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Structural principles in the cantos of Ezra Pound

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STRUCTURAL PRINCIPLES IN THE CANTOS OF EZRA POUND

by

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is a search for some element which functions or was meant to function as a unifying principle in The Cantos of Ezra Pound. It is obvious that The Cantos contain a tremendous variety of forms and an even more varied mass of subject matter. The problem to be examined is does some unifying principle exist in The Cantos? If it does is it a thread of narrative or plot, a logical or psychological progression from topic to topic, or a form or mould cast over all the material in an attempt to achieve a coherent whole? In other words, has Pound attempted a unified work or only a rambling, disjointed thing?

One of the first critics to attempt to answer these questions was R. P. Blackmur in an essay dated 1933, the year in which "A Draft of XXX Cantos" was first published. Blackmur had long been interested in The Cantos and had written to Pound asking about them as early as 1924[1], a year before the first sixteen cantos were published in Paris by the Three Mountains Press. Pound replied to a second letter from Blackmur in 1952:

> Dear Mr. Blackmur: Stray bits of curiosity
> re unfinished work have no general utility.
> Or at least very slight utility.[2]

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1. D. D. Paige (ed.), The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941 (New York, 1950), p. 189.

2. Ibid., p. 198.

Thus Blackmur's answers to the questions posed by this paper were based on the first thirty cantos alone, and on the assumption that these cantos are typical of the entire poem.[3]

Blackmur finds an attempt to draw these cantos together by way of a kind of planned fragmentation:

> This deliberate disconnectedness, this art of a thing continually alluding to itself, continually breaking off short, is the method by which the Cantos tie themselves together.[4]

Blackmur judges The Cantos to be "a ragbag of what Mr. Pound thinks is intelligent conversation about literature and history."[5] He can find no theme, no logical or emotional development in the poem.[6] The material is connected only because Pound has put it in the same poem just as the rags in a ragbag are connected only because someone has stuffed them into the same bag.

Three years after Blackmur's study of Pound, Alan Tate published the second, important, early critical work on The Cantos. Although "Eleven New Cantos, XXXI - XLI" had been published in 1934, he, too, confines his study to the first thirty cantos and reached conclusions very similar to Blackmur's. Tate describes The Cantos as "rambling talk."[7]

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3. R. P. Blackmur, "Masks of Ezra Pound" (1933), Language As Gesture (New York, 1952), p. 139.

4. Ibid., p. 140.

5. Ibid., p. 137.

6. Ibid., p. 136.

7. Alan Tate, "Ezra Pound" (1936), An Examination of Ezra Pound, ed. Peter Russell (Norfolk, Connecticut, n.d.), p. 67.

> At least each Canto is a cunningly devised
> imitation of a casual conversation in which
> no one presses any subject very far. The
> length of breath, the span of conversational
> energy, is the length of a Canto. The con-
> versationalist pauses; there is just enough
> unfinished business left hanging in the air
> to give him a new start; so that the transi-
> tions between the Cantos are natural and easy.[8]

To Tate the method of The Cantos is that of a "many-voiced
monologue."[9]

Although Pound published more cantos in 1937 and again
in 1940, most critics ignored his long poem until the govern-
ment's charge of treason focused attention on him in 1945 and
again in 1949 when the Bollingen Prize for Poetry given him
for "The Pisan Cantos" forced critics to examine more than the
first thirty of the now published eighty-two cantos.

Since the war and especially since 1949, a great many
critics have published a great number of reviews and studies
of The Cantos in various magazines. One of the most valuable
of these studies is James Blish's summary of "what has been
learned to date about the essential content and method of the
Cantos:"[10]

> The poet guided by maps on which only the
> outlines have been filled in (the periplum),
> sets forth upon an Odyssey through time, in
> search of events and actions worthy enough
> to be incorporated into a live tradition.
> These islands in time are to be organized
> in a hierarchy of economic, aesthetic, and
> moral values, corresponding roughly to the

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8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. James Blish, "Rituals on Ezra Pound," Sewanee Review,
LVIII (April 1950), p. 192.

organization of the Divine Comedy; and, in
order to enter into each rather than observe
it from the outside, the voyageur will assume
a series of masks or personae.[11]

Two more extensive studies have been made and published
since Blish's essay. The first to appear was The Poetry of
Ezra Pound, by Hugh Kenner. Kenner finds the major unifying
principle of The Cantos in the following lines from Pound's
translation of Ta Hsio: The Great Digest, one of the Confucian
Stone-Classics:[12]

> The men of old wanting to clarify and
> diffuse throughout the empire that light
> which comes from looking straight into
> the heart and then acting, first set up
> good government in their own states;
> wanting good government in their states,
> they first established order in their own
> families; wanting order in the home, they
> first disciplined themselves; desiring
> self-discipline, they rectified their
> own hearts; and wanting to rectify their
> hearts, they sought precise verbal defini-
> tions of their inarticulate thoughts (the
> tones given off by the heart); wishing to
> attain precise verbal definitions, they
> set to extend their knowledge to the
> utmost. This completion of knowledge is
> rooted in sorting things into organic
> categories.[13]

Using these lines, Kenner, by a process which I do not fully
understand, arrives at the conclusion that "the unity of the
Cantos is Pound."[14]

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11. Ibid., p. 193.

12. Hugh Kenner, The Poetry of Ezra Pound (Norfolk, Con-
necticut, n.d.), p. 38.

13. Confucius, The Great Digest and The Unwobbling Pivot,
trans. Ezra Pound (New York, 1951), pp. 30-31. The bracket
is Pound's. Throughout this paper all punctuation in quoted
material is that of the author quoted unless noted otherwise.

14. Kenner, op. cit., p. 38.

The latest, long study of The Cantos is Harold H. Watts' Ezra Pound and The Cantos published in 1952. Watts answers the questions posed by this paper by focusing on Pound as a reformer of society. The poem is "a series of calculated and violent juxtapositions effected in the interest of perfectly comprehensible ideas."[15] The first step in grasping the structure of The Cantos is recognition of Pound's purpose in writing it and "perception of how [that purpose] shapes and directs the unrolling poem."[16] Once the reader sees why Pound is writing the poem's unity becomes apparent.[17]

Blackmur, Tate, Blish, Kenner, and Watts are but a few of the critics and reviewers who have written on The Cantos. For the purposes of this paper they are the most significant since they have worked on The Cantos' structure. By adopting a new method of examining The Cantos, a new perspective on its structure, this paper will attempt to support, expand, or, wherever necessary, contradict the work of earlier critics.

When the initial confusion caused by the juxtaposition of materials taken directly or indirectly from so many times and places subsides in the reader's mind, or the reader at least

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15. Harold H. Watts, Ezra Pound and the Cantos (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1952), p. 25.

16. Ibid. The parenthetical comment is mine.

17. Hugh Kenner attacks this view in his review of Watts' book, "Gold in the Gloom," Poetry, LXXXI, 2 (November, 1952), 127-132, and as could be expected, Kenner finds Watts going astray because he has not realized the importance of Pound's Confucian translations which Kenner calls in his review "the best possible handbook to the Cantos."

becomes acclimated to the seeming chaos of substance and form, certain cantos and groups of cantos stand out against the heterogeneous background as definite groupings of subject matter. Some of these cantos are further set off from the surrounding ones by the extended use of one or more techniques, such as the archaic diction of Canto XLIV or the autobiographical framework of Cantos LXXIV through LXXXIV, "The Pisan Cantos." Thus the task of seeking out a unifying principle in The Cantos falls into two parts: to establish and examine, first, groupings of cantos according to subject matter or ways of handling subject matter and, second, devices which appear intended to unite these groupings into one coherent work. By using this method in its search for a unifying principle in The Cantos, this paper will attempt to make clear the problems which Pound has met in writing his long poem and the ways in which he has tried to overcome them.

