If the previous chapter projects Americanization north and south through the wide-angle lens of language, this chapter focuses on two pairs of American writers who in their formative years, each in his own way, accompanied the paths of sense and sensibility in Europe. To examine four writers of the modernist years rather than hundreds of millions of speakers over a span of five centuries drives us to a different set of specificities. Our interest shifts to single minds that betray no clear line between American promptings and European premises or reinfusions. We lack the statistical regularities that support conclusions about the seseo in Spanish America or pronoun placement in Brazil or commonalities of Caribbean creoles. In one case the speech of whole peoples throws us back on collective emanations; in the other single minds lead us along lonely, sometimes tortuous paths. Dealing with modernists in the second case heightens the privacy of the writer’s lens. Modernism, misunderstood or even embarrassing in its time, now comes to stand as the benchmark for the Latin American prise de conscience in our century and, less decisively perhaps, for a North American prise. Microscopically examined, however, the benchmark dissolves into a thousand prisms penetrating received certainties of the industrial age. Modernism suspends trends and shared visions to favor the private eye.
A second point deserves note. I undertook this modest inquiry by innocently wondering whether there were two North American poets who might correspond to the twin stars (though unrelated by family) of São Paulo modernism, Oswald de Andrade, the enfant terrible, and Mário de Andrade, the “pope.” I committed the heresy of allowing the periphery to interrogate the center and of musing whether the Brazilian mind might help unmask constraints of the “metropolitan” mind. This has forced me to be evenhanded in dealing with each of my pairs. I have dismissed the question of influence, which tilts the scale, and examined four persons who simply had different placements in the Western world. This strategy takes us beyond Europe-America or north-south dichotomies and invites shifting triangulations among Europe and the two Americas.

A final point is that it seemed natural to treat my first pair of writers as cubists and to adopt a spare, reductive manner in doing so. The second pair are more introspective, discursive, and—for all their modernism—under the spell of tradition. Inevitably, they require more serpentine explication. My pairings were at the start visceral. As the exposition lengthened I saw that their logic corresponds to Coleridge’s hallowed categories of fancy and imagination, which provides the coda to the essay.

William Carlos Williams and Oswald de Andrade: Triangulating Two Cubists

Here we have two masters of verse, prose, and optics: William Carlos Williams (1883–1963) and Oswald de Andrade (1890–1954). I first juxtapose the men, then scrutinize a short poem by each, a total of thirteen lines or thirty-six words. Tiny though the verses be, they are two of the sturdy hinges on which the door of modernism swung in the New World.

Both writers matured at the brink of renovation in arts and letters in their respective countries. Both were allured by the avant-garde in Europe. Williams went there as a child and again in 1909–10; Oswald went first to Paris in 1912. In 1913 Williams burst out laughing at Duchamp’s descending Nude in the New York Armory Show. “I felt as if an enormous weight had been lifted from my shoulders,” he wrote fifty years later. That same year Oswald’s São Paulo had a miniature analogue to the Armory Show in the one-man exhibit by a young Russian expressionist, Lasar Segall. Although Segall later settled in Brazil and became one of its finest artists, his first show was too premature, and immature, to cause explosion. By 1917 the time was ripe, and an exhibition by the Brazilian expressionist Anita Malfatti, just returned from Europe and the United States, had its shock effect. In about this year Oswald and his cronies began concocting ingredients for the Modern Art Week of 1922, which implanted modernism on the Brazilian scene. Also in 1917
appeared Williams's book of poems *Al que Quiere*, in which he abandoned cherished models for a “cubist” style.

Both Williams and Oswald were more radical than their fellow modernists in stripping language of discursive, ready-made elements. Their subjects were distilled, intensified, and directly rendered. Photography, cubism, and dadaism gave lessons for connecting discourse with typography, for achieving instantaneity through montage. Williams, himself a painter, was a habitué of the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, the famous “291” of Fifth Avenue, where Stieglitz became his mentor for the “hieroglyphics of a new speech.” Oswald too used a “Kodak” technique in prose as well as poetry to seek “constructive innocence” and create a “new syntax” for direct presentation of materials.³

Yet for all the illumination shed by Parisian experiments, neither poet could follow “the radical steps being taken by the European artists toward abstraction or toward the more destructive aspects of Dadaism.”⁴ Both felt obliged to define, or render, the American scene and to abjure the cerebral imperatives of modernism that led to *blague*. They began with the medium itself, language. It was not enough to discard hand-me-down rhetoric and fixed form. That left one still in Europe. One must discover American languages if one is to convey experience directly. Linguistically, modernism began at home. Williams found that because Americans slur their speech into a common stress level, an American poem should abandon a quantitative measure for a qualitative one. The poet must base his line on “sense-stresses,” not on the inherent accents of syllables.⁵ For Oswald “Brazilian” was a stripped-down, plasmic vernacular, the common denominator of American Portuguese and its immigrant influences, especially African: “Language with no archaisms, no erudition. Natural and neological. The millionfold contribution of all errors. As we talk. As we are.”⁶ If Williams found the sonnet form fascist for an American language, Oswald found it bureaucratic: “I was never able to count syllables. Metrics were something my mind couldn’t accept, a subordination I absolutely rejected.”⁷ Neither poet hankered for symbols, contexts, and poetic “beauty.” They demanded that things be starkly exposed, not painfully copied in the realist’s sense but absorbed and imitated in Aristotle’s sense. In this they went beyond their respective compatriots, T. S. Eliot and Mário de Andrade. Of Eliot’s “Waste Land” Williams wrote: “I had to watch him carry my world off with him, the fool, to the enemy.”⁸

To discover American language meant to discover American history and reproduce it in clean camera shots. Here our poets necessarily diverge. One can speak of linguistic Americanization throughout the hemisphere. One can speculate on commonalities of New World time, space, and identity. But the specifics of history, its political and psychological burdens, differ vastly. Transatlantic legacies come into play.

*four american poets: a cat's cradle* 63
Williams tackled history with In the American Grain, published in 1925. He set out to discover “what the land of my more or less accidental birth might signify.” The plan was “to get inside the heads” of some American founders, a fine instance of the subjectivism of Stephen Spender, who in his chapter “Subjective America, Objective Europe” holds that Europe offers a cultural past that engulfs each person and his generation, while unexplored, “subjective” America is geographical; it speaks in the present tense, forcing an American to achieve a private relationship with his fellows and with nature. For Williams nothing was “to get between me” and what the founders had recorded. Such founders included the Spanish, to whom Williams, whose parents grew up in the Caribbean, felt drawn. Not only did he recreate original texts but he composed his chapter on the destruction of Tenochtitlán “in big square paragraphs like Inca [sic] masonry.” He admired boulders fitted without plaster. It was how he wanted his prose: no patchwork.

Williams starts with Red Eric, who “left the curse behind” in reaching Greenland. “Rather the ice than their way” are the opening words. He repeats them near the end in explaining Edgar Allan Poe, whose eeriness and isolation made him the first original North American writer. Williams refuses to blame the conquistadors for the work of their terrible hands. They traveled on instincts as deep and ancient as the seas that carried them. Against them he sets the Puritans, the first to come as a group, prompted by private desire. They were to make everything like themselves, for no man led them. Stripped and little, their sole authority was the secret warmth of their tight-locked hearts. “Each shrank from an imagination that would sever him from the rest.” On the other hand he praises Champlain for his skill at detail, his woman’s tenderness, “the perfection of what we lack, here.” There follows a panel on the Salem witch trials, when suddenly the author plunks us down in the Paris of the 1920s amid Picasso, Braque, Stein, Tzara, Joyce, Pound, Léger, and the whole modernist crew.

Williams had indeed revisited France while writing the book, to find himself with his ardors “beaten back, in this center of old-world culture where everyone was tearing his own meat, warily conscious of a newcomer, but wholly without inquisitiveness—No wish to know; they were served.” Yet precisely this remove brought the New World into focus, and with it the opposition of Puritan and Catholic. (In 1924 Paulo Prado wrote that Oswald de Andrade, “from high in an atelier of the Place Clichy, navel of the world, was dazzled to discover his own country.”) In conversation a French interlocutor found Williams brimming with three things, all embattled: the Puritans’ sense of order, the Jesuits’ practical mysticism, and the qualities that both of them defeated in the Indian. This led Williams to discuss Père Rasles, the Jesuit martyred in Canada, who lovingly labored to release the Indian from his pod of
isolation, but as an Indian. The Jesuit’s world was one of touch, acknowledgment of femininity, mystery, not the Protestant heaven where everything is Federalized, all laws are prohibitive, and the blacks alone make religion vital. Now Williams had his touchstone for judging heroes such as Daniel Boone and Aaron Burr and Poe, his Indian heroine Jacataqua, or the antihero Ben Franklin. He ends (at his publisher’s request) with one page on Lincoln, presented as a brooding, compassionate woman in an old shawl, the beard and stovepipe hat lending unearthly reality.

The history that informed Oswald was vastly different. And he was, despite convergences noted, a vastly different person. Williams, the devoted obstetrician who delivered lower-class babies of all races in Rutherford, New Jersey, was not the same young man who bought a Cadillac in São Paulo because it was the only model that had an ashtray. One was a no-nonsense physician bringing things to light, unmasking sham and meanness in a land of power and plenty. The other came from a terra incognita with no world image. Its colonial status, never dismantled, was reinforced by the North American success story. The issue for Oswald was not lack of compassion but lack of liberty; the therapy was primal emancipation, not psychoanalysis.

