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EZRA POUND: THE *CANTOS*

THE early career of Pound, his great influence on other poets from 1912 to 1922, and the steps by which he modernized his style were discussed in the first volume of this history; I here concentrate on his later life and especially on his *Cantos*. Pound was born in 1885 in Idaho and grew up in suburban Philadelphia. In college he concentrated especially in Romance languages and literatures; his interest in Dante, Guido Cavalcanti, and the troubadour poets of Provence was to be lifelong. In 1908 he emigrated to Venice and then, in the same year, to London, where he married in 1914. He plunged into London poetry circles, attending Yeats's Monday evenings at home, Ernest Rhys's evenings, T. E. Hulme's evenings, and the meetings of the Poets' Club. Between 1908 and 1911 he published four volumes of verse. At first he was enthusiastic about contemporary English poetry, but gradually he saw in it vices of vagueness, sentimentality, literary diction, and looseness. He learned to value a hard, precise, objective presentation of fact in a language that departed "in no way from speech save by a heightened intensity." In 1912 and 1913 he propagated these and other values as Imagism. The provocative, explicit directions "how to write" that he published at this time have had an impact on poetry in

America ever since. *Cathay* (1915) and *Lustra* (1916) show Pound in his Imagist or first Modernist phase.

In September 1914 he met T. S. Eliot. By now he was corresponding with Joyce and reading his work. Through Wyndham Lewis he encountered Modernist painters and sculptors, and he joined with them to launch another movement in the arts—Vorticism. He felt that he and his friends were harbingers of a new sensibility, a new civilization. He created more radically Modernist styles in *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1919), *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920), and his early *Cantos*.

The war years brought a terrible disillusion. Like most sensitive people, he was appalled at the slaughter abroad and the jingoism at home. His selfless efforts to get Modernist literature accepted ran into resistance of the crassest kinds. Now thirty-five, Pound was fed up, he said, with England—its cultural life, politics, religion, economic system. Though all Western societies seemed to him venal, stupid, and brutal, intellects seemed clearer, the arts livelier in Paris. He lost his chief economic attachment to London when the *Athenaeum* fired him from his job as drama critic. Maybe he sensed that he was being surpassed as an artist by Joyce and as an influence by Eliot. He doubted his own poetry. He had begun the *Cantos* in huge ambition and hope. They would be the grand poem of the age, comparable in scope and importance to the *Odyssey* or the *Divine Comedy*. But now, briefly, his confidence failed.

In 1921 he moved to Paris. The *Little Review* that year printed a calendar he had made, a zany expression of his resolve, as he approached middle age, to shake off his past and begin again. The Christian Era had just ended, his calendar revealed, and a new age had commenced, to be known as the Pound Era. He tended to identify with founders of civilizations and cultures, and he was now also flirting with Dada. (His brief interest in Dada illustrates again how much he was fed up and in search of novelty, for Pound's idea of poetry was really about as close to Dada as Dante's would have been.) He formed a liaison—it was to be lifelong—with Olga Rudge, a violinist and later a musicologist, and a daughter, Mary, was born. About this time he also had a son, Omar (named for Omar Khayyam), by his wife. *A Draft of XVI Cantos* was published in 1925. The title reflected his

doubts; it protectively implied that these Cantos were unfinished, merely provisional. He made friends with several younger writers, notably Cummings and Hemingway. His fascination with history had not at first led him to study the American past, but by 1922 he was going through the writings of Thomas Jefferson, using a set Eliot had given him. One of his important literary works came in 1921, when Eliot laid before him the manuscript of *The Waste Land.* It was "damn good," Pound said, but he blue-penciled through it, slashing boldly, and the poem was published much as it had left his hands. He continued his magazine campaign for Eliot and Joyce, and he wooed correspondents for money to liberate Eliot from the bank where he was working and to publish *Ulysses.* He now also pushed the ideas and writings on economics of C. H. Douglas, whom he had met in 1918, as much as he pushed Eliot and Joyce.

In 1924 Pound settled in Rapallo, Italy, where he was to live for the next twenty years. His rooftop apartment looked over the sea. He swam, played tennis, and read detective stories, but mostly he worked. He translated Confucius. He read further in early American history. He published articles on literature, music, government, and economics. Partly to his championship we owe the rediscovery of Vivaldi's music, though the research of Miss Rudge was more important in the long run. Beginning in 1933 he organized annually a series of concerts in Rapallo. He wished to show how much one person's effort can enhance civilization in his locality. He kept up a wide correspondence. The contemporary writers he now praised were chiefly Williams, Zukofsky, Basil Bunting, Cummings, Hemingway, Marianne Moore, and Eliot. He wrote the *ABC of Economics* (1933). In 1933 he met Mussolini, who observed to Pound's great pleasure that the *Cantos* were amusing. The "Boss," as Pound called him, seemed also to share Pound's economic theories.

In London before the First World War Pound had devoted himself almost exclusively to poetry and the other arts. His thoughts, talk, friendships, doings, and aspirations all centered on them. Some twenty years later, in the 1930s, he was more preoccupied with economics and the social order than with art and literature. How to write concerned him far less than how to govern. Where formerly he had advised and aided Eliot and

Joyce, he now tried to advise senators and congressmen, Roosevelt and Stalin.

Devoted to his ideal of the good society, Pound thought he saw it materializing in Fascist Italy. His sympathy with Fascism, like his anti-Semitism, will always be deeply damaging to his fame. Since the Italian news media were controlled by the government, Pound could not know all that was going on in Italy, especially during the war when newspapers from England and America did not arrive. He dismissed much that he did hear as propaganda. His ideal of a good society incorporated a religious dimension, a conviction that communal life should reflect a reverence for nature and the "gods." The contrast with modern capitalism or socialism was clear, and Pound confused his own piety with its perversion in Fascist cultural propaganda. In short, when we take into account his loathing of the economic system in England and the United States, his conviction that Mussolini was adopting economic remedies Pound had long battled for, his sympathy with paternalistic governments (Founding Fathers in America, emperors in China), his admiration for heroically energetic leaders who get work done ("Tching Tang opened the copper mine"; Mussolini "drained off the muck . . . from the marshes . . . grain from the marshes"), and his religious attitudes, we can begin to see how it happened. What is more, in Italy Pound witnessed the enthusiasm of Fascism and was subjected to its propaganda. And he tended, more than most of us, to project his subjective life upon the outer world. Nevertheless, his sympathy with Fascism highlights, at the very least, a certain crudeness, hardness, and violence of temperament.

As Europe drifted toward the Second World War, Pound felt a terrible urgency. Would he take time to do an article on Joyce? No, for "There is too much future, and nobody but me and Muss and half a dozen others to attend to it." In *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* (1935) he tried to show the "fundamental likeness" between these two heroes, and to explain Italy to the United States. With the same purpose he kept writing letters to American magazines and to friends, senators and congressmen. Only if Americans were ignorant or bamboozled could they enter a war against Italy. He sailed in 1939 for the United States. He had hoped to talk with Roosevelt, but managed to see only a few

legislators. An honorary degree from his undergraduate college, Hamilton, was not much consolation before he returned to Italy. It was now June.