CHAPTER I

SUBJECT MATTER GROUPINGS IN THE CANTOS

The discussion in this chapter is limited to definite
areas of subject matter no smaller than the individual canto.
The second chapter will discuss those cantos which do not fall
into these areas. The type of subject matter contained in the
groupings makes possible their classification as historical
cantos, epic cantos, usura cantos, modern cantos and one group-
ing which Pound has named "The Pisan Cantos." This chapter
will treat these groupings in this order.

I

A brief survey of the historical cantos shows that material
has been taken from the pasts of three countries, Italy, China,
and the United States. The cantos containing this material
make up a very large portion of the poem as a whole; out of
the 536 pages of the poem which have been published so far,
215 pages are definite groupings of historical material. These
groupings are Cantos VIII through XI on Sigismundo Malatesta,
Canto XXXII and Cantos LXII through LXXI on John Adams and his
period, Cantos XLII and XLIII on the founding of the bank of
Siena, Cantos XLIV and L on Tuscany under the Grand Duchy of
the house of Lorraine, and Canto XIII and Cantos LIII through
LXI on the history of China from the early Chou Dynasty to
1736 A. D. (See chart number I.) These cantos are set off
from the surrounding cantos by their treatment of a definite
subject and from the other groupings of subject matter by
their focus on historical material.

GROUPINGS OF HISTORICAL SUBJECT MATTER IN THE CANTOS
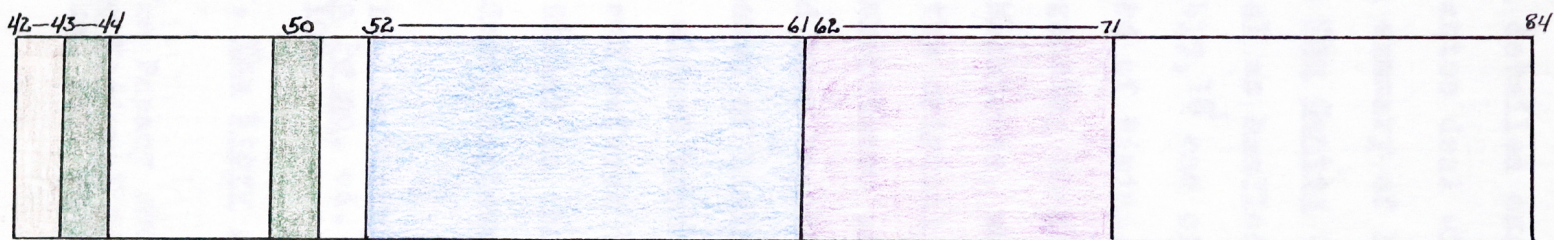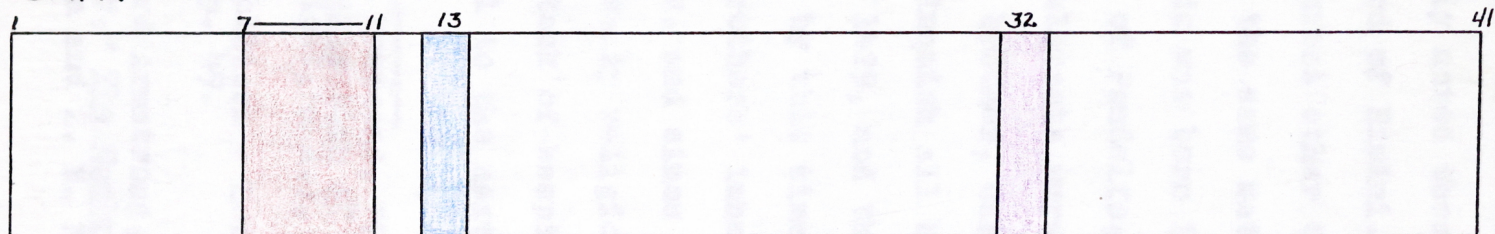
Cantos:

CHART I

Sigismundo ────────────────────
China ──────────────────────────
John Adams ─────────────────────
Bank of Siena ──────────────────
Tuscany under the House of Lorraine ───

Cantos VIII through XI are typical of Pound's method of historiography as exhibited in all the historical cantos, so they have been selected for a detailed examination. As has been previously noted these cantos deal with Sigismundo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini. A summary of Malatesta's career drawn from sources other than The Cantos will facilitate a discussion of the same material as handled by Pound.

Sigismundo was born in 1417,[18] one of three sons, all illegitimate, of Pandolfo, Lord of Rimini.[19] Pandolfo died just as the Malatesta were beginning to gain power and was succeeded by his brother, Carlo Malatesta, whom Pope Martin V forced to relinquish all but the original estate of the family.[20] Carlo died in 1429, and the inheritance passed to the three brothers, who by this time had been legitimized by Martin V.[21] However the brothers' inheritance of Rimini was threatened by outside forces, and since the eldest brother, Galeotto, had become fanatically religious and refused to attend to worldly affairs, the task of keeping Rimini in the control of the Malatesta fell to the next oldest, Sigismundo.

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18. John Drummond, "The Italian Background of the Cantos" (1949), An Examination of Ezra Pound, ed. Peter Russell (Norfolk, Connecticut, n.d.), p. 108.

19. L. Collison - Morley, The Story of the Sforzas (New York, 1934), p. 49.

20. Edward Armstrong, "The Papacy and Naples in the Fifteenth Century," The Cambridge Medieval History, ed. C. W. Previte-Norton and Z. N. Brooke, Vol. VIII (Cambridge, 1936), p. 162.

21. Drummond, op. cit., p. 108.

> At the age of thirteen he saved Rimini,
> himself leading his men to victory, while
> his unwarlike (brother) was offering up
> prayers in the church. At fifteen he
> defeated that experienced condottiere,
> Frederico Montefeltro of Urbino, in the
> field.[22]

Sigismundo and his younger brother, Domenico, more commonly

known as Malatesta Novello, were knighted by the Holy Roman

Emperor, Sigismund, on his return from his coronation in Rome

in 1433, and by Sigismundo's eighteenth year he had already

become an experienced _condottiere_:[23]

> ....he took part in all the wars in Italy
> for the next thirty years, first in the ser-
> vice of one signoria, then of another,
> making war in between times on his own
> account against his life-long rival, Frederigo,
> Duke of Urbino.[24]

Sigismundo's many political and military alliances present

a confused and shifting picture which can only be suggested

in this summary:

1442   He married Polissena, the daughter of Francesco

Sforza, with whom he was allied in the service of

the Venetians.

1445   In alliance with Alfonso V of Aragon he entered the

service of the Pope against Sforza, who had thwarted

---

22.   Collison-Morley, _op. cit._, p. 49. It should be
pointed out that Collison-Morley confused Sigismundo's uncle,
Carlo, with his brother, Galeotto. I have taken the liberty
of changing _uncle_ to _brother_ in the quoted passage because Carlo
died when Sigismundo was only twelve. However with this cor-
rection the passage is in agreement with the other sources I
have used and is an excellent statement of Sigismundo's ex-
ploits as a boy.