If both writers used cubist composition and the bare Kodak shot, the Brazilian tilted the picture. He needed irony, parody, and jeux de mots. Take Williams’s pronouncement that North American wealth, a product of fear and torment to the spirit, makes us “the flaming terror of the world.” Amid our opulence “we have the inevitable Coolidge platform: ‘poorstateish’—meek. . . . This will convince the world that we are right. It will not. Make a small mouth. It is the acme of shrewdness, of policy.”

Had Oswald read In the American Grain, his reply would have been his poem “hip! hip! hoover!” celebrating the visit of the U.S. president-elect to Brazil. This “message to the Brazilian people” commences with three lines, anticipating Brazil’s concrete poetry of the 1950s, that affirm the heat, sweat, and sheer geological presence of the southern continent:

| América do Sul | South America |
| América do Sol | Sun America |
| América do Sal | Salt America |

A “south” that implies indolence and “underdevelopment,” an impassive “sun” that voluptuously tans the flappers of Copacabana while mercilessly flaying workers in the fields, the “salt” of waves cooling to bathers and of sweating bodies that wield machetes. The rest of the poem tells how the whole country turned out to welcome the guns of the warship Utah (an implicit rhyme with, or ellipsis for, the Portuguese “puta”) and the leader of the Great American Democracy: the corporations, the families,
every pickpocket, every bird in the sky. All flocked “to see him, Hoover” (“para o ver, Hoover”). The pun in Portuguese turns the phrase into a commercial jingle. For not everyone turned out to see Hoover. Not even on that festive day did the police stop persecuting factory workers, the human bedrock for an “advanced” industrial nation. How, then, could Brazilians have reduced their problems to the fact, deplored by Williams, that Emily Dickinson starved of passion in her father’s garden? Granted, the obverse is, Why should Puritans who pay a toll even to “reach out and touch someone” worry about factory wages in Brazil? But Williams saw this too when he observed that North American violence extends even to the enterprise that puts bananas on the breakfast table.

In 1925, the very year of American Grain (to resume our miraculously synchronic account), Oswald published his volume of verse Pau-Brasil (Brazilwood). It opens with eight prose poems that, in Williams’s manner, “photo-synthesize” the early chroniclers, but with greater brevity, and conclude with a letter of the first emperor of independent Brazil. The remaining poems are cubist miniatures that juxtapose snapshots of industrial, Frenchified, North-Americanized, immigrant Brazil with those of a cultural undertow, African and Iberian. The poems themselves are not the developed, editorialized recreations of Williams. Oswald saves his programmatic statements for manifestoes: the Brazilwood Manifesto of 1924 (an abridged version of which introduces the Pau-Brasil poems) and the Anthropophagy Manifesto of 1928. We commiserate with Williams for being sickened by North American adoration of violence, the thrill at fires and explosions, the use of violence for “service” and of battleships for “peace.” But after all, the world knew what he was talking about. No one, not even Brazilians, knew what Brazil was about. Oswald had to employ rhetorical violence simply to establish footing. Hence his poem about the “error of the Portuguese.” What a pity the Portuguese arrived in a thunderstorm and put clothes on the Indians! Had it been sunny, the Indians might have undressed the invaders. In other words, suppose that things are the opposite of what they seem. Suppose Montaigne was right about the humanity of the cannibals. Or suppose the Indians did not need the Christian compassion of Père Rasles but the Europeans (who, by invading, became colonials as well as colonizers) needed to learn from the cannibalism of the Indians.

Oswald was necessarily more radical than Williams. The Brazilwood Manifesto declared that by emancipating their language Brazilians could export poetry as they had long ago exported dyewood and all the commercial crops that followed. By insisting on the copresence of forest and school, of witch doctors and military aviation, he moved toward his primitivist theory of anthropophagy. Brazil should ingest, not copy, Europe, just as Indian cannibals had once consumed the white man and absorbed his powers. Imposed authority must be demolished; tabu must
become totem. Before 1500 Amerindian Brazil had already invented bolshevism and surrealism. It had revealed natural man to Europeans, starting with Thomas More, and thus natural rights. Oswald's was not a plea for ethnic sympathies and Christian compassion. He invoked indigenous values such as leisure, fraternity, abundance, sexual freedom, and Edenic life as a revolutionary program for a technified world. He would restore instinct and enchantment to an industrial age.  

The insurrectionary force and stark oxymorons of Oswald's manifestoes made a lasting imprint on highbrow and popular culture in Brazil. Williams's anti-Puritanism, on the other hand, was scarcely so inventive. He had even derived it, to an extent not fully acknowledged, from Paul Rosenfeld and the Stieglitz group. Obstetrical skill rather than revolutionary instinct gave him prominence. Oswald adopted modernist grammar and syntax but went beyond Europeans in reconceiving their Eurocentric world. Hard and withered Puritan hearts required different therapy than did a repressive church-state apparatus that was renewed over the centuries under changing forms of patriarchal, cultural, and even linguistic domination. Brazil's Padre Anchieta may have been even more saintly than Père Rasles, but for Oswald the Jesuit project could only be repressive.  

All this is a backdrop to two poems that energize our present categories and, because they are poems, somewhat elude them. Each poem can be taken as complete in itself, although each is plucked from context. Williams's "Wheelbarrow" comes from Spring and All (1923), a "fooling around book" that included pleas for imagination (in Williams's sense), finely crafted short poems, indictments of modern civilization, and poetic manifestoes, while Oswald's "Farm" is from the "Colonization" section of his Pau-Brasil poems (1925). Both poems portray a farm, but from the titles we note that Williams has anatomized it to an instrument of leverage, while Oswald retains the cluttered view of a social entity. In both, however, the central action is lifting. What is more, neither farm can we mistake for a European one.  

Here is Williams's poem (first published without a title):

The Red Wheelbarrow

So much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens
Visually the stanzas present four identical little barrows composed of words in three-plus-one blocks. They suggest that with the trick of leverage solved, nature becomes infinitely organizable, and the farm infinitely replicable: mass production. The extra short syllables in line one of the first and last stanzas invite us to duck and pick up the barrow to see how light it is, then to set it down. ("Eye it, try it, buy it," said the old Chevrolet commercial.) A child could do it; yet we see no human in the picture. The mechanism "runs itself." At the outset we learn that "so much," perhaps "all," depends on the barrow. Hugh Kenner reminds us of the ambiguity of the word depend. It means "hang from," implying vital "dependence" or suspension from; yet idiomatically the verb takes the preposition "upon," implying a load piled on the barrow to relieve the owner's shoulders.\(^\text{19}\)

If humans are now a ghost in the machine, nature too has strangely evanesced. Williams's farm(s) are no longer Wordsworth's "plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tuft, / Which at this season, with their unripe fruits, / Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves / 'Mid groves and copses." No "natural" colors remain. We have only red—an eminently human color used for barns, fire engines, stoplights, and red-light districts—and an achromatic white to which the chickens have been bred. Nature becomes a tabula rasa. The only natural element mentioned is rain, which cannot penetrate the barrow to rot its wood but merely glazes the paint. The lines break wholes into parts (wheel / barrow, rain / water). Nature and human effort resolve into the Cartesian triangle, vectors, and circle of the barrow and pivot on its single axle. Such is the spare and functional vision of the physician, or the Puritan.

Here is Oswald's poem:

\begin{verbatim}
a roça
Os cem negros da fazenda
comiam feijão e angu
Abóbora chicória e cambuquira
Pegavam uma roda de carro
Nos braços
\end{verbatim}

the farm
The hundred blacks of the fazenda
ate beans and cassava gruel
Squash chicory and pumpkin-vine stew
They could hoist the wheel of an oxcart
In their arms

First off, the title is ironic. Portuguese and Spanish have no word for the commercial, efficient, family-owned "farm." Their lexicon describes, at one pole, the subsistence plots of squatters and peasants—or peasant plots whose income is siphoned to intermediaries—and at the other, large enterprises, industrialized or not, that command dependent labor. The "farm" here is called a roça, denoting a marginal subsistence plot; yet the first line tells us it is a fazenda, or plantation, with a hundred black slaves. Not, however, a large and prosperous fazenda. Hence the epithet roça.
Oswald places a hundred humans at the center of his picture. The “machine,” which does not function, comes later. Slaves, or human energies, are the motor power for production and society. Unlike the wheelbarrow, which needs neither food nor fossil fuel—and precious little human exertion—the blacks require constant stoking, although not with meat or white chickens. Luxuriant nature invades the fazenda from all sides to offer a host of European, African, and local crops, some wild and some cultivated, some pulled from the vine and some described as already cooked. Enterprise and wild vegetation interpenetrate. Yet the poet never mentions the commercial crop, presumably sugar, but only the foods needed to sustain human labor. Both poems can be called cubist for being reductive and sculptural. But Oswald’s tableau, although quite as economical as Williams’s, cannot fully submit to technical regimentation.

One poem demonstrates control asserted over nature to a point where human agency evanesces. In “Salt” or “Sweat” America, however, control is exerted over human beings, a less perfectible endeavor. The meter shows this. The flat first line (in Portuguese) presents a captive, disciplined work force. The second line ripples as the slaves disband to eat. The third line falls into disarray. The fourth line solidifies as they return to common labor. The final line crystallizes into a statuesque image of sheer exertion.

