

## “Major Form” in Pound’s *Cantos*\*

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IN A RECENT REVIEW of three books on Ezra Pound, Christine Froula lists first among “the larger issues” which remain unsettled about Pound’s “epic” whether it has “‘major form,’ and if so, how to describe it.”<sup>1</sup> Speaking not of himself but of William Carlos Williams, Pound questioned the necessity of “major form” and pointed out several important works which in his opinion lacked it. Whether consciously or not, he describes very well the effect of the *Cantos*:

Art very possibly *ought* to be the supreme achievement, the “accomplished”; but there is the other satisfactory effect, that of a man hurling himself at an indomitable chaos, and yanking and hauling as much of it as possible into some sort of order (or beauty), aware of it both as chaos and as potential. . . . I would almost move . . . to the generalization that plot, major form, or outline should be left to authors who feel some inner need for the same; even let us say a very strong, unusual, unescapable need for these things; and to books where the said form, plot, etc., springs naturally from the matter treated.<sup>2</sup>

In the older epic, form was dependent on plot; something happened to the protagonist which made his situation or his mental state (or both) at the end of the poem different from what it had been at the beginning. But the *Cantos* is not an epic in this sense, even if one regards the protagonist as Pound himself. The speaker is different at the end, but not as a result of a well-plotted causal sequence. Rather there is a sudden change in the “Pisan Cantos” (a new pity, with awareness of ordinary man, and a turning from outer social aims to increased emphasis on mental states); there is another sudden change in the last “Drafts and Fragments” (doubt and a feeling of failure). If an epic is a poem directly or indirectly in the tradition of Homer, the *Cantos* is not an epic in spite of the fact that it has heroes, voyages, wars, loves, gods, and a descent into Hell. It tells many stories, but has no story. Pound’s own definition, “An epic is a poem including

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history,”<sup>3</sup> is not much help either. “There is no mystery about the Cantos, they are the tale of the tribe.”<sup>4</sup> But if so, it is in the sense that they are a tale *about* the tribe, not *by* the tribe. The values Pound tirelessly urges have not been those of any large group in any period, most of them not even in Mussolini’s Italy. He does not express a world view accepted by society, or by an influential part of society, like *The Aeneid* and *Beowulf* and *The Song of Roland*.

Like the *Divine Comedy*, his is a poem about ethical, social, and religious values, and Pound most often cited Dante as his predecessor. Just before the Second World War he described his intended poem as one “which begins ‘In the Dark Forest’ crosses the Purgatory of human error, and ends in the light.”<sup>5</sup> He told Louis Dudek that the parallel with Dante was “possibly a *general* line from dark to light *very general*.”<sup>6</sup> One can easily find passages in the *Cantos* of light and dark, of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. The trouble, if one is looking for “major form,” is that they are not arranged in sequence. We would equate Dante’s *Inferno* with Pound’s denunciations of the modern world, especially of the financiers, *Purgatorio* with the struggle for good government and economic justice, and *Paradiso* with visions of love, nature, and the gods. If this is correct, there are Paradises in Canto II and Canto XVII and touches of Hell in Cantos CV, CXI, and CXV; among the most clearly Purgatorial cantos are the last three in “Thrones.” Canto CIV begins with a touch of Paradise followed by a touch of Hell. Perhaps Pound was thinking of this when he wrote to Denis Goacher, “Dante had a MAP/But his matter is NOT zoned by that map it is heteroclitite in different parts/matter of degree all the dark not in hell, or all the brightness in Paradise.”<sup>7</sup> Dante does remember the sins of the earth in Paradise, even in the primum mobile. Nevertheless, his cosmos is much more clearly zoned than Pound’s, and he is constantly moving in a definite direction, down and then up. There is no way of telling which direction Pound is moving in until he moves.