When the war broke out, Pound stayed in Italy, continuing his usual activities. Bankers' greed for profits was the root cause of the war, he thought—at least on the Allied side. In letters and other writings he strove to prevent the United States from entering against Italy. But Pound felt that his own ideas on economics and government were far more important to the future of the world than the war could be, whoever won. In January 1941, after two years of trying to obtain permission, he began broadcasting his thoughts over the Rome radio. When Pearl Harbor was bombed, he paused seven weeks, pondering whether to return to America and perhaps attempting to do so. But with the United States now at war with Italy, he resumed his broadcasts.

On the air Pound talked about Social Credit, Confucius, usury, Noh drama, modern poetry—in short, his usual topics. He skipped unpredictably from topic to topic: he used an assortment of English and American dialects; he read occasionally from his *Cantos*. Hardly anyone was listening, needless to say, but Italian and American officials were. Hearing such passages as this one from Canto 46 (here as transcribed by official American listeners)—

> And if you'll say that this day teaches a lesson, all that the Reverent Elliot (Haston) more natural language, you who think you'll get through hell in a hurry, huh, ah . . .

—the Italians naturally suspected he was transmitting in code. Doubtless the U.S. Department of Justice was equally puzzled, but some statements were lucid: "For the United States to be making war on Italy and on Europe is just plain nonsense . . . Roosevelt is more than any other one man responsible"; "You are not going to win this war," he told America; "You have never had a chance in this war." In 1943 he was indicted in the United States for treason.

At the end of the war he was seized by partisans and then arrested. He was taken to the Disciplinary Training Center at Pisa—a concentration camp to which the U.S. Army sent for "training" its worst criminals—and confined in a wire cage. He

slept at first on blankets laid on the concrete floor and later under a pup tent. He was exposed to rain, sun, and dust. No one was permitted to speak to him. After three weeks he broke down, and the doctors, fearing for his life, transferred him to the medical compound, where a tent was set up for him. Under these conditions he gradually resumed, so far as he could, the routine that embodied his ideal of how to live. He composed verse, translated Confucius, and, for exercise, walked and played imaginary tennis with a lath and stones. Late at night he was allowed to use a typewriter in the dispensary. Here between September and November in 1945, amid the wreck of all personal and political hopes, he composed his "testament" and vision of paradise, the *Pisan Cantos*.

From the prison camp in Pisa he was brought in 1945 to Washington for trial. Four examining psychiatrists found him unable to comprehend the seriousness of the charges against him or to aid in his own defense. He was, they told the court, distractible, illogical, grandiose, delusional, and paranoid. He was confident he could rehabilitate the world through Confucian government and Douglasite economics, which he could not explain coherently; he thought himself persecuted by bureaucrats; he had not been taken prisoner, he said, but "gave himself up" to meet President Truman, who needed his information on Japan and Italy. At this time and within the psychiatrists' frame of reference Pound was insane. That the *Pisan Cantos* contributed slightly to their conclusion is unfortunate but understandable.

In view of the psychiatrists' testimony it was legally impossible to try him. He was sent to the government's asylum in Washington. Living in the insane asylum, he did not collapse in self-pity. He had "enormous work to be done."

He studied Confucius. He battled for monetary reform. In 1949 the *Pisan Cantos* won the Bollingen Prize for poetry. He wrote more Cantos, and translated Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*. A selection of his letters was brought out in 1950. In 1954 he published a volume of translations from ancient Chinese poems. *The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius* is uneven and contains no poem of the first order, but makes, with its variety of lyric styles, a fascinating and delightful book. His work was being broadcast over the BBC, his writings being reprinted, his reputation spreading, and various efforts were under way to have

him released from St. Elizabeth's asylum. Finally in 1958 the Department of Justice made no objection and the indictment was dismissed. Among the writers who worked for this were Eliot, Hemingway, MacLeish, and Frost.

Out at last, Pound visited his boyhood home near Philadelphia, stayed with friends, and sailed after two months for Italy. He took up quarters with his daughter and her husband in their castle in the Italian Tirol. Now seventy-two, he was, as ever, full of projects—a marble temple to be built nearby on a mountain summit, sugar maples to be planted in Italy, five hundred grapevines to be set out in the castle vineyard to provide the white wine he preferred. In 1955 *Section: Rock-Drill* (Cantos 85–95) and in 1959 *Thrones* (Cantos 96-109) had been published. Despite fine passages, these Cantos did not equal the great testament he had written as he awaited execution in the Pisan prison camp. Struck by illness, he recovered, but felt himself old. In 1965 he attended the memorial service for T. S. Eliot in Westminster Abbey. He visited Paris again and the United States. He had left it sixty years before with a swelled head, he said, and returned with swelled feet. Mostly he lived in Venice with Olga Rudge. As energy ebbed in these last years he doubted the value of his life's work. Often he was depressed, silent, rueful. He died in 1972 in Venice and was buried there.

After 1920 Pound composed almost no poetry, except translations, that was not part of the *Cantos*. The other important poems he published earlier—in his four books between 1908 and 1911 and in *Cathay* (1915), *Lustra* (1916), "Homage to Sextus Propertius" (in *Quia Pauper Amavi*, 1919) and *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920)—were noticed in the first volume of this history, and in this one I discuss the *Cantos* only. The poem is about twenty-three thousand lines long. It extends in time from the modern word back through history to the ancient and primitive. In space it ranges through America, London, Gibraltar, Italy, Greece, China, Africa, Russia, and Japan. Its tone of voice varies from

> Hey Snag wots in the bibl'?
> Wot are the books ov the bible?
> Name 'em, don't bullshit ME;

to

> Kuanon, this stone bringeth sleep;

to

> And then went down to the ship,
> Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and
> We set up mast and sail on that swart ship;

to

> woe to them that conquer with armies
> and whose only right is their power

—tones that we may call low colloquial, lyric, epic, and prophetic—and it includes a huge variety of other tones. Its mass contains, among other things, laws of ancient China, quotes from Jefferson and John Adams, extracts from account books of medieval Venice, vignettes of Edwardian London, ideograms that the Chinese emperor Tching Tang wrote on his bathtub—

> Day by day make it new
> cut underbrush,
> pile the logs
> keep it growing

—Douglasite explanations of cost and purchasing power, instructions of Sigismundo Malatesta to his architect, descriptions of hemorrhoids, and moments of mystical vision. It is humorous, grand, startlingly beautiful in places, relentlessly boring in others, nobly intended, and sometimes morally repulsive. Laying different historical times and places "ply over ply," it tries to show the recurring basis of just societies—the few to be found—and creative civilizations. It asks what sustains the human spirit amid the confusion and fear of existence.

