDougall's calls "quasi-pathological." [McDougall 1926: 13] According to this theory, emotion is by definition a concept of the unconscious, in direct contrast to other contemporary theories that either place emotion under the purview of the body or of consciousness. According to Hart and British integral psychology generally, because they are unconscious, emotions dictate neurotic, hysterical behaviors such as those exhibited in Pound's poetry.

Love's emotional cure in "Middle-Aged: A Study in an Emotion"

"Middle-Aged: A Study in an Emotion" (published 1912) conveys an understanding of emotion somewhat akin to that of British integral psychologists such as Hart.³ However, Pound ultimately balances the destructive and redemptive powers of emotion in the poem. The lack of scholarship on "Middle-Aged" is surprising considering it was published in the first edition of *Poetry* magazine. However, Martin Kayman and K. K. Ruthven observe that it was the very first poem that Pound designated as "Imagiste" in a 1912 letter to Harriet Monroe, a letter that also remarks upon its affinity with Browning's verse [Kayman 1986: 175] [Ruthven 1969: 257]: "I send you all that I have on my desk—an over-elaborate post-Browning 'Imagiste' affair and a note on the Whistler exhibit." [Pound 1950: 10] Clearly the four years between Pound's homage to Robert Browning ("Mesmerism") and "Middle-Aged" had not stifled Pound's admiration for Browning or his concern with the insightful nature of emotion. However, he had begun to formulate a more modern poetics under the name of imagism. "Middle-Aged" serves an example of how the poetics of imagism treats human emotion.

The poem revolves around a single conceit likening middle-age to an ever-diminishing list of objects, a conceit that resonates with Hart's idea of

³ The entire poem appears on page 250 of *Personae*.

the complex as a pathological concept. As the reality of middle-age sets in, “Gold” cheapens to “fine flakes” that then reduce to “fine dust”: “As gold that rains about some buried king;” “As the fine flakes, / When tourists frolicking / Stamp on his roof;” “As the fine dust, in the hid cell / Beneath their transitory step and merriment.” Likewise the “buried king” is a mere tourist attraction, quickly visited and as quickly forgotten. In other words, the emotion of middle-age is a vain adornment for the insentient dead king who has now become the transient curiosity of tourists who take photographs, “wolf down their ale and cakes,” and move on “to inspect some further pyramid.” Indeed, this emotion, this “vague, invarious delight,” is merely “another crust / Of useless riches for the occupant,” lying lifeless in his sarcophagus.

Love is the central emotional element of the poem and overcomes the neurosis of middle-age expressed in the image of the dead king. The speaker likens himself to the dead king, but instead of useless jewels, his hollow trapping is love. “[T]he fires that lit once dreams” have died out such that “love / Rains down and so enriches some stiff case.” The tragedy of the poem appears to lie in the conflicting powers and incapacities of love. On the one hand, love enlivens the speaker’s mind with poetry, “[strewing it] with precious metaphors.” On the other hand, love fails to revitalize the aging and decaying middle-aged body even as it revitalizes the speaker’s poetry. The speaker escapes love’s trap in the conceit of the final two stanzas, declaring that “the space / Of [his] still consciousness / Is full of gilded snow, / The which, no cat has eyes enough / To see the brightness of.” Unlike the dead king of his metaphor, the speaker is conscious of the precious gem of love which is more poetically insightful than any inanimate Egyptian idol. The poem contains a poignant irony wherein the most unfertile ground for poetry (i.e., a consciousness “full of gilded snow”) produces fruit by means of love’s nourishment. The image of the gilded snow—itsself an “intellectual and emotional complex”—is therefore at once an image of death and life colored by the emotion of the “vague, invarious delight.” Indeed, the speaker wittily undermines his own conceit in the end, not by dwelling on the affinity between himself and the dead king, but by highlighting the difference between them. This difference, of course, is love. Love turns out to be a triumphal emotional element because the speaker is careful enough to procure its poetic offerings. The poem’s implicit argument is that love—and by extension emotion—is best explored in images, in this case a series of metaphors that offers the reader a likeness of the situation that originally aroused the emotion of middle-age.

These images of imagist poetry are both what make emotions meaningful and the means by which poetry accomplishes a cure for the neuroses accompanying middle-age. By offering the reader the verbal reproduction of the images of emotions, the poet can conjure an emotion in his reader. In this way, even a young reader without the experience of middle-age may come to understand the emotional state of the middle-aged. What Pound's imagism ultimately suggests, therefore, is that poetry may communicate emotions by substituting verbal images for an experience, so long as those images emanate from an emotion in the poet and closely correspond with the experience that incited the emotion. In addition, the entire work is a quotation offered to an attentive listener, the kind of audience a patient might find in a therapist. Pound obviously intends the poem to be a gateway for exploring its speaker's psyche, much in the same way that Freud's cathartic "talking" cure enabled patients to safely recall in speech some repressed psychological trauma [Breuer 1957: 30]. As in the cathartic cure, the poem resembles a therapeutic confession that not only relieves the writer but also the readers through inciting in them the same middle-aged emotion before purging them of it. However, in Hart, the emotional content of the complex has no such remedial capacity, unlike in Pound's "Middle-Aged" where the emotion of love cleanses the speaker of his neuroses. In this way, then, Pound has actually misapplied Hart's term "complex," as he himself suspects in "A Few Don'ts" when he admits "we might not agree absolutely in our application."