23.   Drummond, _op. cit._, p. 106.

24.   _Ibid._

his attempt to gain possession of the cities of
Pesaro and Fosembrone.

1448   Alfonso hired him to make war against Florence,
but when the Florentines offered him better terms,
he broke his contract with Alfonso, kept the
money Alfonso had paid him, and went over to the
Florentines.

1449   He began building the Tempio Malatestiano at Rimini.
He besieged Cremona for the Venetians but was forced
to withdraw by a superior army sent by Milan.

1450   He was sent to help Milan by Venice but was de-
feated by Sforza.

1452   He entered the service of Florence against Aragon.

1454   He led the army of Siena in an unsuccessful cam-
paign against the Counts Pitigliano.

1457   He was attacked by Frederigo d'Urbino and Giacomo
Piccinino at the instigation of Alfonso.

1459   He was forced to ask Pope Pius II to make peace
between him and the Frederigo-Piccinino alliance,
which the Pope did on terms unfavorable to Sigismundo.

1460   He began hostilities against the church.

1461   He joined the Angevin cause against King Ferrante,
who was supported by the Pope, and defeated the
papal tropps. He was excommunicated and burned in
effigy in Rome.

1462   Frederigo d'Urbino, leading the papal army, defeated
Sigismundo; four months later Sigismundo's son,
Roberto, was defeated at Fano after a long siege.

1463 He appealed to the Venetians for help but was re-
      fused, so he was again forced to sue the Pope for
      peace on the Pope's terms.

1464-65 He led the unsuccessful campaign against the
         Turks in Morea.[25]

Sigismundo returned from Morea broken in body and
fortune and asked the new Pope, Paul II, for help, which was
refused. In a last spurt of defiance, he journeyed to Rome
with the intention of stabbing the Pope, but he failed because
of his ill health and the Pontiff's well armed cardinals. He
died in 1468.[26]

Sigismundo's private life is buried under a mass of con-
flicting reports. All sources do agree that he was married
three times, the last marriage being to his concubine, Isotta,
who was the most important woman in his life, and that he had
a daughter and at least one illegitimate son. However, his re-
lations with his immediate family are a source of many vio-
lent contradictions among historians:

> Sigismundo Pandolfo Malatesta killed three
> wives in succession, violated his daughter,
> and attempted the chastity of his own son.[27]

Other sources add charges of rape and murder:

> In 1448 he conceived a passion for the young
> wife of a German count. When she refused to
> have anything to do with him, he attacked her

---

25. Ibid., pp. 108-113.

26. Ibid., p. 113.

27. John Addington Symonds, Renaissance in Italy (New
York, n.d.), p. 172.

and her escort one night as she was passing
through Fano with such vigour that she herself
was killed in the affray, whereupon, according
to some accounts, he violated her corpse while
still warm.[28]

This is but one view of Sigismundo though, for other
sources deny these charges, attributing them to the personal
hatred between Pius II and Sigismundo and "to the propaganda
of the Church that was out to despoil him of his possessions."[29]

Although Sigismundo's political and military career is
a confused and tragic tangle of changing alliances and his
character is the subject of much discussion, his place as one
of the great patrons of art is granted him by all. The erec-
tion of the Tempio Malatestiano, for which he commissioned
Leone Battista Alberti to design the facade, heads his accom-
plishments in the arts; this has been called the first import-
ant work of the great architect.[30] Then in 1465 Sigismundo
brought back from the unsuccessful campaign against the Turks
the remains of Gemisto Plethon and placed them in a sacrophagus
close outside his church with this epitaph:

These remains of Gemistus of Byzantium, chief
of the sages of his day, Sigismundo Pandolfo
Malatesta, son of Pandolfo, commander in the
war against the Turks in Morea, induced by the

---

28.   Collison-Morley, op. cit., p. 51.

29.   Drummond, op. cit., p. 106. A more complete attempt
to refute these charges can be found in Edward Hutton, Sigis-
mundo Pandolfo Malatesta, Lord of the Rimini, (New York, 1906).
Pound also attempts to whitewash Sigismundo, sometimes by
denying these charges, sometimes by simply ignoring them.

30.   W. G. Constable, "Painting, Sculpture, and the Arts,"
The Cambridge Medieval History, p. 777.

mighty love with which he burns for men of
learning, brought hither and placed within
this chest. 1466.[31]

Sigismundo surrounded himself in Rimini with poets,
artists, and philosophers, and while in Rome, he was the close
companion of the humanist, Poggio Bracciolini. But he was not
contented with being only the companion of artists and scholars;
his poems to Isotta show that he was a skillful poet, and the
humanist, Antonio Campanio, after staying briefly with Sigis-
mundo at the Rocca in Rimini was "as much impressed by his
host's knowledge of philosophy as by his generosity."[32]

This sketch of Sigismundo contains the basic stuff of
Cantos VIII-XI, but in the poem these facts appear in a very
different manner. Pound's aim is to combine history and poetry
but he does not wish merely to make history into poetry at the
expense of truth. His goal is factual art. This aim, and
the difficulty of accomplishing it, is suggested in the open-
ing lines of Canto VIII.

> These fragments you have shelved (shored)
> "Slut!" Bitch!" Truth and Calliope
> Slanging each other sous les lauriers.[33]

---

31. Symonds, op. cit., p. 173.

32. Collison-Morely, op. cit., pp. 50-52. The quoted
passage appears on page 51.

33. Ezra Pound, The Cantos of Ezra Pound (New York, 1948),
Canto VIII, p. 28. Sections of The Cantos have been published
as follows:
      1925, "A Draft of XVI Cantos for the Beginning of a Poem
             of Some Length."
      1928, "A Draft of Cantos XVII to XXVII."
      1933, "A Draft of XXX Cantos."
      1934, "Eleven New Cantos, XXXI-XLI."
      1937, "The Fifth Decade of Cantos."
      1940, "Cantos LII-LXXI."
      1948, "The Pisan Cantos," LXXIV-LXXXIV.

Thus Canto VIII, the first of the four Sigismundo Cantos,
opens with Truth and the muse of epic poetry not on the best
of terms, a situation which foreshadows many critics' claims
that the historical sections of The Cantos are neither history
nor poetry. However, such judgments do not fall into the scope
of this chapter, for regardless of these claims, definite
groupings of historical materials which Pound has attempted
to turn into poetry do exist in The Cantos. To locate and
examine these and other groupings as the necessary first step
in a search for some unifying principle in the poem as a whole
is the sole purpose of this chapter. An evaluation of Pound's
method of historiography as well as other techniques which
will be mentioned must wait until the final chapter of this
paper.

> A Japanese student in America on being
> asked the difference between prose and
> poetry said: Poetry consists of gists
> and piths.[34]

This passage from Pound's A. B. C. of Reading is especially
true of the poetic historiography exhibited in The Cantos. In
the Sigismundo cantos there is no attempt at a complete bio-
graphical or historical statement. The reader finds only the
important fact which suggests the whole event; these cantos
are history told in suggestive essences, a record which pre-
sents the piths, the essential facts of Sigismundo's life,

My text for quotation is a collected edition which duplicates
the 1933 through 1948 editions even in pagination.
    The poem when finished will probably contain one hundred
or one hundred and twenty cantos. (Paige [ed.], op. cit. pp.
180,350.)