Here nature is not “managed.” Rain, instead of glazing a barrow, creates huge potholes in the road. Therefore the wheel cannot take precedence as a secret of power but comes last as an encumbrance. Sheer human muscle must rescue it. The phrase “They could hoist the wheel” has frightening ambiguity. It suggests the hyperbole that to lift the immense wooden wheel of an oxcart took a hundred blacks. But if “they” means not all but any of them, then we are left, in the powerful and pivotal last line, with a single African supporting the weight, like Atlas carrying the globe. Or like a savior crucified, arms outstretched to frame the poem. Oswald, the future communist, unveils a society where religion, whether European or African, escapes translation into science.

T. S. Eliot and Mário de Andrade: In Search of the Grail

Williams and Oswald are a natural fit, at least in the selective way I have treated them. To pick a companion for Mário de Andrade (1893–1945) was more tricky. I chose T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) for reasons developed hereafter, but at first glance they seem to offer an unlikely coupling of populist and elitist sympathies. Cautiously attracted to the “iron laws” of Marx and Bukharin, Mário also confessed sentimental hopes for fraternity, humanitarianism, progress, and enlightened nationalism as notably synthesized in the unanimism of Jules Romains. Eliot censured the
whole package. Mário looked to the people for culture and democracy; Eliot felt that his people had trivialized both. To trace affinities between the two, we must suspend ephemeral “political” criteria to show how, at a keen creative pitch, they mobilized private expression and proven authority to intercalate the realms of art, culture, tradition, society, and belief. So ambitious a quest moves beyond our concern with Americanism, as indeed it must once we slip from the thematic to the cognitive realm. Mário in a sense lets us off the hook, for his whole *oeuvre* is drenched in Brazil, its transactions and accommodations. Eliot is more problematical unless we accept that his self-exile was like that of Henry James, a kind of rejective affirmation. Poetry, Ezra Pound told Eliot in urging expatriation, could not be written in America. Eliot accepted his fate, feeling that the civilization his country lacked existed only in Europe. He moved there longing for a past that seemed more real to him than to most Europeans. Like James and Pound, what he found was “decadence.” And like Mário, he began seeking primary definitions for what, as an American, he could not take for granted.

Given the seeming incommensurability of Eliot and Mário, let us start with two texts rather than, as with our previous pair, end with them: Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and “Inspiração,” the opening poem of Mário’s *Pauliceia desvairada*.²¹ “Prufrock” was published, reluctantly and at Pound’s insistence, by Harriet Monroe in *Poetry* in 1915. *Pauliceia* appeared in 1922 under a dedication by the author to himself as his “dear master.” Both texts plunge us into the metropolis, seen as crucible and as outcome for modern civilization. Prufrock’s is a disenchanted city of half-deserted streets where the romantic sunset becomes an etherized patient and its inhabitants lonely men in shirt-sleeves leaning from windows or women gliding behind windows talking of Michelangelo—a matrix for alienating forces that encompass the globe. Because the poem was completed in 1911 and Eliot moved to Oxford in 1914, one may suppose that the nameless city derives from the commercial St. Louis of his childhood and the ersatz high culture of Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he studied. It distills radiations from a commercial-industrial impulse deplumed of cultural thickness and social textures. In his Dantean epigraph Eliot lets us know that Prufrock is a passive character who cannot, in his inferno, become an active agent. We will be treated to a tableau of several states of soul, from damnation to limbo to salvation. “Prufrock is superior to the inhabitants of his world because he is conscious of being inferior. He suffers, which means that he is one of those who knows he is in a Baudelairean hell. He glimpses boredom and horror.”²²

Mário’s epigraph for his “Inspiration” is from an early Portuguese historian who spoke of summer as producing storms of cruelest winter. Climate, geography, history, and self interpenetrate. Whereas Eliot’s yellow
fog curls about the house and falls asleep—is external to or sets a mood for a morality play—Mario's São Paulo, and the very air he breathes, urges him to a Protean quest for self-community. In his first “Landscape” São Paulo is his “London of fine mists”; its ten thousand million roses fill his nostrils; the wind is a razor in the hands of a Spaniard; at moments the sun burns through a wintry chill that tastes of tears. All is interfused and in potential, as on the day of creation. The religious symbolism is not from Eliot's Dantesque nether world but from a carnival fantasy that merges the city's light and mist, grey and gold, ashes and lucre, repentance and greed, with the lozenges of a harlequin's leotard. São Paulo is the “commotion of my life,” not a proscenium or complex metaphor, while “my life” belongs to Mário and is not an escape from self as in the projected first person of “Let us go then, you and I...”. We are left with the paradox that the interlocutor of the modern city is passive, detached, and condemned, while the one for its peripheral, derivative version is active, engaged, and promissory.

Their respective poetic language softens the variance between Eliot and Mário. Both versions are far removed from the camera shots of Williams and Oswald. The intention here is not cubist reduction nor veiling the private lens nor repudiation of poetic “beauty.” It is to link present and past, not sever them; the genealogy of poetry is respected. Both use internal rhyme, assonance, nuanced metrics. In “Reflections on Vers Libre” (1917) Eliot dismissed the manifestoes of his age, when a million in advertisement bought a groat's worth of art. A living tradition would be “the good New growing naturally out of the good Old, without the need for polemic and theory.” Vers libre, he felt, offers no excuse for polemic; “it is a battle-cry of freedom, and there is no freedom in art.” In any epoch interesting verse either starts from a conventional form and withdraws from it or starts from no form to approximate a simple one. Freedom presupposes artificial limitation. There is no escape from meter, only mastery; rejection of rhyme only tightens the strains on language. There is no division between “conservative” and free verse, only among good verse, bad verse, and chaos. In his own reflections on free verse Mário placed Eliot (without, we assume, having read his “Reflections” of 1917 published in the New Statesman) in a motley list of sixteen poets including Unamuno, Cocteau, D. H. Lawrence, Millay, and Manuel Bandeira who used “now measured verse, now rhyme, now both of them.” “To the destruction of verse by the prose poem we prefer, we choose, the existing Free Verse... To the destruction of the intellectual order, the Order of the Subconscious.” And: “The poet doesn't photograph: he creates.”

Keeping in mind this shared poetic sensibility and the common preference for historical awareness over modernist fragmentation helps us bridge cleavages of temperament, upbringing, and milieu. The fascina-
tion of both poets with religion, history, and tradition as these affect culture and people was acquired in vastly different settings. Eliot's Bostonian grandfather left Harvard Divinity School in 1834 to establish Unitarianism in the wilderness of St. Louis. Although baptized in that faith, the grandson spent his early life rejecting it as a heretical creed that made Christ a loftier Emerson, drained Puritanism of its theology, and accorded less importance to heaven and hell than to the mundane space between them. He distrusted the quasi-spiritual sanction for belief in progress, perfectibility, and high-minded "ethical culture." Ironically, though, his eventual career as a smiling public figure, businessman, and educator splendidly exemplified Unitarian leadership and service.25

Mario's case was the opposite. Born to a petty bourgeois Brazilian family, his legacy was the hand-me-down version of an age-old, universalist Catholic faith ill adjusted to modern times. At twenty-three he was still asking ecclesiastical permission to read the indexed works of Balzac, Flaubert, and Maeterlinck and the Larousse dictionary.26 Eliot, born to a faith consonant with modernity, groped to recover one adequate to decadence and disillusionment. Mario, born to a timeless and unarguable faith, acquiesced in a vague substrate of credence that he aspired, in part subconsciously, to splice to currents of change and liberation. His world was one of turbulent self-discovery; Eliot's was one of senescence.

All this underscores the futility of an academic contrast between the establishmentarian Eliot and the populist Mario, the Eliot who became a British subject in search of venerable assurances and the Mario who never left Brazil save for a foray into "primitive" Peru. Ideological positions not being centrally at issue, we must delve to their latent content—which is indeed what "ideology" pleads for. As poets they saw artistry neither as a self-sufficient statement nor as an ideological vehicle but as orchestrated with culture, tradition, and prehistory. Both, therefore, drew on musical along with consecrated literary principles of composition. Both distrusted iconoclastic manifestoes that promised new realms of freedom. Both, to seize the crux of the matter, were reluctantly modernist pilgrims on paths toward, quite literally, a traditional grail.

In the matter of manifestoes, Eliot escaped to England, a land that avoided them, while Mario remained in São Paulo, a land that wantonly produced them. England refused in the 1920s to overturn a venerable "classical modernism" and embrace the dadaism of Zurich, Berlin, Paris, and New York which rejected past, future, and the very idea of art. The notion of artistic personality remained secure, allowing the esthetic humanism of Coleridge and Arnold to persist into this century. Historical consciousness and awareness of the relativity of literary style help explain the power of "The Waste Land." Malcolm Cowley, spokesman for the exiled Americans, recalls that Eliot, who never wrote "a line that betrayed immaturity, awkwardness, provincialism or platitude," showing
that a Midwestern boy might become a flawless poet, was their model. Yet "The Waste Land" posed a dilemma: a great modern poem, richer musically and structurally than Eliot's earlier verse, showing magisterial command of post-Baudelairean poetic technique, meeting every demand of modernist slogans. Even so, on emotional grounds "we didn't like it." Eliot's fellow Americans refused the simple idea underlying the poem's wide learning and consummate composition, namely (as they read him), that the present is inferior to the past, with the fountains of spiritual grace now dry. Eliot seemed to say that his senile age had no words to bewail its impotence save patched excerpts from dead poets. If so, he could not share the excitement of living in the present.27

Mário, whose advanced education consisted of two months in a business school, which he left after a tiff with the professor of Portuguese, and six years in the Dramatic and Musical Conservatory of São Paulo, lacked the sobering credentials of Eliot, who studied philosophy at Harvard and Oxford and, had it not been for wartime disruption of sea travel, would have defended his dissertation on F. H. Bradley at the former. Without pedantic inclinations and living where northern eyes saw a huge subequatorial blotch on the map with no imaginable "culture," literary or popular, Mário relished modernist boutades and shock treatment. Yet one thing was shock to awaken sensibility; another was to cauterize the tissues of memory. Mário soon regretted having allowed Oswald to baptize him as his "futurist poet." "I'm not a futurist (à la Marinetti). I said it and I repeat it... The fault is mine. I knew of the article and let it appear."28 At the start of this same preface he founded his own school of Hallucinism, then summarily disbanded it at the end.