It may help reconcile those who approach literature through concepts of genres to regard the *Cantos* not as an epic but as a Menippean satire, as suggested by Max Nänny.<sup>8</sup> Nänny points out many similarities between Pound’s poem and the long Menippean tradition, which sets up no expectation of “major form.” But though such a classification gets out of the difficulty caused by the label “epic,” it simply says that structure is unnecessary. Structure is usually taken to imply a shape something like that of

the five-act tragedy, with rising action, climax, and falling action, or at least a recognizable progression from one state to another. Hugh Kenner, whose *Poetry of Ezra Pound* did more than any other book to teach us how to read Pound, denies the poem unity in the usual sense. He stresses the mesh of interlocking references (“weighing of passage against passage”) as the “poem’s modus of structural unity” and finds that the *Cantos* can be organized around many different schemes.<sup>9</sup> This again denies the necessity of structure in the usual sense. The efforts of Daniel D. Pearlman to find a structure based on changing definitions of Time and of Forrest Read to find one based on numerology and patriotic symbols have not been convincing.<sup>10</sup>

Speaking of his earliest thoughts on his long poem, Pound said, “The problem was to get a form—something elastic enough to take the necessary material. It had to be a form that wouldn’t exclude something merely because it didn’t fit.”<sup>11</sup> Inclusiveness is a basic aim of the *Cantos*, which is one reason contrast is such a frequent technique, contrast in point of view, style, tone, and subject matter. On page 258, contrasted with usury and evidently locating two frescoes by Simone Martini, is the phrase, “Between KUNG and ELEUSIS.”<sup>12</sup> The first is Confucius, the most socially oriented of philosophers. The second is the Eleusinian Mysteries, where there were revelations of the dead, of sex, and of the gods. On page 272 “Kung” is the doctrine of Confucius which can be taught and Eleusis is “not taught,” but revealed “to catechumen alone.” “Kung and Mencius do not satisfy *all* the real belief of Europe,” Pound wrote. “But all valid Christian ethics is in accord with them. In fact, only Kung can guide a man, so far as I know, through the jungle of propaganda and fads that has overgrown Xtn theology. The mysteries are *not* revealed, and no guide book to them has been or will be written.”<sup>13</sup> Those cantos which are not Hell can be divided into Kung cantos (history, economics, law—the reform of society) and Eleusis cantos (vision, religion). The former are generally longer; the latter (often called “lyric”) are more like what we are taught to expect from poetry and have been more popular. Confucius is not in conflict with religion: “Whoever has called Confucius an atheist is an idiot. He respected the decree of heaven.”<sup>14</sup> Beside a statement in Robert Morrison’s *Dictionary of the Chinese Language* about “the godless character of the Confucian Ethics” Pound wrote “Bunk.”<sup>15</sup> But Confucius did not speak of the gods; the mysteries had no social purpose. To Pound,

both were necessary. Personal ecstasy should not neglect society; social improvement needs to keep in mind the goal of ecstasy.

Mixture of the two kinds is a regular structural feature. Except in the Chinese and Adams cantos and in the Pisan sequence, there is alternation of cantos of the Kung type and cantos of the Eleusis type, and within cantos generally of one type there are frequent reminders of the other – for example, the brief lyrics which are a regular feature of the economic cantos (XLII–LII). Between references to Eliot’s concept of hell and a scene with Douglas in the office of the *New Age* appears:

That day there was cloud over Zoagli  
And for three days snow cloud over the sea  
Banked like a line of mountains.  
Snow fell. Or rain fell stolid, a wall of lines  
So that you could see where the air stopped open  
and where the rain fell beside it  
Or the snow fell beside it.

(46/231)

Between Celso Cittatini’s scheme for increasing the amount of wheat and a meeting of the Sienese Balía:

Grass nowhere out of place.

Pine cuts the sky into three

(43/219)

In the middle of legal documents about the Monte dei Paschi:

wave falls and the hand falls  
Thou shalt not always walk in the sun  
or see weed sprout over cornice  
Thy work in set space of years, not over an hundred.