The Hartian complex in "Villanelle: The Psychological Hour"

Like Eliot's "Hysteria" and "Suppressed Complex," Pound's "Villanelle: The Psychological Hour" (published 1915) clearly demonstrates a preoccupation with British integral psychology and serves as a defining example of the influence of modern psychology in modernist poetry. However, this work presents an understanding of the complex quite at odds with that found in "Middle-Aged" but more aligned with Hart's theory. Written after Pound and Eliot met, it clearly shows Eliot's influence. It is the most Eliotic of Pound's early poems in that it expresses and mimics Pound's neuroses without relieving them. Here Pound explores his own hypersensitivity and self-consciousness in a three section work whose title has baffled many critics and scholars. While Peter Brooker observes that the poem is "obviously only loosely a villanelle," [Brooker 1979: 46] William Harmon argues that the designation is entirely misapplied [Harmon 1977:

78]. In his biographical analysis of the poem linking it to Pound's artistic life at the beginning of World War I, Peter Robinson defends the title on the grounds that Pound's definition of the villanelle is broad [Robinson 2005: 22-38]. As Ruthven notes, Pound said of Ernest Dowson's villanelles that "the refrains are an emotional fact, which the intellect, in the various gyrations of the poem, tries in vain and in vain to escape." [Ruthven 1969: 242-243] [Raffel 1984: 46]

The emotional tone of a villanelle that Pound identifies lies in the anticipation of unity and the fulfillment of expectation. In the traditional villanelle the reader expects to see the lines of the refrain alternate until a unity of those lines is achieved in the final stanza. Each time the refrain lines are repeated they appear in a new context that slightly alters their significance. By the time the two lines converge in the last stanza, then, they are transformed from what they were in the first. Pound's "Villanelle: The Psychological Hour" accomplishes the same excited, anticipatory "emotional fact" through a variance in the form. Just as the reader of a traditional villanelle awaits the union of the refrain, so too does the reader of Pound's poem await the union of the speaker and his guests. In the end, the speaker's guests depart England without coming to visit him, leaving the reader as frustrated in his expectations as the speaker. Pound achieves the anticipatory quality of the traditional villanelle without the satisfaction of the final resolution.

Such an understanding of form is a slight departure from the imagism of "In a Station of the Metro." [Pound 1990a: 251] Regarding the earlier imagistic work, Pound contends that the artist's job is to determine which art form applies to a given emotion [Pound 1980: 199-209]. In this villanelle, however, Pound explores how the emotional content of a poem could be at odds with its intellectual content such that it does not in fact "[present] an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." Here Pound relishes intellectual and emotional tension rather than the catharsis of the imagist poem.

For Pound, then, the term *villanelle* does not stand for a particular pattern of rhyme or meter, but for a certain type of form that expresses a particular emotional content. To be precise, the form mimics a contest between the intellect and the emotions wherein the intellect tries "in vain to escape" the lure of the emotions conveyed in the poem's refrain. The form of the villanelle exemplifies the power of poetry to submit the intellect to the emotions, a power that Pound's "Villanelle: The Psychological Hour" exploits. Such a power is pathological for submitting reason to hysterical emotion. While emotion corrupts art, paradoxically Pound admits that no art

would exist without it. Despite the pathological nature of such poems as this villanelle, Pound confesses that emotion is essential for art. As Pound wrote in 1918 in "Pavannes and Divisions" in an attempt to define the essential quality of the best poetry, "[o]nly emotion endures." [Pound 1935a: 14]⁴

In the first stanza the speaker (identified as Pound in the final section) reveals his neurotic insecurities. He criticizes himself for the "middle-aging care" he took in preparing for an "event." [Pound 1990c: 155] He is guilty of what many of us are, namely, of putting on a false show of erudition in "[laying] out just the right books" to impress his guests [Pound 1990c: 155]. Apparently a younger version of Pound would not have been so self-conscious and pompous, and in hindsight he laments his "barren regret" for the "many hours wasted" in vain preparation for an event that never occurred [Pound 1990c: 155]. Pound attempts—and fails—in Janetan terms, to synthesize the facts of his experience into an intelligible and conscious whole [Janet 1977: 527-528]. Janetan synthesis is in fact the antidote to the dissociated consciousness of the hysteric. In his listless disappointment Pound becomes neurotic. He remarks upon the "diverse forces" by which his prospective guests' "little cosmos is shaken," thus projecting beyond the walls of his apartment his own timidity and seeing in others and the world at large the regret and wasted hours that torment his own mind [Pound 1990c: 155]. In his paranoia he questions his relationship to the outside world, wondering if the people who have failed to arrive are in fact his friends [Pound 1990c: 155].