Nearly four years after Modern Art Week, in an interview ironically captioned "Thus Spoke the Pope of Futurism," Mário declared that futurism had kept on "killing the moonlight till now, without finding a humanly artistic solution. What mark can we give it? Zero." French, Germans, the Sturm group, dadaists, and integral cubists likewise missed the boat. They either kept imitating themselves or cascaded from revolt to revolt without creating. "Revolt breaks with tradition, then it ends and tradition keeps on evolving. Everyone drowsed in the torpor of our official literature. We yelled 'Fire!' and they woke up and began flailing around. Now they want us to shout the alarm forever... But we go on our way with no more cries of revolt." The secret of revolt was to discern working reality and a human value for reconstruction. Brazilian modernism led toward that victory; it killed nostalgia for Europe, geniuses, ideals, and past and future, and longs only for the loved one, the friend. "The Brazilian modernist lives, he doesn't relive. Hence the clever sonnet and evocative poem died... To traditionalize Brazil will consist in living its actual reality with our sensibility as is, not how people want it, and referring to that present our customs, speech, destiny, and also our past."29

four american poets: a cat's cradle 73
Despite their different placements in the world, Eliot and Mário both found themselves in a desert. “Younger generations,” wrote Eliot in 1934, “can hardly realise the intellectual desert of England and América during the first decade and more of this century.” America’s extended “à perte de vue, without the least prospect of even desert vegetables.” Mário spoke of his desert in ludic extroversion rather than the dark humor of the repressed Eliot:

São Paulo! commotion of my life...
A Galicism yelping in the deserts of America!

His emblematic “Galicism” could be taken to mean Dumas, symbolist verse, Parisian avant-gardism, haute couture, haute cuisine, or simply what was au courant in Europe. Eliot regarded Paris and its “incontestable” predominance more in envy than in Mário’s vein of expressive badinage. Calmly he tallied the stars of his French constellation: Anatole France and Rémy de Gourmont (elderly mentors, now scapegoats for the young), Barrès, Péguy, Gide, Claudel, Romain, Duhamel, Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, Janet, and Bergson. His perspicuity in identifying such a cast richly hints that the Anglo-American “desert” that had nurtured him was not unirrigated.

Next to Mário, Eliot appears disingenuous or hermetically self-involved, even verging on parochial. After all, Eliot, one presumes, never read Mário, while as early as 1922 Mário cited Eliot twice, saying that “the American Eliot applies in poems the eminently lyrical theories of Einstein.” The imputation of parochialism to Eliot may be unfair given the sociology of book translation and distribution in the Western world at the time. But then again, Eliot left banking for the prestigious Faber and Gwyer publishing house in 1925, thereby assuming a mite of responsibility for that “sociology.” Why, we may ask rhetorically, did he not learn of Margaret Hollingsworth’s unfinished translation of Macunaíma and insist on publishing such a classic? Eliot’s irrigated desert had provided an education at Smith Academy in St. Louis, where he read Othello, Milton, Macaulay, Addison, Burke, Virgil, Ovid, Cicero, the Iliad, Racine, Hugo, Molière, and La Fontaine; he studied at Harvard at the feet of Santayana, Josiah Royce, and Irving Babbit, then moved to Oxford; he had connections to land a job at Lloyds Bank and to place writings in Harriet Monroe’s Poetry or with the Hogarth Press of Leonard and Virginia Woolf or with Alfred Knopf; when he had a breakdown and was in penury, a group including the Bloomsbury set took up a collection, which he declined, but soon after he received Dial’s two-thousand-dollar award and became editor of the influential Criterion. Like Mário, he suffered indigence, overwork, and distress in his private life, but as his talents matured he found his “desert” peopled by literary figures who could strop his razor of private sensibility and who con-
trolled the delicate levers of power needed to enhance his visibility at the
world's cultural center—a center in his view perhaps a waste land but,
like the umbilicus after birth, still a cynosure.

Mário's desert was of another sort, not a sere waste land but a wilder­
ness. Far from having an Oxford or Harvard, Brazil had no universities
at all. It lacked institutions to implant cultural canons, much less furnish
heterodox versions of them. Because he had no means to travel (and per­
haps because his imagination, like that of Machado de Assis, was a
sufficient surrogate) he relied on random visitors or returnees from outer
space such as Blaise Cendrars or Oswald or Sérgio Milliet for tidings
from Paris. He knew the Western world, to say nothing of "primitive"
worlds, but as refracted through his private lens. His self­education
flowed instinctively toward fusion rather than manic delight in juxtapo­
sition. Eliot too thirsted for fusion, even to the extent of his baptism into
the Church of England, but he came from another heading. The differ­
ence shows up in how they saw Dante. For Eliot, Dante was exemplary
because his beliefs and his poetry were seamless although his thought
and method had been accessible to any cultured person of his time; "he
wrote when Europe was still more or less one." For Mário, Dante was a
forger of culture; he lacked even a language for his Comedy, for if he was
not to revert to Latin he must "invent" Italian. He was at a crossing
between an inherited canon and emanations of fresh community. Eliot
yearned for medieval organicity, Mário for renaissance.32

Both writers felt themselves heir to Western culture, and Mário,
despite the poverty of Brazilian libraries, bookstores, and centers of learn­
ing, probably kept up with Eliot in absorbing it by the eclecticism and
sheer serendipity of his readings. By far the most learned of the Paulista
modernists, his writings of the 1920s seem even more abundantly, if less
coherently, informed than Eliot's. The difference lay in how each was to
fit his national culture (for Eliot an ambivalent transatlantic one) to the
fusion. Eliot was quite prepared to excise swatches of his poetic legacy—
Georgians, Swinburnians, romantics, even Milton—as he harkened to a
time when wholeness was all. Mário could not dissect his tradition, for it
was not for him a recognizable entity, an etherized patient on a table.
On the eve of Modern Art Week he reexamined five Brazilian Parnas­
sians, or "masters of the past." If he laid them to rest with "hosannas dripp­
ing irony and sarcasm," they also taught him what might be needed for
a poetic revolution.33 He came to bury and not praise them, simply
because he found little to love in what they wrote. Indeed, if intellect
shaped the reluctantly Puritan Eliot's reconstruction of tradition, it was
love that guided the lapsed or inadvertently Catholic Mário's invention
of his. He even hesitated to grant Brazil's most "universal" author a place
in it, asking his reader to answer honestly, "Do you love Machado de
Assis?... Do you know the difference between Catholic charity and

four american poets: a cat's cradle 75
Protestant free scrutiny? . . . A Machado de Assis one can worship only ‘Protestantly.’” Mário went farther. One loves the less genial Dante of the *Vita Nuova* more, he felt, than Eliot’s mature Dante of the *Inferno* (even though, ironically, the *Comedy* concludes with the maximal love that moves the stars). 34

As with Williams and Oswald, a dual tension arises between two technological and two religious worlds. What for Eliot and Mário conditions the antitheses and, with them, the purpose of art is historical conscience. Yet Novaes Coelho cautions us that Mário’s poetics were not a hankering for “beauty” nor a defense of the eloquent manner. For even in the modernist age of shock, montage, and *blague* an older division persisted between the poet as artist in the tradition of Mallarmé and the poet as seer in the tradition of Rimbaud—following Marcel Raymond’s distinction. Oswald was the former, Mário the latter. The artist discounts lyricism in favor of free association and abrupt analogies produced by sheer intelligence. He exalts the self-given present, seeking instant destruction and liberation. He enumerates objects, shatters their logic, improvises language, calls up concrete and visual imagery. The seer, on the other hand, holds to an interior world and the history that suffuses it. In Mário, Novaes Coelho finds “a *historical conscience* and an *ordering vision* of the universe,” and in the Oswald of the inventive work “an *anti-historical conscience, a fragmented* vision of the world, in obvious *syntony* with that creative, anarchic spirit.” 35

Such differences have correlates in personal life, with the “artist” given to gratuitous pronouncements. Oswald one day accused Brazil’s composer Villa Lobos of being an ignoramus who did not know harmony or counterpoint. When pressed, he cited Mário as his authority. Mário heard of it and called him to account. “I lied!” replied Oswald with a balmy smile. 36 William Carlos Williams also favored obiter dicta, as when he complained that “The Waste Land” set him back twenty years or that Eliot had carried “my world off with him, the fool, to the enemy.” Ezra Pound found Williams’s criticism personal and not a true opposition. And if Wyndham Lewis, who formed the Vortex trio with Pound and Eliot, was reputed to be snide, his friends agreed that he placed issues above personalities. If he attacked Eliot, Eliot found him “impartial” and never malicious: “The meaning of ‘opposition’ is that one chooses worthy opponents—people with ideas and not ‘borrowed clichés.’” 37

Haroldo de Campos rightly cautions us against reifying the split between Oswald’s shock technique and Mário’s poetics. He places Mário as well as Eliot on a spectrum. “The most radical Eliot is the one near to Pound, the one of *The Waste Land*, just as the most radical Mário is the one who fraternizes with Oswald, the one of *Macunaíma*. . . . Mrs. Novaes Coelho seems not to notice that the best part of Mário de
Andrade’s poetry is precisely that where its ‘anthropophagic’ face devours subjective sentimentalism in critical and ironic fashion.”\(^{38}\) Clearly, modernist sensibility, technique, and tactics were central to the poetic mastery of Eliot and Mário. Yet if both were selectively dismissive of recent literary generations, they also drew back from proclaiming fresh Truths manifesto-style. As hostages to human time in all its range and texture, they could not dispense homiletic distillations of history as did Williams and Oswald. Historical imagination resisted modernist fragmentation. Indeed, neither was content even with a base line in the Renaissance or the Middle Ages. Each was drawn to origins. And here they differed. Eliot had to build down from where he was to discover the “primitive,” rendering it in partial caricature and mediated by cognoscenti. Mário built up from what he saw around him to construct the modern, thus winning firmer footing in the primitive. Theirs was the coming of age of anthropology. Both read Tylor, Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, and Frazer but interrogated them from different angles.\(^{39}\) As poets, they performed a reconstruction that was not historiography but adroit pastiche.