(42/210)

Between economic decrees of Mantua and of Venice, Lucrezia Borgia arrives in Ferrara, introduced by:

When the stars fall from the olive  
Or with four points or with five

(35/175)

The “lyrics,” like the factual cantos, depend heavily on concrete detail. They are lyrics more in the original sense, songs, than in the Romantic sense, outpourings of personal emotion. “Our time has overshadowed the mysteries by an overemphasis on the individual. . . . Eleusis did not distort truth by exaggerating the individual, neither could it have violated the individual spirit.”<sup>16</sup> There is a strikingly impersonal tone in most of the lyrics—they are about Pound’s *visions*, not *Pound’s* visions. We could use more subtle distinctions in speaking of the sense in which a poet speaks in his own person. Even when he does, it is a selected part of himself that speaks. “While ‘Homage to S. Propertius,’ Seafarer, Exile’s Letter, and Mauberley are all ‘me’ in one sense; my personality is certainly a great slag heap of stuff which has to be excluded from each of this [sic] crystallizations. And an expression of the ‘personality’ wd. be a slag heap and not art.”<sup>17</sup> “I’m no more Mauberley than Eliot is Prufrock.”<sup>18</sup> Probably—but in neither case does that mean not at all. There can be senses in which such personae as Artemis and Apollonius of Tyana “are” Pound and other senses in which “ego scriptor cantilenae” and the prisoner at Pisa are Pound. It is hard to find a rule that applies to all of the cantos, and it seems needlessly pedantic to speak of the “Pound persona” in the “Pisan Cantos.” This persona was not the complete Pound, obviously, but he was doing and thinking the things Pound was then doing and thinking, and he is not distanced like, for instance, the observer in Canto XVII. The same thing can be said of the “persona” in the last “Drafts and Fragments”; if he is not Pound, he is so much like him that the difference hardly matters. George Dekker, who prefers the lyric cantos, says that they disrupt the unity of the poem because they are “different in kind.”<sup>19</sup> But only a narrow conception of unity will be destroyed by the difference. Pound was forging (to take only a few subjects of Cantos XLII–LI) a Siense bank, the results of the depression, a voyage to Hell, the sexual act, and the gods into aspects of one complex world—as they are.

Some cantos have a unity within the canto, but one cannot assume a priori that all of them do. Passages may be cross references, or designed to serve the unity of the poem and not of the canto: “Most Cantos have in them

'binding matter,' i.e. lines holding them into the whole poem."<sup>20</sup> Or the unity may be based on contrast. Or Pound may simply allow himself a digression—at least one should not decide without looking at the individual case that he does not. We do not see that the memories of Gibraltar on pages 103–05 fit into the first seventy-one cantos, though (perhaps by serendipity) they prepare the way for two themes of the “Pisan Cantos,” the recovery of Pound’s past and the reconsideration of the Jews. John Adams’ encounter with the old woman on page 360 is a digression from the political concerns of the Adams cantos. Kang Hi’s hunting and his horse (pp. 328–29), so far as we can tell, are only colorful details, but perhaps someone can find their relevance or the relevance of Basil Bunting’s projected translation of Firdausi on page 474. One cannot decide until one is in a position to decide “digression” from *what*, that is what the canto is mainly dealing with. Achilles Fang has made an unhappy choice in citing the second part of Canto XXXIII as an example of miscellaneous scraps: “it would be rather a waste of time to reconstruct the coherence Pound had in mind when he put them together.”<sup>21</sup> Fang had not discovered the other sources besides Jefferson, which turn out to form an unusually neat pattern: the thoughts of the American founding fathers, Karl Marx’s justified criticism of contemporary society, the unhappy results of Marxism in Stalin’s Russia, and the degeneration of America in an era of big business and corrupt politicians.<sup>22</sup> All of the sources concern finance and social injustice, and all but the last concern revolution. It is worth looking for such patterns, but it is dangerous to count on them unless one wants to risk imposing one’s ideas of what the poem should be rather than observing what it is.

The opening of Canto LXXIV, the first of the “Pisan Cantos,” can be taken as a model of Pound’s method. It begins with a vivid picture of Pound’s view of the end of Mussolini and of the war, the destruction of civilization as he saw it. This theme continues throughout the sequence and is immediately underlined by a reference to the ideal city of Diocet. Pound himself appears as *Ou Tis, No One*, another theme often repeated. The references at the bottom of page 425 to *romanesque* and *quattrocento* art (Pound’s two favorite periods) are not hard to connect with the fall of civilization; they also introduce one of Pound’s favorite values, the importance of good craftsmanship. The connections between these brief references are left for the reader to discover.