COMPONENTS OF THE TEXTURE

Whether or not the *Cantos* have an overall structure is a vexed question. There is also the question whether or how much it

matters. On one occasion (in "Dr. Williams' Position") Pound suggested that "Major form is not a non-literary component. But it can do us no harm to stop an hour or so and consider the number of very important chunks of world-literature in which form, major form, is remarkable mainly for absence," and he mentioned, among others, the *Iliad,* the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus, Montaigne, and Rabelais. "The component of these works and *the* indispensable component is texture." As Coleridge once explained it, a poem must provide "a distant gratification from each component *part.*" The "reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the pleasurable activity of the mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself."

For many persons reading the *Cantos* is not pleasurable, since the texture seems hopelessly difficult. For example, the opening lines of the *Pisan Cantos:*

> The enormous tragedy of the dream in the peasant's bent shoulders
> Manes! Manes was tanned and stuffed,
> Thus Ben and la Clara *a Milano*
>   by the heels at Milano
> That maggots shd / eat the dead bullock
> DIGONOS, Δίγονος, but the twice crucified
>   where in history will you find it?
> yet say this to the Possum: a bang, not a whimper,
>   with a bang not with a whimper,
> To build the city of Dioce whose terraces are the color of stars.
> The suave eyes, quiet, not scornful,
>   rain also is of the process.
> What you depart from is not the way
> and olive tree blown white in the wind
> washed in the Kiang and Han
> what whiteness will you add to this whiteness,
>   what candor?

The main elements of this texture are concrete and fragmentary presentation, allusion, ellipsis, discontinuity, and juxtaposition. The "peasant's bent shoulders" may refer among other things to Benito Mussolini ("Ben" in Pound's brash way of talking). "Manes" (or Mani), founder of the Manichaean religion,

was crucified, his body flayed, and his hide, the poem says, tanned and stuffed. "Thus" or analogously with Mussolini and his mistress, whose dead bodies were hung up by the heels at Milan. In the context of the *Pisan Cantos* the reference to Mussolini's downfall begins to suggest what the "dream" was and why it was tragic. "Shd" might indicate a rhythmical effect—we do not accent or pause on "should" in this line—but more probably reflects merely Pound's impatience in typing this passage. The image of massive strength in the bullock connects with the peasant and with Mussolini. DIGONOS in Roman and then in Greek letters evokes the god Dionysus. Bringer of a new religion and a new culture, Dionysus makes a subject rhyme with Manes and Mussolini. Like them he was violently killed—torn to pieces. The form of his name here alludes to the myth that he was born twice. The "twice crucified" may be Mussolini, whose body was first trampled and hacked by the mob and then strung up. Perhaps we should also think of Pound: he was stood by the partisans against the wall to be shot, and then brought to the prison camp, where he expected to be hanged. Certainly Pound identified himself with the founders and prophets he alludes to.

"Crucified" is one of the several details in these lines that bring Christ to mind; but we notice that while Pound names Mani, Mussolini, and Dionysus, he does not name Christ although the context seems inevitably to summon the thought of Christ ("crucified," "way," "olive"). It is a typical moment in his lifelong quest to replace Christianity with a truer and finer vision and a better basis of social order.

"Possum" is of course T. S. Eliot, author of *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats,* and Possum's *The Hollow Men* had ended with the famous lines:

> This is the way the world ends
> This is the way the world ends
> This is the way the world ends
> Not with a bang but a whimper.

The allusion tells us that in this moment and for this speaker the world is ending.

Thus the lines establish a coherence, a meaning, and a dramatic development of emotion; but my subject here is not this creative achievement—I do not aim to "read" these lines—so

much as the methods Pound employed. Obviously the presentation is concrete throughout. We are given images, metaphors, examples—the "peasant's bent shoulders," the "dead bullock," Mussolini hung up by the heels. The strength and truth of language lay for Pound in its power of concretion. It is one thing to say "prison" or "concentration camp." But to show the barbed-wire fence and guard towers, as Pound does in the *Pisan Cantos*, speaks "prison" to the imagination. The pictureless general term lies inert on the page; the images, activating imagination, compel us to undergo something of the experience. Conferring felt knowledge, the images penetrate, hold in memory, form feeling. They have the suggestiveness and complexity of reality. No wonder Pound distrusted thought that lost touch with the concrete. For Pound it was a question of sincerity, of knowing and feeling that of which you speak. We can know, to repeat, particulars, not generalizations. We may, for example, have encountered a person who is on the whole virtuous; "the good man" is a meaningless abstraction. Thus if we wish to speak sincerely we will not say, "the good man is modest, loyal, true, and brave," defining an abstraction by more abstractions. Pound will say "Confucius," or, maybe, "John Adams." (He is still more likely to say "Confucius/John Adams," but this is a different, more sophisticated technique—the "ideogram"—to which we shall come.) He will show their acts, quote their words.

These concrete presentations are almost always fragmentary. Fragmentation in *The Waste Land* is mimetic: the technique expresses the modern "mind," our incoherent experience or world, which Eliot renders in satire and despair. But Pound thought that in all times life has always presented fragments to the mind. This is the natural case. The world is coherent—this was Pound's faith—but our data are always incomplete. The event is a complex whole, but only aspects, snatches, bits come to our cognizance. As when historians reconstruct the past from surviving documents, or scientists Sinanthropus from his bones, or archaeologists the ancient city from their digs, we must intuit the living reality from the snippets we can know of it. Some details are especially telling or "luminous," and afford "sudden insight into circumjacent conditions, into their causes, their effects, into sequence, and law." Naturally Pound tried to give such details in his poem. Since life presents fragments, it is not surpris-

ing that our minds are inherently disposed to work with them. "All knowledge is built up from a rain of factual atoms . . . Real knowledge goes into natural man in titbits. A scrap here, a scrap there; always pertinent, linked to safety, or nutrition or pleasure. Human curiosity survives and is catered for, by the twopenny weeklies, 24 lines on chromosomes, six lines on a three-headed calf." And as life does not comment on the concrete fragments it provides us, neither do the *Cantos*. If most important poems may be called a reading of life, the *Cantos* aim also to be a course of education in how to read life's page. As we go through the poem we are learning by concrete experience—this was Pound's hope, at any rate—how much and how we can know people, events, civilizations, historical transitions. The rule of procedure is synecdoche. The fragments evoke the whole context from which they come. They may be very brief or extended. Three words, "Adamo me fecit," carved in the stone of a church bring to mind the ethos of medieval craftsmanship as opposed to modern factory production. At an opposite extreme John Adams is evoked (if Adams is the ultimate object and if "evoked" is the right word) in eighty pages (Cantos 62–71) of selections from his works. Though Pound's fragments are perfectly definite, their implications are endless and often contradictory.

Allusion is an aspect of Pound's concrete presentation. Instead of generalizing about crucified founders of cultures, he writes Manes, Mussolini, Dionysus. Thus he obtains the depth and complexity of the concrete, for whatever we know about these figures may enrich our response. So also with allusions to places, works of literature (usually brief quotations), history, philosophies, and religions; the allusion brings its context into the poem's context, setting up a system of interrelations. All this is familiar in Modernist literature.