Eliot’s fascination with primitivism arose from his quest for sources to rehabilitate a discredited world. Cleanth Brooks compares his mission with those of two poets used for “The Waste Land”: Dante, who inherited a faith that required no proof, and Edmund Spenser, who projected a new system of beliefs requiring didactic efforts. Dante’s beliefs had become clichés that if directly asserted would elicit stock responses. Spenser’s pedagogic strategy clashed with Eliot’s business of the poet. Concerned with integrity, Eliot felt ill at ease with strategy. He composed “The Waste Land” with poetry at the center. He asserted beliefs obliquely, using ancient fertility rites to suggest resurrection or Sanskrit words to denote thunder. If his aim was rehabilitation and not propaganda, using poetic and not hortatory discourse, his method had then to be indirection—not a vague allusive manner but a shock technique to renew symbols encrusted with “distorting familiarity.” “In this way,” writes Brooks, “the statement of beliefs emerges through confusion and cynicism—not in spite of them.”\(^{40}\)

For Eliot religion, art, and public culture were discrete realms although subterraneously interfused. With only spectral tracings of it in his art, he pursued the archeology of this fusion. A first layer was his appraisal (1922) of the music-hall artist Marie Lloyd and her expression of working-class virtues.\(^{41}\) The morally corrupt middle classes, much less the aristocracy they were absorbing, lacked the dignity to find such an idol. But with the decay of the music hall he expected the lower classes to drop into “the same state of protoplasm as the bourgeoisie.” They would attend the cinema lulled by senseless music and by visual action too rapid for the brain to act upon and, in the listless bourgeois attitude
toward art, would receive without giving. "Civilization" would soon deprive them of all interest in life, as it had the Melanesians, whose fate, Eliot supposed, would soon be that of the civilized world.

Deeper layers took him to the metaphysical poets, to the Elizabethans, to Dante, and of course to the sources of Christianity. But undergirding this whole stratigraphy was from the start prehistoric man. In his early "Portrait of a Lady" in "the smoke and fog of a December afternoon," among the violins and "ariettes of cracked cornets" with the "latest Pole" transmitting the Preludes, Eliot felt within his brain a dull tom-tom absurdly hammering a prelude of its own. "Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance": Was smoking simply a nervous drawing-room tic? Or was the trance of the witch doctors in the poet's mind? Farther on the "tobacco trance" recurs when the poet muses that he must borrow every changing shape, must "dance / Like a dancing bear, / Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape." Piers Gray reminds us of the text of Jules Laforgue, who had shaped the sensibility of the young Eliot: "Le rage de vouloir se connaître—de plonger sous la culture consciente vers 'l'Afrique intérieure' de notre inconscient domaine." The search for origins led to primitive myth and religion. But these, and the whole layered course of history, were recapitulated within the modern person. Thus historical myth and private self were both subjects of modern anthropology and psychoanalysis. Lévy-Bruhl, he thought, drew too clear a distinction between primitive and civilized mental process. 42

Eliot in his formative years performed a balancing act on the precarious tripod of art, religion, and science, with art as his innate vocation, religion as a yearned-for renewal of faith, and science as his homage to the dominant legitimization of his time. The science he accepted, however, did not validate the Durkheimian "social fact" nor speak, from outside history, of the "evolution of religion." His argument "drove a wedge between the science of natural development and the history of cultural change." One cannot penetrate history or culture, he held, by behavioral description. Contemporaries see only fragments of their era. Larger understanding remains for later ages, when, paradoxically, interpretation distances the past while the act of interpreting makes the past inform the present. The scientists whom Eliot therefore follows are not brilliant theorists of behavior such as Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl but anthropologists such as Frazer and Jessie Weston, versed in comparative history. These authorities take precedence in the notes to "The Waste Land" over classical, Christian, medieval, and Elizabethan sources, whereon he so freely drew. Weston's From Ritual to Romance had inspired his title, his plan, and much of his incidental symbolism, while Frazer revealed the importance of nature cults or "vegetation ceremonies." 43 An intellectual problem remained, however, that was not to be resolved, or transposed to another plane, until Eliot's religious conversion in 1927. For he
accepted Frazer only insofar as he declined to explain religious behavior, a line that Frazer sometimes transgressed. Matters of intention, Eliot felt, were too subjective for scientific treatment. If his poetic sensibilities were taking wing, his intellect had not yet crossed the pons asinorum.

Mário also relied on the coordinates of anthropology and psychology. Before Macunaima appeared in 1928 he was familiar with Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Freud's *Totem and Tabu*, and perhaps more of Freud. His reading, or absorption, of Lévy-Bruhl and Frazer came in 1929–32. These sources were seasoned, as they were not for Eliot, by the attempt to accommodate Marxism (he read the classics in 1924–26 and came to grips with them in the mid-1930s through Bukharin's *Historical Materialism*) and, more supportive of his interpretation of Brazil, by his reading of Keyserling, who had found in the New World a culture linked to "being" (Sein) and sensibility that seemed closer to true civilization than the mechanized barbarism of Europe. Keyserling identified the issue, Marx the paths for action. Eliot and Mário posed different questions to their overlapping sources while arriving at similar pathologies of their age. Eliot wrote from the heart of Western civilization and from a "modern" condition seen as cultural entropy and degradation. The course of civilization he traced through "universal" authors—Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Joyce—with distant tom-toms and the decadent Melanesians fading reminders of primeval holism. For Mário the issue was not cultural renovation but invention. If he favored shock methods, it was not to unmask the bankruptcy of Western progress, secularism, capitalism, and individualism (although he did have his socialist convictions) but to explode preconceptions regarding the coexistence in Brazil of elite culture and, in the old-style term, the "barbarism" of the common folk. There is nothing Prufrockian about his bourgeois figures: the villainous Italian in Macunaima; the nouveau riche father in *Amar, verbo intransitivo* (translated into English as *Fraulein*, in 1933), who employs a German governess for the sexual education of his teenage son; or the prototypical figure of his "Ode to the Bourgeois." These personages may be mercenary or immoral or philistine but not symbolic of widespread spiritual dryness or acedia. With reference to the characters of Macunaima the author even assures us that none was intended as a symbol.44 Indeed, there was nothing for them to be symbolic of. While Eliot could assume a general Western (and by implication universal) culture, Mário could not assume the features of even a Brazilian one. If the former was bent on scrutinizing the past to see what had "gone wrong," the latter lacked inclination for historical resurrection.

Eliot saw his city (St. Louis-Boston-London) as homogeneous, while Mário saw São Paulo as kaleidoscopic, the "commotion of his life." Eliot reached back to "primitivism" through anthropological renderings, while Mário immersed himself in it simply by traveling about his own
country. Why start with Homer and Dante if cosmic myths are all around one? Because Brazil seemed still inchoate, his writings, had they reached a European public, would have seemed to it “exotic.” But he had to start from where he was, taking Brazil as emblematic of a larger human condition. There were two caveats to his “nationalism.” First, it was not composed of discrete regionalisms. Regionalism he saw as “poverty without humility,” a blind alley of compressed social vision, condescending folklorism (caipirismo), and nostalgic sentimentalism (saudosismo). Therefore Macunaima and his writings on Brazilian speech aimed to “de-geographize” Brazil’s regional mosaic. Second, nationalism itself was merely a stage in self-knowledge that preceded the incorporation of Brazilian expression to world culture. Because through their folklore one knows the people, and because the industrial city consigns common folk to racial categories, Mário accepted the task of reabsorbing folklore and returning it to Brazil. Haroldo de Campos casts the matter in Saussurean terms, comparing folklore to langue and literature to parole. Literature would admit richer possibilities for innovation than folklore, which responds to the judgment of the collectivity. Mário immersed himself in the people’s culture and internalized their codes, but seeking to be both interpreter and innovative coproducer. More distinctly, Eliot assumed the same role in allowing jazz or Marie Lloyd to infiltrate his poetry (as in “The Waste Land”: “O O O O that Shakespearean Rag— / It’s so elegant / So intelligent”); but the transaction between popular and citified culture was for him a means, not an end: he thought he knew where it should come out, while Mário had his notion of where, on its own, it might come out.