At the top of the next page, reference to the paper money of the T'ang and to the suffering caused in India by the gold standard introduce economics, the cause of the war in Pound's view, with the misery of the Indian peasants returning us to the first line of the canto. The reference to the Roman missal not only implies the laziness of the clergy (Pound has suppressed the fact that the unnecessary labor applies only to Sunday) but plays also upon the idea of rest ("don't work so hard," he says later, p. 531), appropriate to Pound's recognition that his work for social justice has been useless. His weariness is underlined by the sapphire bed that brings sleep (a repeated reference), and Canto LXXXIII ends on a note of weariness: "Let an old man rest." The Wanjina myth, furthermore, reminds us that there can be too many words; like Wanjina's, Pound's mouth has been taken away. It also alludes to colonialism, a related cause of the war. The sacred mountains near Pisa and on Lake Garda reveal a sphere above the misery of the camp, with Lake Garda suggesting "woman," an element never long absent from Pound's poem. The people of the prison camp return us to actuality, as they do throughout the sequence.

References to Pound's walking tours of southern France introduce another main element of the sequence, Pound's recovery of his personal past, especially of the things he has loved. The lizard that upheld him is the first of many references to the consolation found in the small segments of nature he could observe in the camp. Kuanon signifies pity, illustrated by the digging of the ditch around his tent and later by the gift of a table from one of the guards. An ideal world is brought in by Erigena's assurance that we are all lights, by the Chinese sage kings, and by the Noh play *Hagoromo*. Pound repeats the economics theme with the references to the loans made to build the Athenian fleet, in Lenin's criticism of capitalism, and in quotations on economic justice from the Old Testament (a reconsideration of the Jewish tradition Pound had so often denounced). The ordinary man (the peasant of the opening of the canto and the prisoners at Pisa) reappears in the hanging of Till and in "tovarisch," an echo of page 131. Three hundred pages later (p. 431), Pound discovers he has been a hard man. Craftsmanship reappears in an echo of the stone carving of page 238 and in the Benin mask of Edwards' face, and the fall of the city in the story of the lute of Gassir with the destruction and rebirth of the African city of Wagadu. Here there is development, not merely repetition, since the city destroyed

in the outside world is indestructible in the mind and can be renewed like the lark arising. Woman and love make further appearances in the beautiful women in Hades and in the statue of the goddess at Terracina. The recovery of the personal past and of what Pound has loved reappears in the lordly men he knew in his youth, now dead. Also dead are the old aristocracy and the restaurants Pound has known, the latter tying the personal past with the destruction of civilization and the importance of the physical. Pound stresses polytheism in the reminder of “temples/plural” and in Micah’s “Each in the name of his God.”

It would take much too long to explicate this canto fully. We have merely been trying to show how apparently disconnected references, by repetition, do form patterns (plural) which can possibly be formed into a single pattern of the things Pound was conscious of at a given time. There is some movement, towards more internalized values; there is some hope of a better future, which is never strongly affirmed or durable; there are reminders of an ideal world which makes present suffering unimportant. But the suffering recurs throughout the sequence. The canto ends with stress again on the ability of the mind (the creative imagination) to find patterns. We can take the last line (“passed over Lethe”) as an indication that Purgatory is about to be left for Paradise, since Dante crosses Lethe on the top of the mountain of Purgatory and soon (not immediately) ascends to Paradise. In Dante, Lethe does not cause complete forgetfulness but only forgetfulness of evil deeds,<sup>23</sup> and there is a movement in the “Pisan Cantos” towards recreating the past by stressing its valuable moments. But in later cantos the negative aspects of Canto LXXIV reappear over and over; no lasting Paradise, even in the mind, is attained. The dark night of the soul occurs in this canto (pp. 436 and 438), but it is in Canto LXXVI that we are reminded that Hell is as real as Heaven (p. 460). The most important new themes introduced in the later Pisan cantos are Dionysus and the ecstasy he brings and the visions of women which appear in Pound’s tent (and then vanish). But they do not replace the themes of economic injustice, fallen civilization, and present misery, which are the subjects of the last two pages of Canto LXXXIV. In other words, though there is movement in the canto and in the sequence—more, we think, than in any other part of the poem—the main method is elaboration and further illustration. At the end, the speaker has learned something, but his



world is unchanged, and whatever complex unity we find resides mostly in the juxtaposition of various themes.