Presenting concrete fragments, Pound boldly elides, ignoring conventions of grammar and giving only the words necessary to his effect. "The enormous tragedy of the dream in the peasant's bent shoulders" is a line but not a sentence, the verb being elided. "Thus Ben and la Clara *a Milano*" tells us who and where but not what: we have to supply the predication for ourselves. A more perspicuous and wordy writer might have said, "My ideal is to build the city of Dioce . . ." Eliding, Pound secures speed and compression; his fragmentary or unfinished units of

grammar work suggestively, summoning the reader's imagination to complete them. When the verbs are elided or are present only in participial forms, as often happens, Pound's lines give the effect of fact after fact laid down with finality. But the omitted verbs may be implied, charging his images with energy and potential action.

His transitions are discontinuous. To some degree they are always disruptive and disorienting also. When we read,

> olive tree blown white in the wind
> washed in the Kiang and Han,

we do not imagine an olive tree washed in the sacred rivers of China. Whatever the interrelations between these lines, the second does not proceed in an ongoing unit of grammar from the first. It is not as with Keats's wine in the "Ode to a Nightingale,"

> Tasting of Flora and the country green,
> Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth,

where the images of the second line refer back to the first line, extending and completing it. The units Pound works with may be images, single lines, groups of lines ("ideograms"), continuous passages, whole Cantos, or clusters of Cantos. Larger ones are built by assembling many smaller. Juxtaposed, they make a system of relations. But each remains a discrete piece.

When two things are given together, the mind naturally strives to connect them. We respond to Pound's discontinuities with an initial surprise and shock, and this gives way to heightened mental activity as we explore possible interrelationships among the separate units. The process may end in illumination as we discover implications in the juxtaposition. To speak of this mode of composition as construction oversimplifies, but emphasizes the contrast with the Romantic convention of spontaneous flow, of the poem conceived as an organically evolving process.

Different styles may be juxtaposed. Not merely literary styles from Homer to Henry James to newspapers, but spoken styles, the way diverse people express themselves—a contemporary swindler named Baldy Bacon, or Confucius, or Malatesta. For a style is associated with and implicitly expresses values. It registers a state of mind. The guard's words in the prison camp—

> "wd." said the guard "*take* everyone of them g.d.m.f. generals
> c.s. all of 'em fascists"

—reveal that the "paraclete" of precision does not dwell in his soul. On the same page we can read about the music of the good emperor Shun, "the sharp song with sun under its radiance." A fragment of "Shun's music" as well as a characterization, the line highlights by contrast the guard's confusion and rage. With its civilized theme, its shapely, definite rhythm, and its density with clarity of utterance, the emperor's music shows the guard's mind for a pigsty.

Since any distinctly recognizable style—of a particular writer, a period, a social type or class—brings with it a system of associations, a writer can use a bit of that style as an allusion, even as a symbol. Moreover, every style (that is in any degree admirable) has particular capabilities and limitations. It can convey some states of sensibility and feeling, but not others. You cannot say in biblical style what you can in the voice of Henry James, or vice versa. At least in theory, then, a writer might adopt whatever style can best express his state of feeling, and if this state changes suddenly and radically, so will his style. It may change to a different language, since we should not think merely of English styles, but of the much wider vocabulary of styles possible to a writer who knows foreign languages and literatures as well. And of course if a writer speaks in some historical or otherwise familiar style, the allusive or symbolic values of this style will contribute along with its intrinsic capabilities. We may, for example, be puzzled that the *Pisan Cantos* end in doggerel—

> If the hoar frost grip thy tent
> Thou wilt give thanks when night is spent

—until we recognize that in meter, diction, and sentiment the lines both use and allude to a style of folk poetry in the oral tradition. "Pound's" experience in prison camp has united him with mankind's experience through the centuries.

However various the styles it includes, a work of art has a stylistic unity also. It is "in," as we say, a style. And usually it does not criticize its own style. But in a work of art such as the *Cantos*, which deploys many radically different styles in rapid juxtaposition, each style is implicitly criticized by the other styles that are also present. Because we are made to be conscious of them,

the specific values and expressive capabilities of any particular style are thus enhanced and liberated. But there may be a cost. The means of expression may become the subject equally with the thing expressed. We may not identify with the emotion as we compare the styles and admire the virtuosity.

IDEOGRAMS

Concrete presentation, ellipsis, allusion, fragmentation, discontinuity, and juxtaposition were fundamental to the *Cantos* from their start. But gradually Pound began to speak of his procedure as the presentation of "ideograms" or the "ideogramic method." Just before the First World War he had come into possession of Ernest Fenollosa's manuscript "Essay on the Chinese Written Character." In Chinese script, Fenollosa explained, some of the characters are "simple, original pictures"; others compound two or more pictures. The ideogram for "messmate" shows a man and a fire. And at every reading. No matter how often we encounter the ideogram, Fenollosa argued, we never respond to it merely as a conventionalized sign. We always perceive it as a complex of images, and our minds work actively from the images toward the meanings they embody. Teaching himself the Chinese script, Pound tried to do just this. Thus the ideogram that combines pictures of the sun and the moon articulated much more than the abstraction "bright." It presented two bright objects, the sun and the moon, and as we think what is meant by putting the sun and moon together, we realize that this ideogram speaks of "the total light process, the radiation, reception, and reflection of light; hence, the intelligence. Bright, brightness, shining."

Precisely when Pound began writing what he considered ideograms is hard to say. (Ronald Bush notices that Pound's characteristic uses of the term began in 1927.) For Pound had been composing by the agrammatical juxtaposition of fragments since 1917 at least. And how would ideograms differ? The question raises a more general one: What conventions did Pound invoke to explain and legitimate his discontinuities, both to himself and for his readers? When he started the *Cantos*, he conceived that the reader would assist in the theater of somebody's mind—for simplicity we may call this person "Pound." The content and flow of the poem would be what "Pound" sees, tells, thinks, remembers, and associates. This was in the Ur-Cantos of 1917. This convention was never wholly abandoned. But though it persisted, the convention had ceased to govern firmly before any Cantos had reached the form in which we now read them. For it was "subjective"; Pound sought a more "objective" presentation. One possibility was the repetition of radicals in a design (something learned from Wyndham Lewis). He borrowed hints from Cubist collage and from music. Each conception of his procedure somewhat influenced his actual way of writing, but also rationalized methods that had been formed (and gradually transformed) under quite different pressures and considerations. None of these conceptions provides a convention throughout the poem. We have to keep them in mind, but they do not completely interpret what we find.