    34. Ezra Pound, A. B. C. of Reading (Norfolk, Connecticut,
n.d.), p. 92.

embedded in the gists, compressed evocations of Italy in the fifteenth century.

The use of quoted material, usually from contemporary documents, is an excellent example of Pound's attempt to present the piths and gists of history rather than either an exhaustive coverage or a superficial summary of Sigismundo's career. Instead Pound has chosen only those fragments of records which either were significant in Sigismundo's life or make his life significant to Pound. A brief catalogue of the material quoted by Pound in these four cantos brings his use of the gists and piths of history clearly into focus. The following items are listed in the order in which they appear.

Canto VIII

1. A translation of a letter dated April 7, 1449 from Sigismundo, who was then in the service of Venice fighting Cremona, to Giohanni of the Medici in Florence. In it Sigismundo is making arrangements for a certain painter to enter his court to do frescoes in the Tempio when the mortar in the wall dries.

2. A translation of an entry from the register of the Ten of the Bailey in Florence, dated August 15, 1452. It commissions him and his army to enter the service of the Florentines.

3. A translation of a few lines from a love poem written by Sigismundo to Isotta.[35]

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35. The complete text of this poem can be found in Hutton, op. cit., pp. 209-215.

4. A translation of a letter from Sigismundo to Johanni di Cosimo probably written in 1450 since it tells of his being rehired by Venice.[36]

Canto IX

5. A quotation in translation probably from a document by Broglio concerning the betraying of Sigismundo by Sforza in the affair over Pesaro and Fessembrone. This was probably written in 1445 when the affair occurred.

6. A legal document in translation certifying that Sigismundo had bought and paid for over two hundred ox-carts of marble which he was accused of stealing from Saint Apollinare in Ravenna and which was used on the Tempio.

7. A series of translated fragments from at least eight letters found in Sigismundo's mail pouch by the Sienese when they intercepted it to see if he was corresponding with the enemy. The letters included a letter from the architect, Matteo Nuti, concerning work on the Tempio; a letter from Giovanni Alvise, the son of a carpenter, Luigi Alvise, working on the Tempio; a letter about marble to the architect, Battista Alberti; a letter from Isotta concerning an affair between Sigismundo and a young girl; a letter from Leonarda da Palla concerning a pony which Sigismundo had given his son and other domestic matters; a letter from his son thanking him for the pony; the first line of a letter from his court poet;

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36. The variations in spelling of Johanni and other names are by Pound himself.

and a letter from his secretary concerning the progress
on the construction of the Tempio.[37] These letters are
all to Sigismundo, and all probably were written in
December of 1454. Sandwiched between these eight letters
are fragments on details of the construction of the
Tempio; I have not seen these identified.

Canto X

8. An excerpt in translation from a letter from Count
Pitigliano mocking Sigismundo's position as leader of the
demoralized Sienese army. It is dated November 17, proba-
bly of 1454.

9. The order in Latin from Pius II demanding that an
effigy of Sigismundo be constructed and burned. This was
probably written in 1461.

10. A fragment listing the church's charges against
Sigismundo, part in Latin, part translated. This was
probably written by the Cardinal of San Pietro in Vincoli
in the year 1461.

Canto XI contains no quoted records long enough to be catalogued.

The effect of Pound's use of carefully chosen excerpts
of documents as the gists and piths of history is well summed
up in the lines which Pound wrote concerning the intercepting
by the Sienese of the letters listed here as item 7.

> That's what they found in the post bag
> And some more of it to the effect that
> he "lived and ruled."[38]

---

37. Drummond, op. cit., p. 111.

38. The Cantos, IX, p. 41.

A second passage from the A. B. C. of Reading makes clear another condition which Pound must meet in turning history into poetry. "Literature is news that STAYS news.[39]

One obvious implication of this statement is that not all history is fit subject matter for poetry but only that which has a lasting significance. There is no doubt that Sigismundo meets this requirement for Pound.

> The Tempio Malatestiano is both an apex and in verbal sense a monumental failure. It is perhaps the apex of what one man has embodied in the last 1000 years of the occident. A cultural "high" is marked.
> In a Europe not YET rotted by usury, but outside the then system, and pretty much against the power that was, and in any case without great material resources, Sigismundo cut his notch. He registered a state of mind, of sensibility, of all roundness and awareness.[40]

And later in the same chapter,

> All that a single man could, Malatesta, managed against the current of power.[41]

However, for history to be "news that STAYS news" it must be more than the gists and piths of significant events. It must be brought alive in the telling; hence the dramatic sense of presence throughout the historical cantos. For instance, the diction in the translations is fitted to the nature of the subject matter, as in the note from the register of the Ten of the Bailey:

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39. p. 29

40. Ezra Pound, Guide to Kulchur (Norfolk, Connecticut, n.d.), p. 159.

41. Ibid.

....and because the aforesaid most illustrious
Duke of Milan
Is content and wills that the aforesaid Lord Sigismundo
Go into the service of the most magnificent commune
of the Florentines
For alliance defensive of the two states,[42]

and the fragment of Sigismundo's love poem:

"Ye spirits who of olde were in this land
Each under Love, and shaken,
Go with your lutes, awaken
The summer within her mind,
Who hath not Helen for peer
    Yseut nor Batsabe."[43]

Or the diction is fitted to the imagined character and mood

of the original writer, as in the letter from the carpenter's

son:

"Sence to-day I am recommanded that I have to tel you
"my father's opinium that he has shode to Mr. Genare
"about the valts of the cherch[44].

or the disgusted account of Sforza's treachery:

"that Messire Allessandro Sforza
    is become lord of Pesaro
through the wangle of the Illus. Sgr. Mr. Fedricko
    d'Orbino
Who worked the wangle with Galeaz
    through the wiggling of Messer Francesco,
Who waggled it so that Galeaz should sell Pesaro
    to Alex and Fossambrone to Feddy;[45]

Throughout the historical cantos Pound attempts to make the

material appear authentic and vital by using an idiom which

would impress the modern reader as best fitted to the character

of the speaker or writer being presented and then sprinkling

the diction with archaic phrases.

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42.   The Cantos, VIII, p. 29.

43.   Ibid., p. 30.

44.   Ibid., IX, pp. 37-38.

45.   Ibid., IX, pp. 34-35.

Pound's method of narration in the historical cantos is also shaped by his attempt to dramatize his material. The narration in the Sigismundo cantos is almost always in the first person. Although the narrator is never definitely identified, several lines point to his being Sigismundo's brother, Malatesta Novello.

> And the Emperor came down and knighted us[46]
>
> And old Sforza bitched us at Pesaro[47]
>
> So they burnt our brother in effigy[48]

Malatesta Novello does not, however, fit all the references the narrator makes to himself.

> And we sit here. I have sat here
> For forty-four thousand years,[49]

Consequently it is impossible to single out any one person as the narrator of this section of The Cantos.

More important than the narrator's identity is the conversational quality of the narrative; it seems closer to spoken than written language.

> And the Venetians sent in their compliments
> And various and sundry sent in their compliments;
> But we got it next August;
> And Roberto got beaten at Fano,
> And he went by ship to Tarentum,
> I mean Sidg went to Tarentum
> And he found 'em, the anti-Aragons
>   busted and weeping into their beards[50]

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46. Ibid., p. 34.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., X, p. 45.

