

UNDERSTANDING *THE STORY OF ANDRO*

Who is Andro? She is a figure of androgyny, from Greek: *andros*, man; *gyne*, woman. In *The Story of Andro* she struggles to reach the ideal: a balanced, fully human person, uncluttered by stereotypes about what is masculine or feminine, free to fully develop her potential.¹ Unfortunately she lives in a racist, sexist, class-divided, militaristic, materialist society epitomized by the characters Sir Richard Adamant, Agnes, Razzle, and Fone who imprison her in the Dungeon of Hard Science (an embodiment of a research lab based on capitalist/military/industrial/empiricist/materialist foundations funded by the Kremagon (Kremlin/Pentagon)). So her story is her struggle to overcome the shackles of these forces of repression.

ACT I

Andro is born. She comes rushing out of the imagination of the “I,” the Speaker who abruptly acquaints you with a condition of rather hysterical alienation from virtually all of Western Civilization. This “Speaker” is best understood as a seeker whose quest forms the basis for *The Tenting Cantos*, a sprawling set of 100 cantos by R. Virgil Ellis (see below). Andro is also on this quest. She is linked to other questers in literature, echoing Gawain and Don Quixote. Her particular quest is to achieve Enlightenment (cf. Huxley’s *The Perennial Philosophy*) through meditation.

ACT II

Her chivalric steed is a motorcycle and her Waste Land is the “Plains of Free Association,” a landscape tumbling out of the Speaker’s imagination, a melange of images, a postmodern spawn reflecting our collapse of coherence and shared values. Her energy is the “unruly mind” of the typical meditator who seeks Mind but who must struggle to overcome the mind, with its susceptibility to multiple doubts and distractions. The ultimate doubt is that there may be no such thing as Mind, only Adamant’s adamantine matter, a doubt she is imprisoned by.

ACT III

Confined in The Dungeon of Hard Science (.cf the “stinking dungeon” in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*) Andro under torture lapses into incoherence. But in the chorus she maintains her deep determination and insists on her right to pursue her daredevil path (see Chogyam Trungpa, *Crazy Wisdom*, and Wes Nisker, *The Essential Crazy Wisdom*).²

ACT IV-ACT V

The military-industrial-political machine determines to find a strategic use for meditation as Andro continues meditation.

ACT VI

Andro confounds the machines as she achieves Enlightenment, expressed playfully in terms of various traditions. The empiricists must now confront the ineluctable and inescapable truth that matter=energy=Mind. The syllables PHAT and SVAHA express the achievement of androgynous spiritual liberation: “Masculine mantras end with ‘hum’ or ‘phat’, the feminine mantras terminate with ‘thum’ or ‘svaha” (from http://www.poornam.net/namotherapy_page_1.htm).

¹See “Androgyny as an Ideal for Human Development” by Ann Ferguson, <http://www.angelfire.com/or3/tss/andro.html>.

²For a fascinating comparison see <http://www.beezone.com/AdiDa/crazywisdom.html>.

ABOUT *THE TENTING CANTOS* BY R. VIRGIL (RON) ELLIS

The Tenting Cantos is a series of one-hundred poems, within which are subsets, including *The Story of Andro*. A comic-ironic tone characterizes many, though not all, of the cantos; the modality may shift rapidly to a fervent lyricism. The central theme is the struggle for union of subject and object, of Self and Other.

The cantos are visionary, eclectic, utilizing imagery from many value systems in an attempt to reach a synthesis between the meditative, the intuitive, and the rational. The work draws from literature, astronomy, geology, particle physics, religion, philosophy, history, mathematics, and biology; it is therefore interdisciplinary, holistic and in the tradition of the great epic and narrative poems. A quotation from Wolfgang Pauli (Nobel Prize in Physics, 1945) sums up very well the program of *The Tenting Cantos*: “...contrary to the strict division of the activity of the human spirit into separate departments—a division prevailing since the nineteenth century—I consider the ambition of overcoming opposites, including also a synthesis embracing both rational understanding and the mystical experience of unity, to be the mythos, spoken or unspoken, of our present day and age.” (from “Science and Western Thought,” quoted in Wilber, Ken, *Quantum Questions*, Boulder, 1984, p. 163.)

Yet there is a strong sense of individualism, of an individual embarked on a dubious and highly introspective quest. Some of the pieces are absurdist or surreal, and some in the mode of deconstruction even question the text itself. There is also a strong sense of contact with the everyday world, not only with its small glories, but with its great injustices. Ron Ellis performs a number of these cantos, with live musicians, electronic effects, and video projections giving the pieces highly dramatic form.

A few of the publication credits for the cantos are:

“Canto 1 Hung up and dried,” *2River View*, http://www.daemen.edu/pages/rLong/tworiveraRView/4_2/poems/ellis1.html.

“Canto 4 Ponder underpinnings,” *2River View*, http://www.daemen.edu/pages/rLongtworiver/2RView/4_2/poems/ellis2.HTML

“Canto 10 Somewhere in the middle,” *Switched-on Gutenberg: A Global Poetry Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1, <http://faculty.washington.edu/Mh/vol5no1/canto10.htm>.

“Canto 65,” *Poetry Northwest* (David Wagoner, editor, U. of Washington, Seattle, Washington), Vol. XXIX, No. 3, Autumn, 1988, p. 32.

“Canto 91 half below,” *EDGZ*, #2, Summer/Fall 2001, Blaine R. Hammond, Editor, (Ocean Park, WA), p. 22.