It will be noted (and deplored by some theorists) that we have been talking mainly of subject matter (or themes). Most of Pound's remarks on the *Cantos* after he began to write them stress the importance of content. He often praised the valuable advice of Hardy that "Homage to Sextus Propertius" should have been called "S. P. Soliloquizes"; with his usual ability to recreate the words of others, he read Hardy as poking "the weak spot in most writing of the last 30 years. = what a dam'd lot of aesthetes we are. = One *almost* comes to believe that the artist ought to be too damn-bloody stupid to be able to perceive anything but his subject." The remark taught him to see the difference between a great writer and a hanger-on: Hardy looked at "WHAT," the poetaster worries about "HOW."<sup>24</sup> Pound often spoke as if his work reflected a "real" world of which he merely reported the "facts." Some critics deny that there is any reflection of a world outside the poem and are interested in purely formal structures. Such an interest is of course legitimate, even though we are sure that Pound would disapprove of it. Like almost all earlier writers, he thought that the words of a poem can and should refer to (not of course reproduce) a world outside the poem. But where is that world? In "reality" (wherever that is)? In "objective" facts? In the mind of the poet? Or in objective facts as reflected in the mind of the poet? There is more than a verbal distinction here. Few people of any sophistication now seem to think they can capture the *Welt an sich*, but this does not necessarily mean that we are condemned to live in a world (like language, mathematics, or a philosophical system) which can be consistent because it is a human construct describing only itself. Pound, like earlier metaphysicians and like all non-metaphysicians, was trying to discover or impose a meaning by putting his observations together into a pattern. Like anyone who tries to do so, he fell short of Truth—which does not prove that he did not discover truths. If the "reality" of the *Cantos* is Pound's *view* of a reality outside the poem, then we escape the dichotomy of reproduction of reality on the one hand and verbal structures on the other. Pound's view of "reality" depends on a world outside the poem but is not bound by it; like all of us, he saw something "out there" which stimulated something inside.

A musical term used by Pound himself to describe the *Cantos* is "fugue."

From his remarks, we judge that this term applies to subjects rather than sounds; if so, it is not open to the usual objection to the use of “counterpoint” in literature, that it is impossible to “play” two sentences at the same time. Writing to his father in 1927, Pound called his “main scheme” “Rather like, or unlike subject and response and counter subject in fugue.” He cited as his example the first two cantos: “Live man goes down into the world of Dead,” “The ‘repeat in history’” (evidently the response), and “The ‘magic moment’ or moment of metamorphosis” (the counter subject).<sup>25</sup> “Take a fugue: theme, response, contrasujet. *Not* that I mean to make an exact analogy of structure.”<sup>26</sup> Yeats early reported that Pound’s poem “will, when the hundredth canto is finished, display a structure like that of a Bach Fugue. There will be no plot, no chronicle of events, no logic of discourse, but two themes, the Descent into Hades from Homer, a Metamorphosis from Ovid, and, mixed with these, medieval and modern historical characters.”<sup>27</sup> Pound must have told Yeats about the same thing he told his father. Pound expressed irritation with Yeats’ remark: Yeats did not know what a fugue is and could not “have known what the hell I was talking about.”<sup>28</sup> The fugue as Pound describes it has contrast as a main element: “Only a musical form would take the material, and the Confucian universe as I see it is a universe of interacting strains and tensions”<sup>29</sup> — subject and counter subject compared to yin and yang.<sup>30</sup>

“Cantos won’t be finished until my demise,” Pound wrote to Norman Holmes Pearson; “shd/always reserve possibility of death-bed swan.”<sup>31</sup> He seems to have had no fixed idea of how long his poem was to be; most often he mentioned a hundred cantos (the number in the *Divine Comedy*), but he did not stop there. As early as 1922 he spoke of “100 or 120,”<sup>32</sup> and he seemed always unable to imagine a paradise or round off a philosophy that would provide an end. After his revision of the three cantos published in *Poetry*, his method did not change; only Canto VI was rewritten, though the first section was still called “A Draft of XXX Cantos.” But his subject matter and tone changed in response to changing interests. In Cantos XXXI–LI Provence, the Renaissance, and Art are largely replaced by a less glamorous history and by economics. His imprisonment near Pisa introduced new themes (especially memory of his early life) and increased emphasis on an old one, the city fallen and reborn; it also introduced a new persona, the poet who lives and feels, not merely “ego scrip-

tor cantilenaë” (pp. 350, 360) who judges. At St. Elizabeths his poem continued to reflect his biography and more obviously the new books he found. “Drafts and Fragments” again has a very personal speaker, meditating on his poem and on his life.