49. Ibid., XI, p. 50.

50. Ibid., pp. 48-49.

Just as the previously quoted lines on the post bag
describe the effect on the reader of Pound's use of docu-
ments,[51] the following lines, which Pound puts into the
mouth of an acquaintance of Sigismundo in Rome, describe the
effect of the narrative method used in these cantos:

> Yes, I saw him when he was down here
> Ready to murder fatty Barbo, "Formosus,"
> And they wanted to know what we talked about?
> ....
> Both of ancient times and our own; books, arms,
> And of men of unusual genius,
> Both of ancient times and our own, in short the
>   usual subjects
> Of conversation between intelligent men."[52]

The second grouping of historical material to be dis-
cussed is formed by Cantos XLII - XLIII, which are focused on
the founding of the Monte dei Paschi, the bank of Siena. The
techniques used in handling this material are the same as in
the Sigismundo cantos; that is, although the narrative is im-
personal, more like a lecture than a conversation, the language
is that of speech, and there is propationately more quoted
material than in Cantos VIII through XI. Extraneous material
creeps in briefly with an eight line reference to politics in
1918 at the beginning of Canto XLII, an account of the prepa-
ration of the Carrocio for Siena's horse race which still re-
sembles a medieval pageant, and a few miscellaneous items
from the Sienese public archives.[53] However, only the World
War I reference is completely extraneous, and it is placed at

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51. See above p. 18.

52. The Cantos, XI, p. 51. The ellipsis is mine.

53. Drummond, op. cit., pp. 114-115.

the beginning of Canto XLII before mention of the main topic, the bank of Siena, while the Carrocio reference and the items from the public archives do deal with Siena in the years 1622 through 1749, the years ocvered by Pound's discussion of the bank of Siena.

Lines near the beginning of Canto XLII make obvious Pound's reasons for considering the founding of the Monte dei Paschi historical material significant enough to become poetry.

> a species of bank - damn good bank, in Siena.[54]

And a "good bank" to Pound is very important as a symptom of a healthy culture.

Cantos XLIV and L form two small groupings of historical material. They are brief treatments of the careers of Pietro Leopoldo and his son, Ferdinando III, Grand Dukes of Tuscany. Canto XLIV utilizes translated documents embedded in conversational narrative, just as employed in the previously discussed historical cantos. Canto L also uses this technique, but its subject matter includes any history contemporary with Pietro Leopoldo and Ferdinando III. However, the focus is still definitely on these two men.

> Revolution' said Mr. Adams' took place in the
> minds of the people
> in the fifteen years before Lexington',
> That would have been in Peter Leopold's time.[55]

Contemporary fragments of history are placed in the framework of the lives of these two men throughout this canto. The canto also contains several references to Pound's source for this

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54. The Cantos, XLII, p. 3.

55. Ibid., L, p. 40.

material, the Storia civile della Toscana (Florence, 1850)
by a historian very much interested in economics, Antonio
Zobi.[56]

> 'Pardon our brief digression' saith Zobi:
> America is our daughter and VashiNNtonn had civic
> virtues, and Leopoldo meant to cut off two thirds
> of state debt,[57]

Pound makes explicit the contemporaneity of these references
with the main topic. This aspect of subject matter is the
only difference between this canto and the other historical
cantos, its focus on Tuscany in the late seventeen hundreds
making it a definite subject matter grouping.

The social and economic reforms effected by Pietro
Leopoldo and Ferdinando III make them for Pound "news that
STAYS news."

> The real history went on, 1760 to 1790 in
> Tuscany with the work of Pietro Leopoldo and
> Ferdinand III of Habsbourg-Lorraine, wiped
> out by the Napoleonic flurry.[58]
>
> Pietro Leopoldo and Ferdinand III cut down
> taxes. Taxes are infamy.[59]

These subject matter groupings, Cantos VIII through XI
on Sigismundo, Cantos XLII and XLIII on the bank of Siena, and
XLIV and L on Pietro Leopoldo and Ferdinand III, are Pound's
only extensive application in The Cantos of poetic historiog-
raphy to Italian history. Other persons and events from Italian

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56. Drummond, op. cit., p. 115.

57. The Cantos, L, p. 41.

58. Pound, Guide to Kulchur, p. 263.

59. Ibid., p. 277.

history are referred to, but they do not form definite subject matter groupings handled extensively in this way.

The first subject matter grouping taken from Chinese history is Canto XIII. This canto is devoted entirely to Kung (Confucius), mainly walking in a garden and talking to his companions. Canto XIII is marked by a stately, smooth flowing style; it has none of the roughness found so often in the other historical cantos:

> And Tian said, with his hand on the strings of his lute
> The low sounds continuing
>   after his hand left the strings
> And the sound went up like smoke, under the leaves,
> And he looked up after the sound.[60]

This canto seems to function as a forerunner for the large group of Chinese cantos which follow.

Cantos LII through LXI, eighty-three pages in the text, are the main body of Chinese material in the poem. In his index to this section of the poem, Pound has labelled Canto LII, _Li Ki_[61] The canto, as the first cantos of several other subject groupings, begins with extraneous material, but the body of the canto is made up of translations from the _Li Ki_. The next nine cantos trace the subsequent history of China's government from 1766 B.C. to 1736 A.D. The treatment of the Jesuits by the Chinese, a short excursion into Japanese history, and the translation of the Confucian texts into Manchu furnish brief but not unrelated sidelights in this condensed history of the Chinese government.

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60. _The Cantos_, XIII, p. 58.

61. Lin Yutang, _The Wisdom of Confucius_ (n.p., 1943), p. 36 identifies the _Li Ki_ as a "record of governmental system of early Chou Dynasty."

Pound's prose contains many statements of the importance
of knowing Chinese history, especially as an example of the
practical results which may be achieved by governing according
to Confucian ideas.

> The people who fail to take interest in
> Kung fail, I think beêause they never
> observe WHAT Confucian thinking leads to.
>   For 2,500 years, whenever there has
> been order in China or in any part of China,
> you can look for a Confucian at the root of
> it.62

This idea is what determines Pound's choice of material from
such a large body of history and also explains why the Chinese
cantos are "news that STAYS news."

The method of historiography is the same as that of the
Sigismundo cantos, the only difference being a smaller propor-
tion of document to narrative, possibly because Pound did not
have access to as many Chinese documents which he considered
significant as he did to Italian and American documents.

The largest subject matter grouping of American histori-
cal material follows immediately after the Chinese cantos,
Cantos LXII through LXXI, eighty-three pages in the text. This
grouping like the Chinese cantos is foreshadowed by a single
canto appearing earlier in the poem, Canto XXXII. All these
cantos are centered around John Adams and the early years of
the United States government. It is interesting to find this
grouping immediately following the Chinese cantos, for Pound
has said that the most important lesson the United States

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62. Pound, Guide to Kulchur, p. 275.

could learn from Chinese history is that the United States
constitution was an innovation which should not be scrapped
now for experiments which have been tried and have failed.[63]

John Adams has been praised again and again by Pound:

> The tragedy of the U.S.A. over 160 years
> is the decline of the Adamses.[64]

Obviously Pound considers the early American government and
John Adams fit subjects for the poetic historiography which
was used earlier on Sigismundo Malatesta.