The "ideogram" was another theory of "objective" presentation. Pound explained and espoused it more persistently than the others, and the *Cantos* are often said to be "ideogramic" from start to finish. The ideogram, to repeat, is visual and spatial. In theory it is as far as possible from interior monologue. With the convention of interior monologue, we take the fragments as occurring one after the other, enacting the movement of consciousness. With the ideogram we take the component images as interacting simultaneously to present a complex of meaning. The interior monologue reflects or, more exactly, *is* somebody's subjectivity. The ideogram is objective in the same sense as is a character in Chinese script. In fact, both conventions—of the interior flow of consciousness and of ideogramic objectivity—can operate at the same time in the *Cantos*. Since the one convention was present at the start and the other came gradually later, the fact that both may be observed in the same passage illustrates that ideogramic writing did not involve a radical change from earlier procedures.

Thus far I have been speaking of Pound's "ideogramic method" as a way of presentation. But Pound also advocated and practiced it as a way of thinking. "I am not putting these sentences into monolinear syllogistic arrangement," he explained in *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*, "and I have no intention of using that old form of treachery to fool the reader, my reader, into think-

ing I have proved anything, or that having read a paragraph of my writing he knows something that he can only *know* by examining a dozen or two dozen facts and by putting them all together." Pound regarded the *Cantos* as a vast process of ideogramic thinking. When he tried to convert George Santayana to this mode of mental procedure, Santayana asked how we know which "facts" or "components" should be heaped up. "A *latent* classification," he said, "or a *latent* genetic connection would seem to be required, if utter miscallaneousness is to be avoided." Ideogramic method claims to eliminate "abstraction," but an unacknowledged (hence nebulous and uncriticized) abstraction stands at the first step, determining which cases are relevant.

INCREMENTAL REPETITION

As we read the *Cantos,* one passage refers us back or forward to another, usually to several others. The connection comes often by allusion to the same memory, historical episode, myth, quotation, landscape, and so forth. It is sometimes as though the circumstance, or the presentation of it, had been shattered into separate fragments, and a fragment were given here, a fragment there. Readers must reassemble the fragments as they read, thus bringing different moments of the poem together. Of course, the actual process and effect is far more diverse and complex than I can suggest. A fragment may enter into different wholes. Events are reinterpreted by the changing contexts in which they reappear. And there are the less describable but no less important incremental effects created through cross-cultural "rhyming" of myths (for example, the Chinese goddess Kwanon with the Greek Artemis), or of myth with history (Helen of Troy with Eleanor of Aquitaine), or of legendary, historical, or literary figures or events with contemporary ones (Malatesta with Baldy Bacon). There is the repetition of images (saffron) and themes (the underworld descent, linking Odysseus with an infant wasp). And there are such unclassifiable associations as the croissant for breakfast with Artemis, the crescent moon. All this presupposes, for its full working, that we have the entire poem intimately in mind before reading any part of it. Few readers do, but every reader experiences that the more one reads the *Cantos,* the more meaningful and moving any passage is likely to become.

MAJOR FORM

When Pound started the *Cantos,* he had methods but not a structure. He had only general notions of what "sort of design and architecture" his poem might acquire. Never mind, he would write on anyway. He would heap up "components," hoping they would eventually cohere. He would make a radical and literal experiment in organic form: the Cantos would develop out of their own dynamics and out of the vicissitudes of his life. He intended a relation to the *Odyssey* and the *Divine Comedy.* Within the first sixteen Cantos he alluded to Homer and Dante in ways that force us to look in his poem for plots parallel to theirs. Occasionally thenceforth, both within the poem and in remarks about it, he indicated that the parallels were still in his mind. And both epics help interpret the course and meaning of the *Cantos.* But no reader has been able to use the *Odyssey* or the *Divine Comedy* as a map. Neither have readers found any other plot or comprehensive design—none, at least, on which they agree. Complaints began early, throwing Pound on the defensive. On most occasions he urged his readers, "as to the *form* of *The Cantos . . . wait* til it's there. I mean wait till I get 'em written and then if it don't show, I will start exegesis." But the *Cantos* were never finished.

Overstating to make the point, we could say that the *Odyssey* has a plot because Odysseus has an aim. Were he not trying to get home, his adventures would be unconnected episodes. Only his volition makes his pleasures with Circe a threat and Ithaca a denouement. But suppose Odysseus willed the purpose of his voyage only gradually in the midst of it. In this case the early episodes of the *Odyssey* would be random, disconnected, and without significance (except that Odysseus survives) when they occur, but would acquire a structural function and a meaning retrospectively as his purpose formed and clarified. In *The Divine Comedy,* in contrast, the world has a structure of its own, independent of any human will. There is only one valid perspective, and every experience is placed within it. But this order

and meaning are not fully possessed by the protagonist from the start. They are unfolded gradually through the encounters of his journey. And suppose Dante recognized that he was in hell only after he had caught a vision of paradise.

In these respects Pound intended that the *Cantos* would blend their two great prototypes. He was Odysseus, but he was voyaging in order to choose the purpose of his voyage. He was Dante in the dark wood, and he hoped that if he went through the chaos of experience and history, he would gradually see that it had a structure. In other words, Pound was in search of an order of values, and he was also exceptionally mindful of the difficulties of the search. Values are exhibited and must be judged in the concrete. But how much can we know about persons or events, not to mention such more nebulous entities as states of mind and civilizations? To the extent that we have information, how reliable is it? And then there are the truisms Pound tried to keep vividly in mind: any event is complex, its components multiple and their interrelations often contradictory; moreover, the event changes as we see it in different contexts and perspectives.

Nevertheless, if Pound did not possess a coherent vision of things, and so could not articulate one in his poem from the start, he had a faith. He thought that if he looked hard at a great many different persons, events, civilizations, and states of mind, and set each in numerous diverse contexts or perspectives, juxtaposing and so implicitly comparing each with others, gradually an order would emerge. It would be not an order he had imposed but an order inherent in things, which his method had compelled them to reveal. The classifications of biology into genera and species provided a metaphor. These groupings exist objectively in the materials, but are not known until the materials are collected, observed, and compared. His poem would enact the observing and comparing. At every point it would remain honest to the concrete complexity of things, the shifting perspectives from which they can be viewed, and the plurality and contradiction of values in the world. If eventually an order of values revealed itself, it would also interpret the earlier portions of the poem.

But though Pound believed that values were to be discovered and tested empirically, of course he began the poem with moral

and even with religious convictions. They were expressed from the start. They change somewhat in the course of the poem, but because of all Pound's experience, not merely because of the examination performed by the poem.

Should we then say that the *Cantos* lack a major form? Obviously they have no "plot" in the ordinary sense, and, except in episodes, generate no narrative interest. There is often a central sensibility, but except in the *Pisan Cantos* that sensibility is too little characterized to hold the poem together. There is much argument, but no logical progression to the whole. There is an order of values, but it does not give structure to the poem. In short, much that in other long poems sustains interest and relates episodes to one another and to the whole is absent from the *Cantos*.