In 1918 Mário published a newspaper article on “a divina preguiça” (divine indolence). Over the years, influenced by Keyserling and Lévy-Bruhl, he developed his praise of indolence into a justification of primitive life and the tropical world as therapy for a technified, consumerized society. Civilization was the antidote to “progress,” not its handmaid. Preguiça in part reflected his sense that the Brazilian still lacked firm character or “national conscience” and resisted discipline for modern life. But it also connoted idleness for cultivating artistic sensibility, with no theological imputation of laziness as a state of spiritual dryness. Hence his interest in Lévy-Bruhl’s pre- or nonlogical primitive mentality, meaning, we may presume, not irrationality but resistance to rationalization.

In the mid-1920s Mário found the key for translating his intimations into the exactitudes of art in the works of Theodor Koch-Grünberg, based on research in 1911–13 on the Indian lore of Venezuela and northeast Brazil. Here he came upon his antihero, or “hero without any character,” in Macunaima. Mário took him, however, not as a symbol for Homo brasilicus, for he appeared in legends common to Venezuela and the Guianas as well. Mário once confessed his “horror” of boundaries.
No patriotism caused him to prefer Brazilians to Hottentots or Frenchmen; he worked for Brazil simply because he was more useful here than in Cochin China. Nonetheless, *Macunaima* closely exemplified Brazilian character as Mário knew it. To start with, English missionaries had misunderstood the name *Maku* (bad), with its augmentative *Ima* (great), or Great Evil, and used it to signify the Christian “God.” This ambiguity Mário took as symptomatic of modern Brazilians, or even modern men, who invent morals as circumstances suggest. *Macunaíma*’s logic was to have no logic. Mário could therefore project him into serial incarnations: temporal, geographic, ethnic. What he need not do was to explain, interpret, or preach. He simply adhered, with creative rearrangements, to the legend. In this he was close to Eliot, who was a poet when writing poetry, only intimating his own beliefs.

Two further points illustrate our two writers’ affinities. One is their use of musical form as complement or alternative to an intellectual one. Mário was a musicologist and, as Mello e Souza shows, “composed” *Macunaima* on musical principles. The two genres that he found applicable to popular music were the suite or rhapsody (*Macunaima* is subtitled a “rhapsody”) and the variation. Each was suited to a people “parasitic” on Indian, African, and European forms and having none of “their own,” where creation requires mimesis, dissolution, absorption, and recomposition. Music, in short, is an idiom suitable for creating *ex nihilo*. The transaction with imported forms, however, did not imply passivity; one might conjecture that the popular orisons of the Brazilian northeast displayed prophetic “surrealist” elements. Eliot too was given to literary musicianship, but more in Aristotelian imitation of form than in search of it. Spender gives two examples. When he first read “Ash Wednesday,” section 2 reminded him of the mysterious second movement of Beethoven’s Quartet in A Minor. When he asked Eliot whether he knew the late quartets, he replied that he found the A Minor Quartet “inexhaustible” and that the later works seemed “the fruit of reconciliation and relief after immense suffering; I should like to get something of that into verse before I die.” Or again, Spender sensed an affinity between Eliot and Wagner. Once, after following a performance of *Das Rheingold* from the score, he asked Eliot whether he had been studying the libretto when he wrote “The Waste Land.” “Not just *Rheingold*,” replied the poet slyly, “the whole of the Ring.”

The concluding point, and the heart of the comparison, lies in both writers’ fascination with the grail legend. Eliot took the legend as the organizing symbol of the waste land from Jessie Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance*—a land blighted by a curse where crops cannot grow nor animals reproduce. The plight of the land is related to that of its lord, the Fisher King, who has been maimed and rendered impotent. The warning Eliot drew was that for people to lose the knowledge of good and evil

**four american poets: a cat’s cradle**
keeps them from being alive; hence the modern waste land was a realm whose inhabitants were nonexistent. Evil itself was more dignified and less boring than the "life-giving," cheery automatism of the modern world. It at least proved existence. Eliot could demonstrate the persistence of the legend from pre-Arthurian or African tribal times to the present, passing through Dante's inferno and Baudelaire's Paris. A controlling theme is the victory of lust over love in the primal version, or of science over asceticism and ritual in the modern one. The Rhine-daughters of Wagner's Götterdämmerung, whose river is polluted by Alberich's theft of the gold, become, in "The Waste Land," the violated Thames-daughters, whose feulent river is cursed by oil and tar.49

If we suppose the waste land to be the entropic, self-annihilating outcome of civilization, we must remember Eliot's grounding in anthropology, which yielded symbolic vocabulary for incorporating the experience of the industrial West to history and prehistory, and in Freudian theory, which allowed him to see a single life as recapitulating all stages of civilization. Despite his tactical use of literature from Homer to Conrad's Heart of Darkness, Eliot's primary reliance was not, like Joyce's, on literary myth. "What The Waste Land does on the positive side is to replace the aesthetic with anthropological myth."50 While this nonpositivist yet "scientific" grounding did not commit him to entropic evolutionism, he was left with the problem of redemption. This he managed by making prayer, as the link between despair and hope, the subject of "Ash Wednesday." Yet the Anglo American who had meticulously classified art, science, and religion and, within religion, described himself as having "a Catholic cast of mind, a Calvinistic heritage, and a Puritanical temperament," faced a dilemma. Poetry could not resolve it, nor could he, once he had drawn the connection between the grail legend and the myth of the wounded god, clearly identify the grail of his times. He required, and undertook, a Pascalian leap.51

Mário negotiated more smoothly the transition from myth to present circumstances. When he encountered Koch-Grunberg's books, he took him not as an ethnologist with another view of primitive thought but as a repertoire of contemporary Amerindian legends. No interpretation was needed, just as none is needed for vestiges of the Song of Roland that appear in Brazilian peasant balladry. In the Brazilian subcontinent cultural time had collapsed. Once Koch-Grunberg gave him specifics, Mário could straightway exemplify hunches he had been developing about the Brazilian, or South American, human creature. It took him one week (December 16–23, 1926) in a hammock, clouded in tobacco smoke, on a farm in São Paulo state to compose Macunaíma. (Eliot took a year, 1922, to write "The Waste Land." Toward the end he sought surcease and psychotherapy in Lausanne, where he wrote the final sections in an "inspired" state, recovering long-suppressed passages from his Harvard years.)52
Gilda de Mello e Souza addresses the grail theme in *Macunaíma* by examining a historic literary form that helps to specify the message rather than, as Eliotologists are wont to do, by showing how form emanates from the author's intention. This might imply that Mário started from where he was and tried to make something of it, while Eliot started with the weight of civilization on his back and tried to give it translation and form. The poet, said Eliot, “must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and . . . continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career.” In his second preface to *Macunaíma* Mário warned, however, that during social transitions one cannot easily bargain with an unknown future. “I don't want the past to return, and so I can't extract from it an instructive fable.”

Mello e Souza explains *Macunaíma* as a satiric reprise of the Arthurian chivalric romance or grail legend, which had already passed through several phases. By the time it reached Rabelais the “spiritual journey” had lost its purity, and the narrative was absorbing grotesque, obscene, and parodic elements from the intruding popular culture. With Cervantes the *hypertrophy* of chivalric virtues further inverted the legend, but without yet draining the courage of the protagonist. With *Macunaíma*—coming after Wagner's ineffectual attempt, though portentous for Eliot, to recover the original legend—the complete reversal occurs. The hero's knightly virtues have *atrophied*. In *Macunaíma*’s character each becomes its opposite: courage becomes cowardice; loyalty, disloyalty; truthfulness, mendacity; justice, injustice; altruism, self-interest; and love, concupiscence. Yet the oppositions are not categorical, or else the new antihero would be a monster or a devil. Parsifal or Galahad had, as paradigms, always to live up to the code. *Macunaíma*, as representative rather than exemplary, could not live up to either a code or an antocode. The grail itself was now no longer the chalice of the Last Supper nor a stone whereon a lance drips blood but a magic jade talisman, or *muiriquita*, that could make its owner happy, rich, and powerful. The quest, that is, was now incompatible with chivalric virtue, nor was it restricted to the virtuous. The very grail had become sacrilegious.

We could comfortably polish off our comparison by reverting to the Weberian dualism between the Catholic society, which expects of its parishioners only an “average” morality, and the Protestant society, which preaches private asceticism. *Macunaíma* and Prufrock might exemplify such a construction. This, however, invokes transatlantic legacies, while Mello e Souza helps clinch the American theme of this essay. She senses that the leitmotif of *Macunaíma* is not an anthropophagic celebration of Brazilian “identity” and that it reflects not simply tension between Europe and America but discomfort with the ineradicable European presence. The grail legend, however carnivalized in its Brazilian version, is still a transatlantic myth, and by its aspiration toward perfectibility a
universal one. As emblematic evidence the critic cites the incident in chapter 13 of *Macunaima* when the (anti)hero is attracted to the five-decked luxury liner headed for Europe. The brawny sailors and luscious stewardesses urge him abroad, but then the captain raises his gold-laced cap and makes a sign. At once the crew jeer at Macunaima, and the steamer belches forth a cloud of mosquitoes, gnats, and wasps. He brushes them off and goes home.

Unlike Mário-Macunaima, Eliot did go to Europe; he joined the Church of England and became a British subject, succumbing, as it were, to the legend of the grail. After the early poems it becomes for a while difficult to tell where America breaks off and European civilization begins. England seems to have provided the coordinates for his life work. Yet in the *Four Quartets* (1943) he reverted to a quest, the tortured Puritan quest, for origins. “East Coker” was the English village where the Eliot family had lived for two centuries before coming to America. “Dry Salvages” are the rocks off Cape Ann, Massachusetts, of which Eliot had earlier written:

> But resign this land at the end, resign it  
> To its true owner, the tough one, the sea-gull.  
> The palaver is finished.