This examination of Cantos VIII through XI, XLII and
XLIII, XLIV and L, XIII and LII through LXI, XXXII and LXII
through LXXI has attempted to establish three points: each
of these cantos or groups of cantos treats a definite, limited,
historical subject; each of these historical subjects has a
definite significance to Pound; each grouping of historical
subject matter is handled with the same method of poetic his-
toriography.

The next three classifications, which take up much less
space in The Cantos, require only brief treatment in this study.

II

The second class of subject matter groupings to be ex-
amined is that of the epic cantos. The subject matter of these
cantos is drawn from three epics, the Odyssey, the Poema del
Cid, and the Divine Comedy.

The Odyssey cantos are Cantos I, XXXIX, XLVII, and the
last four pages of Canto XX; although this last section is not

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63. Pound, Guide to Kulchur, p. 275.

64. Ibid., p. 254.

a complete canto, it merits inclusion because of its length.

Canto I relates the departure of Odysseus and his men from Circe's isle, the summoning of the dead by Odysseus, and his speaking with Elpenor and Tiresias.65

The section in Canto XX describes the lotus eaters. This description is interrupted briefly by a lament by the sailors who had been with Odysseus and had died. The poetry here is marked by the luxuriousness and exactness of the imagery.

Canto XXXIX is made up of the reminiscences of Odysseus, chiefly of Circe. It is written in the first person. Canto XLVII is very similar to Canto XXXIX in that it is a jumble of things concerning Odysseus, but it is centered on his descent to the dead. Cantos XXXIX and XLVII are the least definite of all the subject matter groupings.

The only subject matter grouping dealing with the Cid is Canto III. It starts with a brief reference to Pound in Venice, but moves to a description of the Cid being refused

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65. This canto is a translation by Pound from Book II of a Latin version of the Odyssey by Andreas Divus Justinopolitanus published in 1538. The Latin text can be found in Ezra Pound, "Translators of Greek," Make It New (New Haven, 1935), pp. 138-141.
Lines such as:
Sun to his slumber, shadows oer all the ocean (Canto 1, p. 3) and
Swartest night stretched over
wretched men there. (Canto 1, p. 3)
make this canto very reminiscent of the prosody of "The Seafarer" as translated by Pound.
May I for my own self's songs' truth reckon,
Journey's jargon, how I in harsh days
Hardship oft endured.
(Ezra Pound, "The Seafarer,"
Personae (New York, n.d.), p. 64.)

entrance at Burgos and being forced into exile. This canto
also relates the Cid's tricking of two pawnbrokers with a trunk
of sand. It ends with a reference to the murder of Ignez de
Castro and with the image of a decaying wall.

Cantos XIV, XV, and the first half of Canto XVI form one
of the most definite groupings in the poem. The first line of
Canto XIV immediately sets the scene and prepares the reader
for the following two and a half cantos:[66]

Io venni in luogo d'ogni luce muto, (I came into a place
void of all light.)

The line is borrowed from the Divine Comedy where it
occurs just as Dante and Virgil pass Minos and enter the second
circle, the beginning of hell. Cantos XIV and XV are Pound's
modern adaptation of the Dantean hell where Pound has thrust
politicians, financiers, betrayers of language, vice crusaders,
slum owners, and Calvin, among others. What Pound's inferno
lacks when compared with the exactness of classification found
in Dante's, it more than makes up for in repulsiveness. At
the end of Canto XV Pound is overcome by the filth and faints.
When he regains consciousness, his guide, Plotinus, is gone,
so he staggers alone through the hell mouth into purgatory and
Canto XVI. It is impossible to say at the end of this group-
ing if Pound is in paradise or still in purgatory; the latter
seems most probable. Because of the definite borrowings from
Dante, these cantos are one of the most distinct subject mat-
ter groupings in the poem.

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66. The Cantos, XIV, p. 61. The line is from Dante,
Inferno, V, l. 28.

As can be seen, the epic groupings - Cantos I, XXXIX, XLVII, and four pages of Canto XX drawn from the Odyssey; Canto III drawn from the Poema del Cid; and Cantos XIV, XV, and the first pages of Canto XVI based on the Divine Comedy-- are set off from the rest of the poem only by their focus on subject matter. They do not utilize any one technique as the historical cantos do.

<div align="center">III</div>

Cantos XLV and LI, the usury cantos, are the third type of subject matter grouping. These two groupings differ from the other groupings in that they are the direct presentation of an idea, the degenerative effects of usury, while the others are focused on actions and only indirectly on the ideas which these actions express.

Canto XLV indicts usury on two charges: as a cause of degeneration in the crafts and arts, and as an interference with the natural fecundity of the earth and man. The canto presents these charges by listing examples of the effects of usury in a quite formal catalogue which abounds in archaisms and inversions.

> Usura rusteth the chisel
> It rusteth the craft and the craftsman,[67]
>
> with usura, sin against nature,
> is thy bread ever more of stale rags
> is thy bread dry as paper,
> with no mountain wheat, no strong flour[68]

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67. The Cantos XLV, p. 24. Usury as Pound uses the word means more than the lending of money at exorbitant rates of interest; it is all the evils caused in a society by a lack of precise terminology.

68. Ibid., p. 23.

> Usura slayeth the child in the womb
> It slayeth the young man's courting
> It hath brought palsey to bed, lyeth
> between the young bride and her bridegroom
> CONTRA NATURAM[69]

The second usury canto, Canto LI, opens with a juxtaposition of light and mud, a figure for society free from usury and society embedded in a usurous muck:

> Shines
> in the mind of heaven God
> who made it
> more than the sun
> in our eye.
> Fifth element; mud; said Napoleon[70]

Without any break the canto launches into a restatement of most of Canto XLV but in a terse, modern style:

> Usury rusts the man and his chisel
> It destroys the craftsman, destroying craft;
> ....
> With usury....
> the peasant does not eat his own grain
> ....
> Usury kills the child in the womb
> And breaks short the young man's courting
> Usury brings age into youth; it lies
>   between the bride
> and the bridegroom
> Usury is against Nature's increase.[71]

The last half of the canto presents in contrast to the previously stated effects of usury examples of productivity, "That hath the light of the doer."[72] The canto closes with a song by Geryone, the dragon which bore Dante and Virgil on its back down into Maleboge.

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69. _Ibid._, p. 24.

70. _Ibid._, LI, 44.

71. _Ibid._, The ellipses are mine.

72. _Ibid._, p. 45.

Both Cantos XLV and LI are condemnations of usury and are set off from the rest of the poem by their concentration on this one topic. These usury cantos, like the epic cantos, are not set off by the consistent use of any single method of handling subject matter as the historical cantos are.

IV

Cantos XII, XIX, XXII, and XXVIII form a fourth set of subject matter groupings, the modern cantos. These cantos are a collection of glimpses of modern life - some humorous, some bitterly satiric, most probably fictitious.

Canto XII is made up of three anecdotes, Baldy Bacon's financial career, José Maria Dos Santos and the pigs, and "The Tale of the Honest Sailor."[73] Baldy Bacon's story is typical of the anecdotes which make up the modern cantos. Baldy Bacon bought up all the centavos in Cuba and sold them at a profit when the demand for centavos became great enough.

> Baldy's interest
> was in money business
> "No interest in any other uv bisnis,"[74]

This transaction caused Baldy to become very unpopular with the Cubans, so he returned to Manhattan and became an agent for an insurance company until the company folded.