Yet our experience as readers must be the test, and as I go through it, the poem does not seem, on the whole, to lack coherence and development. The sense of coherence is produced mainly by the incremental repetition. And though we are not at every moment aware of it, a "hierarchy of values" is establishing itself. As things and persons recur in different contexts, our judgment of them varies with the context. This holds true throughout the poem. There is never a final view. But amid the multiplicity of different experiences and perspectives, ideals are being ordered in relation to each other. Consider the condottiere Sigismundo Malatesta, whom we encounter in Cantos 8 to 11. He is phenomenally busy, a man of many projects who gets work done, and Pound identifies with him. Also, he embodies the Renaissance "mind" in one of its early expressions. Pound's characterization of him assembles "a great number of . . . violently contrasted facts," as Pound thought historical interpretation must do "if it is to be valid." Malatesta is individualistic, mercenary, violent, treacherous, brave, generous, vital, productive, and a patron and student of the arts and philosophy. And if amid these contrasts we ask what judgment we are to form of Malatesta, the Cantos about him do not tell us. We look at their context in the poem, but the immediate context opens contrasting perspectives. Compared to Baldy Bacon (Canto 12), a modern soldier of fortune interested only in money, Malatesta is admirable. So far as vitality and purpose are better than their opposites, he is also a positive figure when compared with the

living dead of Canto 7. But Confucius in Canto 13 measures him by a different scale.

> Kung walked
>   by the dynastic temple,

the Canto begins, and the rhythm has a serenity lacking in the Malatesta Cantos. As more Cantos accumulate, we see Thomas Jefferson, a ruler no less busy, vital, and many-sided than Malatesta, but less violent and more thoughtful. Pursuing useful inventions, improvements, trade, the regulation of the economy, he represents the "mind" of the Enlightenment, and we would rather be governed by Jefferson than by Malatesta. And in Canto 53 there is the Emperor Yao, "like sun and rain" to his people. And by the time we come to the *Pisan Cantos* and read, "To study with the white wings of time passing," and "in the light of light is the *virtù*," and "have I perchance a debt to a man named Clower," we are far in spiritual geography from Malatesta. We may look back on him as one of those "lost / Violent souls" of whom Eliot speaks in *The Hollow Men*.

THE *PISAN CANTOS*

The *Pisan Cantos* have a human interest beyond anything Pound had written hitherto. For "Pound" is the central character. We see his immediate circumstances in the concentration camp, with all their drama and pathos:

> The moon has a swollen cheek
> and when the morning sun lit up the shelves and battalions
> of the West, cloud over cloud
>   Old Ez folded his blankets
> Neither Eos nor Hesperus has suffered wrong at my hands.

His memories come back: the young sculptor, Gaudier-Brzeska, eyeing "the telluric mass of Miss Lowell"; "the noise in the chimney" that winter when he shared a cottage in Sussex with Yeats—

> as it were the wind in the chimney
>   but was in reality Uncle William
> downstairs composing.

He remembers the trees in Paris, seen from under the frame of a bridge arch:

> as it might be L'Ile St Louis for serenity, under Abélard's bridges
> for those trees are Elysium
>   for serenity
>   under Abélard's bridges.

And he remembers a time of despair in Venice in 1907, when he almost threw the manuscript of his first volume into the canal: "by the soap-smooth stone posts where San Vio / meets with il Canal Grande . . . shd/ I chuck the lot into the tide-water?" That moment comes to mind because his despair now reminds him of then, but he was "free then, therein the difference." Occasionally he judges his own character and life—

> Les larmes que j'ai crées m'inondent
> Tard, très tard je t'ai connue, la Tristesse,
> I have been hard as youth sixty years.

and he sifts his past and present for values that sustain. "Mihine eyes hev," he quotes the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," heard on the radio, and reflects,

>   well yes they *have*
> seen a good deal of it
>   there is a good deal to be seen
> fairly tough and unblastable.

The "glory" is always there, like the "green world" of vital nature, or like the crystal air.

Because he was writing with a personal and autobiographical dimension, Pound emphasized elements of style that would put even his most intensely personal feelings at a distance. Unlike many poets since who also worked with personal materials, he was not striving to enhance our impressions of intimacy and sincerity by diminishing our impression of artistry. On the contrary, his thoughts, memories, and immediate sufferings were to be placed in a context and handled in a way that would give them the hardness and objectivity of art. Irony is omnipresent, almost, and in inexhaustibly various forms. Pound mythologizes his experience. In one breathtaking transformation the four guard towers at the corners of the concentration camp become four giants, and the camp itself the legendary city of Wagadu, an

African folktale version of the ideal city of Pound's dream, "now in the mind indestructible." At many points in the poem Pound uses words, phrases, and lines in foreign languages. At times these are literary or other allusions, but often they are not. Pound had no one reason or justification for this technique, no motive or intention that explains all instances. Each bit of foreign speech must be studied in its context, and usually its appropriateness or enhanced effectiveness will be clear. (That such phrases arrest attention and cause us to reflect on them would of course be one reason for them.) Often in the *Pisan Cantos* Pound seems to have adopted the foreign phrasing as a means to emotional reticence or control. In Canto 76 Pound in his isolation speaks to the swallow, asking it to carry a message to the woman he loves:

> O white-chested martin, God damn it,
> as no one else will carry a message,
> say to La Cara: amo.

And in Canto 83, remembering Venice, he asks himself "Will I ever see the Giudecca?"

> or the boats moored off le Zattere
> or the north Quai of the Sensaria DAKRUON ΔΑΚΡΥΩΝ

the Greek spelling "weeping."

Each quotation in the *Pisan Cantos* works in particular ways in its own context, but generally they remind us that the poem is not to be read as the natural voice of "Pound." More exactly, they have this alienating effect, but we continually reinstate our sense of intimate connection with the speaker. As an external or objective element of "poetic tradition" in the style, quotation generalizes the utterance of "Pound," makes it less personal and more authoritative. But at the same time it serves as a means to Pound's self-expression, for it further defines his emotion through the associations it evokes.

Up to the *Pisan Cantos* Pound had either composed in the mode of impersonal construction by juxtaposition, which gradually he came to call the "ideogramic method," or alternatively he had created a persona as speaker or central consciousness. A passage could be read by both conventions at the same time. The

great advantage of impersonal construction was the freedom it afforded in the materials and styles that could be combined. When, for example, the persona is John Adams, the materials must be limited to those which could conceivably have existed within Adams' field of consciousness. And the diction, syntax, imagery, and rhythm—in short, the voice—must similarly restrict its range. (Though Adams' own sentences and phrases became remarkably condensed and elliptical in Pound's extracts.) Thus Adams can utter "Indian pudding and pork greens on the table," but imprisoned in Adams, Pound cannot combine this with Ling Kong's menu—"this prince liked eating bears' paws"—as was possible in an ideogram.