When Pound spoke of the divisions of the *Cantos*, he spoke of a tripartite structure, most often of Dante’s. Another model was the frescoes in the Schifanoia Palace in Ferrara, also tripartite: contemporary scenes from everyday life on the bottom, then the Zodiak, and above, Petrarch’s Triumphs. If Yeats got the parallel correctly, the bottom frescoes are events that do not recur, the signs of the Zodiak are fixed elements like descent into the underworld and metamorphosis, and at the top are “archetypal persons.”<sup>33</sup> “Best div. prob. the permanent, the recurrent, the casual.”<sup>34</sup> Above a plan of the frescoes sent to James Laughlin, Pound calls the planes “Dominated by the Emotions,” “Constructive Efforts—Chinese Emperors and Adams—Putting order into things” and “The domination of Benevolence. Theme in 90” (the Richard of St. Victor canto).<sup>35</sup> The same division was applied to the Dantean scheme.<sup>36</sup> A slight variation, “people dominated by emotion, people struggling upwards, and those who have some part of the divine vision,” was also applied to it. “The thrones in Dante’s *Paradiso*,” he told Donald Hall, “are for the spirits of the people who have been responsible for good government. The thrones in the *Cantos* are an attempt to move out from egoism and to establish some definition of an order possible or at any rate conceivable on earth. . . . *Thrones* concerns the states of mind of people responsible for something more than their personal conduct.”<sup>37</sup> “Thrones” does include people looking for order and good government—Justinian, Leo VI, K’ang Hsi, Hohenlohe, Talleyrand, Thiers, Buchanan, Anselm, and especially Coke. But such people have been as prominent and at least as just in earlier cantos—Jefferson, Adams, Van Buren, the good Chinese emperors, Randolph of Roanoke, Benton. Actually in Dante the Thrones (the third highest order of angels) correspond not to the heaven of Jupiter (Justice) but to the higher heaven of Saturn (Contemplation)—their delight is seeing deeply into the truth “in which every intellect is quieted.”<sup>38</sup> The good governors would seem to belong rather with Purgatory; Richard of St. Victor does belong with the contemplatives.

Except for his hesitation between Justice and Contemplation as the highest value, the schemes are similar, and each of them needs to end with

a Paradise, a triumphal conclusion to the poem. Pound saw the problem: “It is difficult to write a paradiso when all the superficial indications are that you ought to write an apocalypse.” And he added. “Okay, I am stuck. . . . I must find a verbal formula to combat the rise of brutality—the principle of order versus the split atom.”<sup>39</sup> Even aside from the world situation following the Second World War, writing a Paradise has never been easy.

And Pound’s Paradise was both internal and transient. “What is a god? A god is an eternal state of mind.”<sup>40</sup>

Le Paradis n’est pas artificiel  
but spezzato apparently  
it exists only in fragments unexpected excellent sausage,  
the smell of mint, for example,  
Ladro the night cat;

(74/438)

Le Paradis n’est pas artificiel  
States of mind are inexplicable to us.

(76/460)

After finishing the Adams cantos, he had written, “From 72 on we enter the empyrean, philosophy/Geo/Santayana etc.”<sup>41</sup> Perhaps war and imprisonment kept him from entering it, but we doubt it—it has not been entered (convincingly) in a long poem for well over six centuries. And Pound was not one to *pretend* he was in it. In 1953 he was still promising Guy Davenport “a *Paradiso* . . . moving toward final coherence.”<sup>42</sup> We cannot feel much sympathy with those, however justly irritated by Pound’s political views or his Modernist methods, who have gloated over his confession in the last “Drafts and Fragments” that he has not made it cohere. Who has? Who that tried to take in as much as Pound did? *Does* it in fact cohere? The confession of failure itself shows a high standard of coherence, and of truth.