> Also ran up to 40,000 bones on his own,
> Once, but wanted to "eat up the whole'r Wall St."[75]

Most of the anecdotes in the modern cantos are like the Baldy Bacon episode - short, colloquial, and concerned with

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73. Ibid., XII, p. 55.

74. Ibid., p. 53.

75. Ibid., p. 54.

economics or politics in the early part of the twentieth century. However, some of these anecdotes are on art and some merely present a character, such as this passage from Canto XXVIII:

> "Buk !" said the Second Baronet, "eh...
> "Thass a funny lookin' buk" said the Baronet
> Looking at Bayle, folio, 4 vols. in gilt leather, "Ah..
> "Wu......Wu ... wot you goin 'eh to do with ah ...
> "... ah read-it?"[76]

Pound's concern in all of these anecdotes with telling a good story is shown by the dramatic technique used here. The only anecdote that seems to involve the poet personally appears in Canto XIX, where the narrator (this short section is in the first person) is told:

> "But it's a question of feeling,
> "Can't move 'em with a cold thing, like economics."[77]

In short, the modern cantos are groupings of anecdotes told conversationally and set off from the rest of the poem as subject matter groupings by their concentration on life in the twentieth century.

V

One large grouping, "The Pisan Cantos," remains to be studied. Unlike the epic, usury, and modern cantos, this grouping, Cantos LXXIV through LXXXIV,[78] forms a relatively large portion of the poem, one hundred and fifteen of the total five hundred and thirty-six pages.

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76. <u>Ibid.</u>, XXVIII, p. 139.

77. <u>Ibid.</u>, XIX, p. 85.

78. Cantos LXXII and LXXIII have not been published. Unconfirmed rumors give two likely reasons: To avoid libel suits; because these cantos will not be intelligible until the poem is completed.

"The Pisan Cantos" are the only large grouping of personal subject matter in the published sections of the poem. Occasional glimpses of Pound speaking directly to the reader appear throughout The Cantos:

> And if you will say that this tale teaches ...
> a lesson, or that the Reverend Eliot
> has found a more natural language...[79]

These passages, however, are no more than occasional asides throughout the first seventy-two cantos, and even with the addition of those sections of the modern cantos which are obviously personal, the amount of material that is directly personal is very slight up to Canto LXXIV.

Not all the subject matter in these cantos pertains directly to Pound; many references to the preceding cantos can be found, usually with a value judgment attached, in this grouping.[80]

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79. Ibid., XLVI, p. 25.

80. These references to earlier cantos are one of the most troublesome aspects of the poem to the reader, especially when the lines being referred to were not emphasized on their first appearance. For example, these lines from Canto LXXVIII, p.59,

> So we sat there by the arena,
>   outside, Thiy, and il decaduto
> the lace cuff fallen over his knuckles
>   considering Rochefoucauld
> but the program (Cafe Dante) a literary program 1920
>   or thereabouts was neither published nor followed

are reference to and very enlightening expansion of the following lines from Canto XXIX, p. 145.

> And another day or evening toward sundown by the arena
> (les gradins)
> A little lace at the wrist
> And not very clean lace either...

Taken together the two quoted passages are definitely more meaningful than when they are apart, but they are separated by so much material in the poem and are so inconspicuous in context that there is very little hope the reader will make the necessary connection.

> Fear god and the stupidity of the populace,
> but a precise definition
> transmitted thus Sigismundo
> thus Duccio, thus Zuan Bellin or trastevere
> with La Sposa
> Sponsa Cristi in mosaic till our time / deification
> of emperors
> but a snotty barbarian ignorant of T'ang history need
> not deceive one[81]

Only in these cantos does Pound consistently make the significance of much of the material in the poem so explicit as in the above example.

Yet these statements of value are not the main reason for classing Cantos LXXIV through LXXIV as a grouping of personal subject matter. The autobiographical nature of these cantos is even more important. "The Pisan Cantos" are in essence a journal.

In April of 1945 Pound reported to advance units of the U. S. Army, was taken to Genoa for interrogation, and later removed to an internment camp at Pisa where he remained until November of the same year when he was flown to Washington, D.C., to be tried for treason. "The Pisan Cantos" were written in the camp at Pisa, and the poet's experiences there furnish an autobiographical framework for this section of the poem. These cantos are an almost equal mixture of scenes from life in the camp, Pound's memories of his earlier life and the earlier cantos,[82] and statements in varied forms of what might be called Pound's personal philosophy.

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81. _Ibid._, LXXIV, pp. 3-4

82. According to Russell, _op. cit._, p. 13, the only books which Pound had during his internment were the Bible and Prayer Book supplied by the camp and the two Confucian texts, the _Ta Haio_ and the _Chung Yung_. Apparently Pound did not have access to the previously written cantos.

Only Canto LXXV is devoid of any explicitly personal reference. The canto consists of only seven lines and the score of Gerhart Münch's transcription for violin of Clement Janequin's bird-song chorale.[83] However, once the reader identifies the score and remembers Pound's comparing several times the birds sitting on the prison fences with notes on the music staff, Pound's inclusion of the score of a bird-song chorale no longer seems out of place in this often subjective journal of the prison camp.

> 4 birds on 3 wires, one on one
> . . . .
> 5 of 'em now on 2;
> on 3; 7 on 4[84]

> 8th day of September
>   f f
>   d

> write the birds in their treble scale[85]

> three solemn half notes
>   their white downy chests black-rimmed
> on the middle wire.[86]

Pound's descriptions of the camp and its surroudings and his recording of incidents and bits of conversation from life in the camp provide an objectively autobiographical background for Cantos LXXIV through LXXXIV.

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83. Kenner, _op. cit._, p. 234.

84. _The Cantos_, LXXIV, pp. 63-64. Seven lines are omitted.

85. _Ibid._, LXXXII, p. 103.

86. _Ibid._, p. 105.

and there was a smell of mint under the tent flaps
especially after the rain
        and a white ox on the road towards Pisa
           as if facing the tower,
dark sheep in the drill field and on wet days were
        clouds
in the mountain as if under the guard roosts.[87]

and Mr. Edwards superb green and brown
        in ward No. 4 a jacent benignity,
of the Baluba mask: "Doan you tell no one
        I made you that table."[88]

This background is further established by scattered lines
which refer to the writing of "The Pisan Cantos":

        As a lone ant from a broken ant-hill
from the wreckage of Europe, ego scriptor.[89]

and that day I wrote no further.[90]

and by Canto LXXXIV and parts of Canto LXXXII which are dated
as if they were entries in a diary.

Pound fills the framework, established by lines such as
have been quoted, with memories and ideas. The memories are
drawn from all of Pound's experience; the ideas are conclusions
drawn from this experience, Pound's philosophy of life.[91]

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87. _Ibid._, LXXIV, p. 6.

88. _Ibid._, p. 12.

89. _Ibid._, LXXVI, p. 36.

90. _Ibid._, LXXXIV, p. 111.

91. Unfortunately Pound's philosophy seems impossible to
paraphrase in a neat prose statement:

        Premature to mention my "philosophy,"
call it a disposition. In another 30 years
I may put the bits together, but
probably won't.
           (Paige [ed.] , _The Letters of Ezra
           Pound_, p. 333.