But a persona holds the poem together. Each detail refers to the central figure and characterizes him. In Canto 71, for example, Adams' thoughts move in four lines from Chief Little Turtle's horror of rum to Adams' own of the banking system. The aversions have an ideogramic connection, but if a reader did not follow this thread, each of the items separately and the leap from one to the other would still contribute to the portrait of Adams. Impersonal construction, on the other hand, can seem incoherent. When the thread is lost, the juxtapositions seem a jumble, and we have no way of relating to the poem.

Creating himself as the associating, self-expressing consciousness in the *Pisan Cantos,* Pound did not tie himself to any particular range of materials or style of expression. He illuminated by explosive juxtapositions, as in impersonal construction, but these now also registered complexities and rapid transformations of feeling in a person with whom we identify. That the thoughts and images are fragmentary, elliptical, and dissociated simply contributes in this case to the dramatic characterization. As in Eliot's *The Waste Land,* discontinuity presents a mind *in extremis.*

The *Pisan Cantos,* in other words, must be read both as ideogram and as interior monologue. Yet since this could also be said of some earlier Cantos, the *Pisan Cantos* are so much different not simply because they unite the two modes, but because in them the ideograms have an imaginative splendor, the characterization of the persona an emotional appeal beyond anything Pound elsewhere achieved. For example,

I don't know how humanity stands it
with a painted paradise at the end of it
without a painted paradise at the end of it
the dwarf morning-glory twines round the grass blade
magna NUX animae with Barabbas and 2 thieves beside me.

In the "death cells" awaiting execution, Pound thinks of man's illusory hope for an afterlife, the "paradise" so frequently "painted" for our consolation. Because it is artificial, we cannot bear it. Yet without it we cannot bear to confront death. His attention fixes on the dwarf morning-glory and then on the great night of the soul. In this moment of agony he identifies himself with Christ on the cross. The passage enacts a plunge of the mind facing death into despair and self-pity.

Yet when we view this passage as an ideogram, the morning-glory changes its value. It is not just a brief eddy in a stream of consciousness, but a stable and lasting component of a complex of meaning. The passage reflects on Christianity, and since "Possum" is mentioned two lines before, probably T. S. Eliot's Christianity was hovering before Pound. Possum had dwelt in his *Four Quartets* on the concept of the great night of the soul. Pound was always concerned to set Eliot right. In the interrelations of the ideogram the morning-glory exhibits the paradise that is not "painted," the real, always present, vital nature, as much in this one small, frail thing as anywhere. "Morning" and "glory" flood the line with light, contrasting with the NUX. The interrelations of the flower held on the grass blade with Christ on the cross defy description.

PARADISO

The old reverence before sacred nature is gone in the modern world. This fact connects, Pound believed, with the artistically unproductive, deeply unnatural character of modern life, and the *Cantos* facilitate comparison by placing their images or evocations of the ideal next to other images of venal art, sterile luxury, inert sloth, ruthless greed and swindles. All this is hell, and Cantos 14–16 express it as scenes in Dante's *Inferno*. But it is not just a spiritual state, it is the result of an economic system, and the relation between these two orders of reality is not always

clear in the *Cantos*. For on the one hand, the evil lies in the human will. The *Cantos* are the most intense indictment yet made, in the poetry of our century, of greed blighting human affection, coarsening intellect, depraving art, perverting government, kindling wars. But on the other hand, the evil lies in certain malfunctionings of the economic machine, and, in Pound's opinion, only a little expert tinkering is needed to adjust it and keep it working infallibly, a cornucopia steadily distributing.

Just before he was imprisoned in the Pisan concentration camp, Pound had started to prepare himself for writing the final part of his *Cantos*. He was going to write his *Paradiso*. The relation between his ideals of paradise and of communal order is tricky. Pound intensely hoped that the just state would someday become a reality. Passages in the *Cantos* that imagine this might be said to portray an earthly and possible paradise. Still, his *Paradiso* could not be merely a description of a future social order. For paradise must be now or nowhere. There is no afterlife, no future heaven. A future golden age of history was, in Pound's view, no glorious promise for those who would never see it. Our one existence is now, in this moment, for example, of dawn that Canto 47 pictures:

And the small stars now fall from the olive branch,
Forked shadow falls dark on the terrace
More black than the floating martin
that has no care for your presence,
His wing-print is black on the roof tiles
And the print is gone with his cry.
So light is thy weight on Tellus
Thy notch no deeper indented.

If there is any "paradise," or hope of it, for us now, it must be individual and mystical, the soul's vision of the divine or union with it. Pound believed, in his own way, in this. He had partly beheld the vision, or thought he had.

When asked his religion, Pound used to call himself a "pagan." I hesitate to attach a less interesting label, but his religion was a mode of pantheism. It was of course an intuition, not a logically consistent or theologized creed. He believed that man is a part of nature and that nature in its inmost being is divine. "'Consciousness of the unity with nature,'" Pound had written as far

back as 1931, "is at the root of any mystery." He found this intuition of "unity with nature" expressed in the paganism of Confucian China and of the ancient Mediterranean world.

He "believed" in the gods—gods, for belief in one God tends to divert the mind from this world to some other, purely imaginary one. And it seemed to Pound that monotheism has regularly been associated with religious and moral tyranny. "The glory of the polytheistic anschauung is that it never asserted a single and obligatory path for everyone." Another of its glories was that it did not "disdain" but instead "celebrated and exalted" the erotic. Pound felt that nature incarnates in the sexual as in every other of its manifestations a divine mystery. Hence when the *Cantos* present Dionysus, Demeter, Persephone, Aphrodite, Adonis, and the like, Pound is expressing both his nostalgia for an age or culture that sensed and revered the divine in nature and also his own reverence for all that these mythical figures invoked. Above all, he is saying that the gods are still present:

> Gods float in the azure air,
> Bright gods and Tuscan, back before dew was shed.
> Light: and the first light, before ever dew was fallen.
> Panisks, and from the oak, dryas,
> And from the apple, mælid,
> Through all the wood, and the leaves are full of voices,
> A-whisper.

And there is light. It was Dante's symbol of the divine, and Cavalcanti's; it went back to Plato, neo-Platonic philosophers, mystics, Schoolmen, Provençal poets, and Confucius—in Pound's version of Confucius. Light descends from heaven:

> Thus the light rains, thus pours, *e lo soleills plovil*
> The liquid and rushing crystal,

as Pound or his musing protagonist had summed up as long ago as 1919 in Canto 4, the phrase in Provençal ("and the sun rains") taken from Arnaut Daniel. Light is everywhere. "Overstanding the earth," light "fills the nine fields to heaven." It is a symbol of the intellect in its perfection. Studying the Chinese ideogram "hsien" ("to manifest," "to be illustrious"), as Hugh Kenner has explained, Pound thought he saw in it the signs for sun and silk, and imagined the sun's ray or beam as a strand of silk:

> Light tensile immaculata
> the sun's cord unspotted

(saying it in scholastic Latinity and in Chinese ideogram to invoke two different civilizations). Stretching between heaven and earth, hitting the mark, in other words, tense, precise, focused, clear, radiant, this sun silk or light or intelligence is the "paraclete that was present" in the good Chinese emperors. Drawing on neo-Platonic and medieval philosophers, Pound could say that the intellectual being or light of the divine dwells not just in the mind of man but in all things as their inmost principle or essence. In his brash, familiar way he cites Scotus Eriugena, a ninth-century philosopher from Ireland:

> "sunt lumina" said the Oirishman to King Carolus,
> "OMNIA,
> all things that are are lights."