Pound’s Paradise might have come in at least three ways. He might have accepted a religion or a philosophy that assured a happy end. But he was little interested in abstract philosophy. He used philosophers like Erigena and Plotinus to extract tags which fitted his own ideas, not to explore their systems. If he had an epistemology, it was that of the common man,

empiricism — we learn from our senses. He was hostile to the Christian religion and to otherworldly religions in general; and his age offered him no generally accepted belief. “Obviously you haven’t got a nice little road map such as the middle ages possessed of Heaven.”<sup>43</sup> He might have imagined a terrestrial paradise in the future. He had once hoped for a more just state in Mussolini’s Italy, but it was, even in his mind, never really Paradise, and it had fallen. Or he might have found a Paradise in his mind. The general pattern of the “Pisan Cantos” is away from external events towards his own states of mind; but many of the post-Pisan cantos deal again with external events. He was probably too much devoted to social issues to be altogether satisfied with this solution; but more serious is the fact that as an honest observer and reporter (and he was a better reporter of mental than of political events) he could hardly impose a fleeting state of mind as a permanent solution. Without such a solution there is no satisfactory ending and therefore no rounded structure.

Wordsworth had found a climax for his poem about the poet’s mind, the creative imagination discovered on the ascent of Mount Snowden. Pound’s relationship with the world around him illustrates the creative imagination, but he has little to say about it. Very early in his career he would probably have regarded a discovery about Art as a fitting climax, but not in the 1950s. And he had discovered his gods too soon — already in Canto II, and several times thereafter; they came, and they went. He could report them, but not take them anywhere.

It is usually felt that a poem should go somewhere, even if its structure is circular and it returns to its starting point. We cannot see that the *Cantos* goes anywhere. It changes as Pound’s interests change, but there is little horizontal development. Its unity is more vertical — one can cut through it at many points and find several of Pound’s interests and values on one page. In this sense it is static. It changes, but does not progress, except to give us different perspectives on old scenes.

Those who demand structure in the usual sense will be disappointed. Others may think that a world view based on contrast (the poet’s view of events observed both outside and inside his mind) rather than on movement towards a climax is enough. If a poet’s world view can be regarded as enough unity, it is not hard to summarize the *Cantos* in a way that will account for every canto (but not in order) and almost every passage (except colorful details to flesh out events and characters). At the bottom, ruling

the world, is self-interest, usually equated with avarice. It is unnatural, and a life following the natural cycles is one way to combat it. Another (especially in the earlier cantos) is Art. Sex is another. Both lead to temporary revelations. During most of the poem the main weapon is a search for a just political and economic system, based closely on ethics, which also proves temporary. Law at least mitigates the evil. On another level, there are unpredictable glimpses of the various gods, seen in the mind and in nature, which encourage us to keep searching, and provide consolation—again temporary. Our glimpses of them are metamorphoses. Overall, the search is a voyage towards Light. It demands a sense of the past, a questioning of the dead, and an awareness of repeated patterns.

## NOTES

1. Christine Froula, rev. of *The Poetic Achievement of Ezra Pound* by Michael Alexander, *Ezra Pound and The Cantos: A Record of Struggle* by Wendy Stallard Flory, and *The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra Pound and the Modern Verse Epic* by Michael André Bernstein, *Modern Philology*, 80 (1982), 103.
2. *Literary Essays*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), pp. 394–98.
3. Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays*, p. 86; *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 46.
4. Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 194.
5. *Selected Prose*, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 167.
6. *Dk/Some Letters of Ezra Pound*, ed. Louis Dudek (Montreal: D C Books, 1974), p. 13.
7. Loose sheet in the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. We want to thank the authorities of the Humanities Research Center for permission to quote from this and the MS letter to Ingrid Davies (see note 36). We also want to thank the Trustees of the Ezra Pound Literary Property Trust for permission to quote from these and other manuscripts in this article.
8. “Ezra Pound and the Menippean Tradition,” *Paideuma*, 11 (1982), pp. 395–405.
9. *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (1951; rpt. Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus Reprint, 1974).
10. *The Barb of Time: On the Unity of Ezra Pound's Cantos* (New York: Oxford, 1969); *'76: One World and The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1981).
11. Donald Hall, “The Art of Poetry V: Ezra Pound: An Interview,” *Paris Review*, 28 (Summer-Fall, 1962), p. 23.
12. All quotations from the *Cantos* are from the edition published by New Directions, New York, 1972, to which we are indebted for permission to quote from the *Cantos* (copyright 1969, 1972 by the Estate of Ezra Pound).