The meaning of the refrain, "Beauty is so rare a thing ... / So few drink of my fountain," becomes a little clearer in the final stanza of the first part [Pound 1990c: 155]. Applying Pound's description of Dowson's villanelles mentioned above, this refrain is the most important "emotional fact" of the work. Pound's ultimate concern is beauty, but mundane worries, such as the absence of his party guests, obstruct this pursuit of beauty just as the stanzas admitting his regret and concern fragment his commentary on the beautiful. In this way, the structure of the poem itself instantiates "The Psychological Hour" of the title, and therefore replicates the very structure of Pound's mind, a mind increasingly reminiscent of Janet's dissociated consciousness. Unfortunately, as the final stanza suggests, only youth could repair his fractured consciousness and reconcile himself with the beautiful, but as he groans, "my youth is gone from me." [Pound 1990c: 156]. The

⁴ "Pavannes and Divisions" appears as "A Retrospect" in [Pound 1935a]. I have included an excerpt from "Only Emotion Endures" above.

title of “Villanelle,” then, is entirely appropriate given the refrain’s ability to instantiate Pound’s emotional state, a state best described by Hart’s theory of the complex.

In the shorter second and third sections Pound increasingly succumbs to the kind of self-doubt in social situations that provokes hysteria. Such a “provocative agent” could risk becoming a fixed idea that would then suggest to him hysterical symptoms [Janet 1977: 519]. This doubt quickly verges upon a fixed idea, causing Pound to question himself in the second person. After asking himself, “You have danced so stiffly? / ... Did you talk like a fool, / The first night?” he quickly reassures himself that “Someone admired your works,” and that “they promised again” to come the next day [Pound 1990c: 156]. This back-and-forth and the use of the second person demonstrate a precarious split in personality advancing toward the dissociation of Pound’s consciousness.

On the third day contained in the third section, Pound hears “no word from either.” [Pound 1990c: 156]. The only notice he receives is “another man’s note” which reads, “Dear Pound, I am leaving England.” [Pound 1990c: 156]. Because of the brevity of the note and because of Pound’s insecurities, the suggestion the poem leaves the reader with is the same suspicion that seeps into Pound’s mind, namely, that his company is so dreadful that it drives his guests overseas. Of course, his friends likely left for some altogether unrelated reason. However, Pound’s neurotic insecurities lead him to believe that others’ feelings and actions are the results of his own. In “Villanelle: The Psychological Hour” Pound expresses the common experience of faltering as a host and feeling responsible for others’ discomfort. Such social anxiety reveals how dependent our own emotional state is on that of others and how our own sensitivity and concern for others can throw us into a cycle of self-criticism. In the same way as Eliot’s “Suppressed Complex” and “Hysteria,” Pound’s villanelle describes a dissociation of consciousness without the harmonizing synthesis of the cathartic image found in “Middle-Aged.”⁵ This sample of Pound’s early poetry progresses through the process of dissociation and synthesis via the cathartic cure of the image. “A Study in an Emotion” alleviates the self-doubt accompanying middle-age, ultimately contending that, if it attains beauty and love, then even the weakest personality can regain its splendor. The exception to this rule, “Villanelle: The Psychological Hour,” lingers

⁵ The poem is also perhaps the most Prufrockian of Pound’s works.

in the neurotic like Eliot's poetry and subtly investigates the social anxiety out of which hysteria may arise.⁶

The two uses of the term "complex"

"A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" notwithstanding, the difference between these two poems is also the difference between Hart's complex and Pound's complex. Whereas for Hart and the psychologists of the British integral school the complex is a paralyzing, destructive content of the unconscious, for Pound in "Middle-Aged" the complex (i.e., image) is constructive, allowing him to produce art. The complex of the imagist poem is an anti-neurosis, the complex of the unconscious a proto-neurosis. Pound's admission that Hart and he "might not agree absolutely in [their] application" of the term is an understatement. Indeed, the complex has entirely opposite results for each. Consequently, much of Eliot's poetry and Pound's "Villanelle" is more aligned with Hart's understanding of the complex than the bulk of Pound's imagist poetry is.

Furthermore, the difference between these two poems is the difference between emotional insanity and emotional insight. As precursors to the British integral school of psychology that influenced Pound's poetry, Janet and Freud demonstrate that unexpressed emotion is the pathological, unconscious result of our inability to synthesize our experiences into a unified consciousness. Where Pound's "Villanelle" sees such a relationship between emotion and experience as destructive, "Middle-Aged" finds a cure in the power of art to discharge these unconscious pathological emotions to achieve insight into his reader's minds. Both poems, then, essentially agree in accord with the British integral school that emotion involves the unconscious, but they disagree concerning the relationship of art to emotion. Because emotion is pathological, the "Villanelle" instantiates mental illness and its grasp of reality is uncertain. By contrast, "Middle-Aged" is restorative because its image is cathartic. Pound's "Villanelle" is mimetic, "Middle-Aged" therapeutic.

⁶ As I have argued elsewhere, Pound returns to the redemptive and revivifying power of love and the cathartic quality of the image in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*. See [Forman 2019].

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