He complicates the reminiscence by setting Cape Ann against an earlier memory of the “sullen, untamed” Mississippi. In New England, he once wrote, he missed that long, dark river, the ailanthus trees, the cardinal birds, the limestone bluffs, while in Missouri he missed the fir trees, golden rod, song sparrows, red granite, and blue sea of Massachusetts.55 The last quartet, “Little Gidding,” returned him to England, to the Anglican community that received King Charles and was later desecrated by the Roundheads. Here, believes Spender, is “the darkest, most wintry, most death-saturated of the Quartets, and . . . also the culminating point of Eliot’s oeuvre.”56

Eliot’s search was solitary, and his abandoned homeland remained for him multiple and not de-geographized. Mário cast his destiny with Brazil even though his search too was of Christian-European origin. Because his nationalism required self-discovery through popular culture, his vision was not private and Puritan but communal and Catholic. His Brazil would take form, and achieve universality, as the educated mind absorbed the esthetic of the people. To this end he fused the temporal, ethnic, and cultural fissures of his homeland. *Macunaima* registers the complexity of the matter. Vei, the Sun, offers the (anti)hero one of her daughters as a wife; instead he pursues a fishwife from (Christian-European) Portugal. At the end Vei delivers Macunaima to the siren Uiara, made up as a rosy-cheeked European brunette. He plunges into the lake after her and is nearly demolished by piranhas. Bereft of his
muiraquita, his body lacerated, betrayed by the world, his character still unformed, he refuses to settle in Marajó, the Amazonian island whose ancient mounds are Brazil’s only traces of a superior culture. Instead he becomes Ursa Major, a new constellation visible mostly from European latitudes. He chooses to brood alone, shining uselessly in the heavens—uselessly save for those on earth who may find in him self-recognition. And thus a beacon.

Fancy and Imagination: A Shifting Equilibrium

This essay has grown in its own fashion. The two main sections were written a few years apart and, now I see, are not quite comparable. I started out wanting to stick to the 1920s, with a few lines of verse as my fulcrum. But with Eliot and Mário this became difficult. I found I had to skip ahead to Eliot’s *Four Quartets* of the 1940s and to address Mário’s *Macunaíma*, a “rhapsody” to be sure but scarcely a poem. In fairness I should then have gone back to Oswald’s novels of the 1920s—more memorable even than his poetry—and set them against *Macunaíma* and Williams’s *The Great American Novel* of 1923, to say nothing of dealing with Williams’s masterpiece *Paterson* (1946–58). Well, this is an essay, not a treatise, and I shall let it keep its natural shape. As the song goes, I never promised you a prose garden. The original “American” theme was dispatched in the first section, where telegraphic treatment, Morse code as it were, was perhaps admissible; but Mário and Eliot are more loquaciously introspective than the first pair and made me so in the process.

More serious still, the cat’s cradle I promised remains unstrung. I wove the strands between Williams and Oswald and between Eliot and Mário. In the process affinities between the two Americans and the two Brazilians became detectable. To complete the cradle we should toss loops between Williams and Mário and between Eliot and Oswald. The first would require attention to the Whitmanesque qualities of each and comparison of their symbolic city-river complexes Paterson-Passaic and São Paulo-Tietê. But this would stretch to the breaking point my exegetical capacity. In the event that comparison is at all possible between Eliot and Oswald, I have scattered suitable clues in the final section of the previous chapter, “Language in America.” *Doctorandi* are invited to dot the i’s and cross the t’s. All this is to say that I entertain no inclusive paradigm and that I am less concerned with defining the American theme than with discovering ways of appropriating it.

Let us see, then, what we can extract from our writers as I have instinctively paired them. As my argument proceeded it dawned on me that they represent the two modes of sensibility consecrated by Coleridge as fancy (Williams and Oswald) and imagination (Eliot and Mário). The English poet found these markers useful for navigating from the calm

four american poets: a cat’s cradle 85
waters of a classical age to the turbulent seas of romanticism. The distinction can be traced to German critics such as Schelling, Fichte, and A. W. Schlegel. Schlegel, for example, assumed that genius, taken to embrace man's complete inner powers, included fancy and understanding along with imagination and reason. Imagination he called the higher power for its kinship with reason. Or as Jean Paul (Johann Richter) put it, fancy is a strong, vivid memory, while imagination makes all parts a whole and "totalizes everything." One might even wonder whether the Germanic sources of Coleridge's dualism, sprung from concern with society, history, culture, and faith—in short, with an "underdeveloped" world in formation—are of special relevance to our Brazilian writers, while his English preoccupation with a poetics that had become desiccated and a Hartleyan or associationist psychology that denied private impulse points toward our Anglo-American poets. These, of course, are matters of modulation. Coleridge's handling of general issues and contemporary domestic quarrels was seamless, which is why he illuminates our case.

When Coleridge took up the challenge of imagination, it was defined in the English neoclassical tradition as a combining and associative but not a truly creative faculty. "Since Milton, poets had on the whole ceased to maintain the creative interchange between mind and object, and had been content to use ready-made material created in earlier, more imaginative times," or at best to say well what others had greatly imagined but less perfectly uttered. Imagination was seen as welding distinct impressions to form images not found in experience, but without fusing or blending them. Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* of 1755 equated imagination to fancy as "the power of forming ideal pictures." In the late 1790s Coleridge moved from treating fancy and imagination as a combined faculty opposed to reason that could recall or create images and began to conceive imagination as autonomous: complementary though not antagonistic to reason. Wordsworth's poetry, Kant's epistemology, and Cudworth's *True Intellectual System* all pushed him in this direction. He gradually understood fancy as an aggregative faculty that dealt with "fixities and definites," "a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space," and took imagination to be synthesizing rather than passive and associative, requiring interrelated powers rather than discrete capacities.

Critics who compare Williams and Eliot give generous hints for fitting them to Coleridge's categories. They help us also to see that fancy and imagination are not simply different sets of optics or stages of awareness but are in the service of different messages. Williams, for whom "The Waste Land" was the "great catastrophe to our letters," felt himself in competition with Eliot. If, however, he fell under the spell of Eliot's meditations on history, place, and local identity in the *Four Quartets*, he never sought "to retrieve the past nor to locate the present in a circling
pattern of transcendence.” He compared his own sense of the “universal in the particular” with Eliot’s “fatal blunder” of thinking that “place is always and only place.” He esteemed Whitman as the first American to have addressed the local situation of America and rendered its sensual essence. Breslin calls “The Waste Land” an anti-epic, in which the quest for meaning is thwarted and we are left awaiting the collapse of Western civilization. “Paterson is a pre-epic, showing that the process of disintegration releases forces that can build a new world.” Willey cites Eliot’s “April is the cruellest month, breeding / lilacs out of the dead land . . .” as a prime example of imagination as the power that shapes a multitude of things to a poet’s predominant mood. Breslin cites an April definition from Williams’s Spring and All—“tomorrow / the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf”—uttered extempore and self-given at an instant when the world is new.

For Oswald and Mário the amicable polemic between Nelly Novaes Coelho and Haroldo de Campos, cited earlier, scarcely needs translation into Coleridgean language. Novaes Coelho makes the case in canonical fashion. To Oswald she attributes the “inventive style” of verbal juxtaposition, pulverized syntax, grammatical deformation, preference for the objective and descriptive over the subjective and narrative, ironic use of common speech, mix of the banal or colloquial with the recherché or erudite, and predilection for visual imagery. However refreshing this Oswaldian modernist esthetic, Novaes Coelho finds Mário’s poetics to be fully as renovative. For her the point of difference is not that Mário failed to go the whole way, that he was hostage to elocutionary or Parnassian nostalgia, but that he entertained historical conscience and “organizing vision” in place of vanguardist fragmentation and ahistoricism. He searched for ultimates “through the concrete forms of the objective world while the revolutionary vanguard sought the concrete world, the new objective reality, in refuting essences.”

Haroldo de Campos reshapes this dichotomous view in holding that Mário’s verse, even when “experimental,” betrayed irresistible attraction, save in occasional instances, to “urban symbolism à la Verhaeren.” He did not man the barricades of the “Copernican” Brazilwood revolution which led to Drummond de Andrade and thence to João Cabral de Melo Neto. De Campos nonetheless feels that Macunaíma, for many the modernist masterpiece, owes its power precisely to a kinship with anthropophagic poetics. To complicate matters further; if we associate the party of “fancy,” to which we provisionally assign de Campos, with the fragmentation tout court of received imagery and structures of thought, we must then explain why his own “morphology” of Macunaíma commends the meticulous coherence and structural imagination that inform Mário’s achievement.

These paradoxes suggest the need to lift fancy and imagination from German and English romanticism and retranslate them for the world of our four poets. These are not, after all, fixed literary or philosophic
devices but versatile psychic dispositions that in their pathological state, Coleridge tells us, would become, respectively, delirium (images juxtaposed without fusion) and mania (images fused in the heat of coercive passion). Once checked by sense and reason, they become “strategies” (pace Eliot’s reservations about the term) of understanding, craft, and illumination. Situation of course determines strategy. Coleridge was born to an age when poetic fancy lived off prior creativity and now merely embellished received literary forms. He redefined imagination for privileged status in a revolutionary time when “life, and growth, and consciousness—those very mysteries which had never fitted comfortably into the mechanical scheme, now came into their own.” Poets felt themselves in league with ascendant forces, legislators of mankind rather than elegant triflers. For Coleridge the mind at its pitch receives feeling, intellect, memory, and experience to modify or “coadjunate” them, employing “esemplastic” power. He saw the universe not as atomistic but as symbolizing transcendent reality, and the mind not as a detached subject beholding an object but as a coinvolved agent of synthesis. In only a restricted sense, however, is imagination a higher faculty than fancy, for if the former connects reason to understanding, the latter connects understanding to sense. The mind in its normal state employs both faculties. “Imagination must have fancy,” wrote Coleridge; “in fact the higher intellectual powers can only interact through a corresponding energy of the lower.” The “fixities” that fancy toys with are formed only by prior acts of imagination.