13. *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: New Directions, 1971), p. 327.
14. Pound, "Pace decisiva," *Meridiano di Roma*, 15 March 1942, p. 1.
15. *Dictionary of the Chinese Language* (Macao, 1815–1822), I, p. 705. Pound's copy of Morrison's *Dictionary* is in the Library of Hamilton College. We want to thank the Library for permission to quote from Pound's marginalia.
16. *Guide to Kulchur*, p. 299.
17. *Pound/Ford: The Story of a Literary Friendship*, ed. Brita Lindberg-Seyersted (New York: New Directions, 1982), p. 42.
18. *Selected Letters*, p. 180.
19. *Sailing After Knowledge: The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 139–40.
20. Pound to John Drummond, 5 Dec. 1932 (Paige Transcript 1063), in the Center for the Study of Ezra Pound and His Contemporaries, Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. We want to thank the authorities of the Beinecke for permission to quote from this and other unpublished material in its possession.
21. "Materials for the Study of Pound's Cantos," Diss. Harvard 1958, p. I–51.
22. Most of the sources have since been discovered by James P. Shannon and William M. Chace. See Shannon's notes on Canto XXXIII in the TS notes by students of Norman Holmes Pearson in the Beinecke and Chace, "The Canto as Cento: A Reading of Canto XXXIII," *Paideuma*, I (1972), pp. 89–100.
23. *Purgatorio* xxviii.127–29.
24. *Pound/Ford*, p. 55; Pound to Francis F. Mineka, 3 March 1939 (MS in the Cornell University Library.) We want to thank the authorities of the Cornell University Library for permission to quote from this manuscript. See also Ben D. Kimpel and T. C. Duncan Eaves, "Pound's Research for the Malatesta Cantos," *Paideuma*, 11 (1982), pp. 418–19.
25. *Selected Letters*, p. 210.
26. *Selected Letters*, p. 294.
27. *A Vision* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 4.
28. D. G. Bridson, "An Interview with Ezra Pound," *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*, No. 17 (1961), p. 172.
29. Hall, p. 23.
30. In "Fuge and Canto LXIII," *Paideuma*, 11 (1982), 15–38, Kay Davis has given a very good detailed analysis of Canto LXIII as a fugue in Pound's sense.
31. Letter dated 5 Dec. 1958 (MS in the Beinecke).
32. *Selected Letters*, p. 180.
33. Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 5; Bridson, p. 172.
34. *Selected Letters*, , p. 239.
35. Letter to James Laughlin dated 14 Nov. 1955 (MS in the possession of Mr. Laughlin). We want to thank Mr. Laughlin for permission to quote from this and the manuscript cited in note 41.

36. Letter to Ingrid Davies, 31 March 1955 (MS in the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin).
37. Hall, p. 49; see also Pound's letter to Charleen Swansea, n.d. (MS in the South, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).
38. *Paradiso* xxviii.103–09, ix.61–63.
39. Hall, p. 47.
40. Pound, *Pavannes and Divisions* (New York; Alfred A. Knopf, 1918), p. 43; see also pp. 143–44.
41. Letter to James Laughlin, 5 Feb. 1940 (MS in the possession of Mr. Laughlin); Noel Stock, ed. "Letters of Ezra Pound," *X: A Quarterly Review*, I (1960), p. 265.
42. Davenport, "Pound and Frobenius," *Motive and Method in The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, ed. Lewis Leary (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1954), p. 52. On 27 April 1958, the month he was released from St. Elizabeths, Pound wrote to J. Stummvoll, "I have arrived at the paradisiacal segment of my Cantos" (*Letters 1907–1958*, ed. Aldo Tagliaferri [Milano: Feltrinelli, 1980], p. 171). After that he wrote only a few drafts.
43. Hall, p. 23; see also *Selected Letters*, p. 323.