And Pound identified this indwelling light with the "inborn nature" of which Confucius (in Pound's translation) speaks: "What heaven has disposed and sealed is called the inborn nature. The realization of this nature is called the process."

Light shining from everything, a moving energy within, without, over, on. You cannot help seeing it, as well as by means of it. At least, that is what the symbolism seems to imply, but hardly anyone using the symbolism has wished to suggest that we knowingly and feelingly behold the divine in every moment of our earthly lives. Neither did Pound. He thought, instead, of a light that is always there, but, somehow, not always seen. So also with his other main symbolism. "God floats in the azure air."

> And we have heard the fauns chiding Proteus
> in the smell of hay under the olive-trees,
> And the frogs singing against the fauns
> in the half light.
> And . . .

The last line ("And . . .") reminds us that in the unresting flow of temporal experience these moments are followed by other, quite different ones. The crescent moon is Artemis, but the moon comes and goes. The leaves of olive trees ripple in the wind, their white undersides glittering as they catch the light,

and Athena is there, Homer's "gleaming eyed" goddess. But suddenly the eyes are not there again, and "olivi" image

> That which gleams and then does not gleam
> as the leaf turns in the air.

Canto 81 implies that the eyes of the goddess are present in nature as

> sky's clear
> night's sea
> green of the mountain pool,

and adds that once, at least, "Pound" beheld the eyes directly, though even this moment was not one of full communion or knowing.

If the divine light is not beheld, the cause lies in the human psyche, which may not be prepared to receive it. Drawing mainly on his interpretation of Confucius, Pound urges that we must become like light to see it.

> The wind is part of the process
> The rain is part of the process,

and the end of the process or way is the inborn light, manifested as rectitude, candor, clarity. To the person who has gone or undergone the way of purification, the divine is present in the world. Nowhere do the *Cantos* put this more beautifully than in the penultimate Canto 83 of the Pisan suite, where the world appears as water, and light, and light on water.

The Cantos Pound wrote after Pisa are impersonal in presentation. "Pound" is not in them as a central figure except sporadically; the human and dramatic interest of the *Pisan Cantos* is gone. The presentation is more continuously elliptical and fragmentary than it was before the *Pisan Cantos,* and since we cannot now also understand it as somebody's interior monologue, we confront only ideograms. Chinese written characters make frequent components of the text. The subjects recapitulate previous ones. Usury is exposed, right principles of economics and government are inculcated. Cantos 90 and 91 again beautifully enact the ascent to paradise.

How good are the *Cantos* as a whole? Or since evaluation is

always personal, how much do I admire and enjoy them? Huge indictments can be brought against them. Pound's Fascist sympathies are and will remain troubling for as long as mankind remembers what Fascism was. His anti-Semitism is obvious and repulsive. Though there is much to be said for ideograms as a method of presentation, ideogramic thinking, as the poem exemplifies it, is undisciplined and self-indulgent. In many places there is a ludicrous disproportion between the importance of the ideas, in Pound's view, and his unclear, distracting articulation of them. We cannot argue that such intellectual and moral offenses are irrelevant to the poem, for they pervade the poem, influencing subject matter, intention, and form. And in long stretches the *Cantos* are boring.

Nevertheless I admire the *Cantos,* and not only for the lyric passages everyone responds to. Pound's sense of the importance of texture justifies itself, for, however maddeningly difficult the texture of the *Cantos* may be, it rewards by brilliant effects that could be obtained in no other way. And it stays fresh. Passages can be read over and over with pleasure, for they summon creativity and always disclose new interrelations and possibilities of meaning.

The poem is vigorous, bold, and packed with personality and diverse life. Though it differs enormously from *Don Juan,* in some essential virtues it has more in common with Byron's masterpiece than any other long poem of the twentieth century. The sweep of the poem in time and geographical space brings into it an extraordinary diversity of settings, manners, and ways of speaking. Throughout there is a sympathy with human nature, a cocking of an interested eye on the habits, oddities, ingenuities, virtues, costumes, speech—in short, on the characters and doings—of people. Even the villains are observed, often, with an ironic, humorous appreciation of their bustle, effrontery, and hoggishness. Always fascinated by technique, Pound could not help taking a certain pleasure in the ingenuity of their wangles.

In compressed imagination the poem is, at moments, more brilliant and moving than any other poem of the twentieth century. Pound's sensitivity to what in Byron's time (perhaps we should here think rather of Shelley) would have been called "beauty" and his power of rendering it exceed that of any other modern poet. In Canto IV, for example,

Smoke hangs on the stream,
The peach-trees shed bright leaves in the water,
Sound drifts in the evening haze . . .

In Canto 49, again evoking an evening river in China, Pound gives images of the "Sharp long spikes of the cinnamon," the "cold tune" of the water "amid reeds," and the boat that

fades in silver; slowly;
Sun blaze alone on the river.

Always attention is carried out and away from the self. An other is there, offering release. Especially in the *Pisan Cantos* this sense of an other is expressed in nature—ultimately it is more than nature—and nature is always present even to the prisoner in his "cage": "Came Eurus"—the southeast wind—"as comforter"; "Be welcome, O cricket my grillo, but you must not sing after taps";

and there was a smell of mint under the tent flaps
especially after the rain
and a white ox on the road toward Pisa.

Pound's habitual going out from himself finally expresses a religious faith. Late in the *Cantos* Pound speaks of himself in old age as "A blown husk that is finished." To this moving image he adds what will not be found in most other twentieth-century writers: "but the light sings eternal":

A blown husk that is finished
but the light sings eternal
a pale flare over marshes
where the salt hay whispers to tide's change.

The Rock-Drill section of the *Cantos* states as a doctrine that the essence of the soul is

Not love but that love flows from it
ex animo
& cannot ergo delight in itself.

Forty years earlier Pound's Imagist doctrine had repudiated self-expression and stressed the imperative of "presenting an image." The same underlying attitude has now developed into a moral and religious conviction. The final line of this passage falls

into Latin capitals for weight and emphasis as in an inscription: UBI AMOR IBI OCULUS EST.

Occasionally toward the end of his life Pound tried to judge his work as a whole. In these profound moments he speaks for mankind: A "man seeking good, / doing evil"; "Many errors, / a little rightness"; "a little light / In great darkness . . . a tangle of works unfinished . . . I cannot make it cohere." Yet in that typical transition which is his deepest truth he again goes out from his own being to the other. "Even if my notes do not cohere," it—the world—"coheres all right":

Do not move
Let the wind speak
that is paradise.