After two centuries Coleridge’s terminology retains its allure. What has changed is the situation and thus the strategic imperative. Coleridge found it natural to endorse imagination in his quest for an organic, historicist vision of world process, nourished by culture, experience, and feeling, to supersede a mechanistic conception that rendered the poet spectatorial and his poetry decorative. By the early twentieth century Coleridge’s single option, as our four poets exemplify the case, is no longer so clear. For Eliot and Mário “esemplastic” imagination was still the key, whether for recovering a traditional culture or for envisaging a new one. For both, the links among myth, tradition, culture, private sentiment, and poetic craft were a given. The “vanguard” view was that an atomized world could no longer, in Coleridgean terms, be apprehended, much less shaped, by imagination. The new atomism had escaped Newtonian chaperonage to enter a state of primal anarchy requiring dadaist and cinematographic techniques for its capture. Fancy, no longer ancillary to imagination, had acquired autonomous life.

Williams felt that Eliot’s “traditionalism, fantasy, and associativity” and his rejection of America showed intentions about the sources and purposes of poetry wholly at odds with his own. He resented Eliot’s adopting “the lofty, ironic perspective of the seer Tiresias,” whereby he annulled the reader’s personality, lifting him to an impersonal, timeless
point of vantage. Williams's poet must construct a “complete little universe” from things directly, geometrically apprehended with words scrubbed clean of metaphor and allusion, a finely machined, self-sufficient world sprung from the immediate physical world of our origin. Williams admired Marianne Moore, for whom “a word is a word most when it is separated out by science, treated with acid to remove the smudges, washed, dried, and placed right side up on a clean surface. Now one may say that this is a word.” In Williams at his best, wrote Blackmur, “you get perceptions powerful beyond the possibility of backing; the quotidian burgeoning without trace of yesterday; the commonplace made unique because violently felt. . . . He isolates and calls attention to what we are already presently in possession of.” So angered was Williams by “The Waste Land” and the prospect of Eliot becoming the poet of the age that he could not acknowledge coincidences in their views of poetic discourse, much less admit lessons that he had learned. For him the battle lines were drawn: Marianne Moore, Kreymborg, and Bodenheim against H. D., Pound, and Eliot.

To make the match between Williams and Oswald on the points just raised we need only consult the latter’s “Manifesto of Brazilwood Poetry” (1924). “Poetry exists in the facts,” he starts. Saffron and ochre shacks amid the greens of the favelas under a Cabraline blue are esthetic facts. (Cabral discovered Brazil in 1500.) “The black girls in the jockey clubs. High-society odalisks. Fancy talk . . . Brazilwood poetry. Agile and candid. Like a child.” Naturalism is optical illusion. Elites took it apart with impressionism, fragmentation, voluntary chaos. Next come lyricism, presentation in the temple, materials, constructive innocence: synthesis, geometric equilibrium, technical finish. Fighting copy by invention and surprise. No formula. See with open eyes.

The nature of their message restrained Williams and Oswald from discursive explication, from critical essays drawing literary analogies, using the optic of dead masters, or coming to grips with philosophy. If Williams dealt with human struggle, Blackmur remarked, he did so before it reached the level of morals and when it touched the spirit only by accident. He had “no perspective, no finality—for these involve, for imaginative expression, both the intellect which he distrusts and the imposed form which he cannot understand.” Asked to compare Oswald and Mário, Antonio Candido called them the dialectical poles of Brazilian modernism. Oswald was the more fascinating personality, a man of genial intuitions but highly uneven sets of values. Mário was more constructive, scholarly, coherent, wide-ranging, intellectually penetrating. The more important? “For someone seeking precursors for language to break with the traditional mimesis, Oswald. For someone seeking language for a Brazilian vision of the world, Mário.” The reputation of each depends on the historical moment.
Williams never expanded his critical ideas. “He correctly saw the need to establish a center from which he could apprehend the chaos of the contemporary world; but he could never admit the validity of any locus—such as Eliot’s in tradition—that appeared to threaten his own.” Toward the end of his life, after a detour into sociopolitical matters when he mocked his bohemian past, Oswald resumed the utopian motifs of his anthropophagic period—the passage from neg-otium to otium cum dignitate, signifying abolition of the repressive patriarchy and “restoration” of a classless, communal matriarchy. If his torrential documentation from two millennia of world history and ideological fiat did little to deepen the messages of his early manifestoes, they spread the canvas needed to raise fancy from a literary tactic to an agonistic force that could vie with imagination.

The heirs of Oswald who retrieved his project in the 1950s were the concrete poets grouped around Haroldo and Augusto de Campos and Délio Pignatari. The concretist movement is not exclusively “poetic” any more than Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations is strictly “economic.” Fancy becomes a way of construing and reporting our world. Like imagination, it accrues generous conceptual underpinnings and its own genealogy. Instead of absorbing Mário’s Macunaíma into the Christian, Euro-American quest for a grail—a dimension that he fully acknowledges—Haroldo de Campos finds it a work of scrupulous coherence, purged of subjectivism, and explicable (à la Propp and Barthes) within a functional, universal typology of fables. Psychologist residues and evocations of “atmosphere” dissolve under objectivized scrutiny of actions.

The concretist genealogy springs from Mallarmé’s “Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard” of 1897, the year before his death. The concretists call his a prismographic method, a spatial syntax grounded in prismatic subdivisions of an idea. Mallarmé utilized blank space, dispersing his poem over double pages to visualize his meaning and assist simultaneous perception, using varied typefaces to orchestrate his ideas under musical inspiration rather different from that of Eliot or Mário. Other pioneers are Pound (ideogrammic method), Apollinaire (calligrammatic method), Joyce (palimpsest method), e. e. cummings (phonetic pulverization), futurists (process of total light), and dadaists (historical blackout). Precursors include Lewis Carroll and Rabelais, while theoretical infrastructure was derived from the semiotics of Peirce, Ogden, and Morris. Bakhtin came on stage as his work was published. If Baudelaire and Eliot become less exemplary than Mallarmé and Pound, Pound and Joyce are Janus-faced; like Mário, they are in the pantheons of both fancy and imagination, helping to coadjunate the two.

Under the sign of concretism the lyrical ego surrenders to audio- graphic presentation. Architecture, painting, and music join hands with poetry. Industrial production replaces artisanship to deliver a useful
product. Our intelligence, the concretists quote Apollinaire as saying, must understand syntheticoideographically instead of analyticodiscursively. Concretism does not dismiss language or communication, only the armature of discursive syntax. In Pignatari’s résumé: “Before concrete poetry: verses are verses. With concrete poetry: verses are no longer verses. After concrete poetry: verses are verses. But they’re two fingers removed from the page, the eye, the ear. And from history.”

All this leads to quite different understandings than those of Eliot and Mário about the germination of culture in America and its recovery of or incorporation to “Western Culture.” Culture, steeped in psychology and outlook, is in fact less at issue than are books, pages, and words. Haroldo de Campos speaks of the new barbarians buried in books—Borges immured in a municipal library in Buenos Aires; Alfonso Reyes in his “chapel” in Mexico City; Mário amid scores of Schoenberg and Stravinsky, expressionist portfolios, and tracts of Freud and folklore on Rua Lopes Chaves in São Paulo; or Lezama Lima in a house in old Havana—all gnawing at and “ruining” a cultural heritage that is ever more global. Although engendered by vanguardism, anthropophagy-concretism does not begin its work with the modern(ist) age. It is also retrospective and offers a fresh reading of American culture, no longer cast in the genealogical imagery of trunks, branches, and twigs, suggesting a gradual formation of transatlantic “identities.” An example is the contrast between how Roberto Schwarz handles the Brazilian novelist Alencar as a step in a developmental sequence and how Haroldo de Campos treats him as a philological revolutionary (see above, chapter 1). Another is between how Mello e Souza treats Macunaima as the recrudescence of a Western literary myth and how de Campos, though he recognizes this affinity, absorbs it into the wider realm of language and fable, where specific authorship and genealogical laws fail to apply.

The American deconstruction of Western logocentrism can be traced farther back to the baroque antitradition that took marginal or interstitial paths within the course of normative historiography to challenge and cannibalize the Western koine. Linearity yields to synchronism, center-periphery to polycentrism. Lezama Lima intercommunicates with Proust, Mallarmé, and Góngora, Cabrera Infante with Lewis Carroll, Guimarães Rosa with Goethe and Heidegger. National differences are not new buds but the operating space for fresh syntheses of the universal code. “More than a heritage of poets, this is the case of assuming, criticizing and ‘chewing over’ a poetics.”

It was, then, a flight of fancy to posit the linkage of fancy itself between Williams and Oswald and that of imagination between Eliot and Mário. It would be an esemplastic task, both fanciful and imaginative, to fuse our two pairs into a vision of America and how it came, or might come, to be.