In a letter to George Santayana dated December 8, 1939, Pound stated that Cantos LII through LXXI, the Chinese and American historical cantos, would be followed by a section dealing with his philosophy.[92] Although "The Pisan Cantos" leave much to be desired as a systematic statement of a personal philosophy, they do stand out in the poem as a journal-like recording of Pound's thought during his internment at Pisa. This focus on Pound sets "The Pisan Cantos" off as a very definite subject matter grouping.

One more characteristic of all the subject matter groupings needs to be pointed out before beginning an examination of the relationships between these groupings. The examination of the historical cantos showed that each man or event treated had some special significance for Pound. The other subject matter groupings have significance in the same manner. The significance of the usury cantos and "The Pisan Cantos" is explicit in them. Each of the three sources of the epic cantos has been judged significant by Pound in his critical prose; of Odysseus he says, "I hope that elsewhere I have undersocred and driven in the Greek honor of human intelligence;"[93] he calls the Poema del Cid the finest of the medieval poems of action;[94] and the Divine Comedy is praised throughout his prose as an indictment of usury. The significance of the modern cantos is made explicit early in The Cantos.

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92. Ibid., p. 331.

93. Pound, Guide to Kulchur, p. 146.

94. Ezra Pound, The Spirit of Romance (New York, n.d.), p. 66.

"Beer-bottle on the statue's pediment!
"That, Fritz, is the era, today against the past,
"Contemporary."[95]

This chapter has established that a very large amount of The Cantos is grouped within the poem according to subject matter and sometimes technique as well. (See chart number II). Now that these definite groupings of significant matter have been established, an examination of their relationships becomes possible.

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95. The Cantos, VII, p. 25.

GROUPINGS OF SUBJECT MATTER IN THE CANTOS

CANTOS:

1   3   8——— 11 12 13 14 —— 16   19 20   22   28   32   39   41

42 — 43 44 45   47   50 51 52 ——————————— 61 62 ——————— 71   74 —————————————— 84
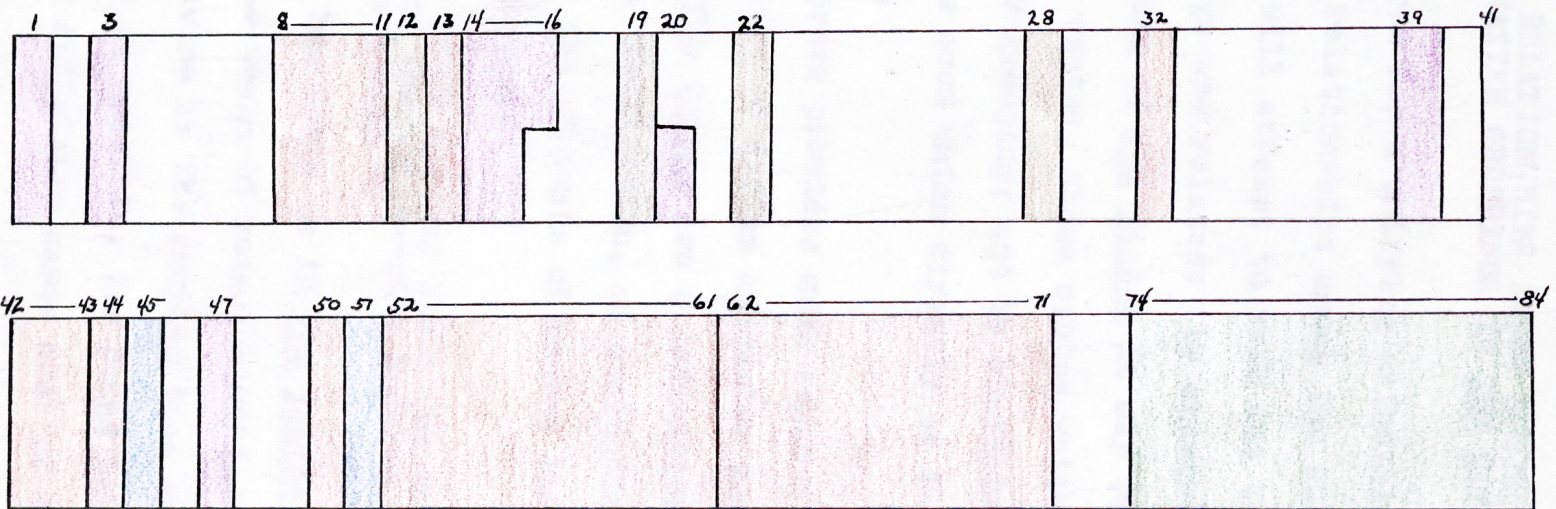
CHART II

HISTORICAL CANTOS ———————
EPIC CANTOS ———————
USURY CANTOS ———————
MODERN CANTOS ———————
"PISAN CANTOS" ———————

CHAPTER II

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG SUBJECT
MATTER GROUPINGS IN THE CANTOS

The search for a unifying principle in The Cantos becomes
a search for relationships among the subject matter groupings.
This chapter will attempt to seek out the manner in which
these groupings are related: by examining Pound's prose for
any illumination of The Cantos it may offer; by examining the
heterogeneous cantos, those cantos which are not part of a
subject matter grouping; and by examining those lines through-
out the entire poem which directly or indirectly are comments
on The Cantos.

Pound's prose provides much support for considering The
Cantos an attempt to define a complex idea in terms as concrete
as possible. The Cantos are a definition of Pound's evalua-
tion of modern civilization, an evaluation which involves also
a diagnosis of the ailments of modern life and a compounding
of a remedy for them:

> There is no mystery about the Cantos, they are the
> tale of the tribe--give Rudyard credit for his use
> of the phrase.[96]

The task Pound has taken on in The Cantos is a constructive
criticism of the whole of modern civilization.

This criticism is the complex idea which he wishes to de-
fine as exactly as possible, for Pound believes that inexact
terminology and definition cause most of the problems in the

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96.   Pound, A Guide to Kulchur, p. 194.

modern world. The cure is suggested in his translation from the _Analects_ of Confucius with which he begins the _Guide to Kulchur_:

> Tseu--Lou asked: If the Prince of Mei appointed you head of the government, to what wd. you first set your mind?
> Kung: To call people and things by their names, that is by the correct denominations, to see that the terminology was exact.[97]

Much of the apparent lack of coherence and clarity in _The Cantos_ is caused by Pound's attempts to define precisely the large and complex idea which is the meaning of the poem. An examination of Pound's method of definition should show why this difficulty exists.

In his search for exact terminology, Pound found what he considered a defect in the method of definition used in Western culture from the Greeks to the present:

> In Europe, if you ask a man to define anything, his definition always moves away from the simple things that he knows perfectly well, it recedes into an unknown region of remoter and progressively remoter abstraction.[98]

Any definition made in this way would be obviously only as exact as the abstractions from which it was made. Pound feels that this way of defining was satisfactory during the medieval period when language was carefully tended and the "general exactitude in the use of abstract terms" was high.[99] However, modern language has lost those precise and clear abstractions:

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97. _Ibid._, p. 16.

98. Pound, _A. B. C. of Reading_, p. 19.

99. _Ibid._, pp. 19-20.

> Definition went out in the fifteen hundreds. . .
> "Abstract thought" or "general thought" or philoso-
> phic thought after that time was ancillary to work
> of material scientists.[100]

Consequently the method of definition to which people have

become accustomed in Western civilization is no longer exact

enough for Pound's purpose in The Cantos. He has to find

some new method.

Just as Pound derives his emphasis on precise terminology

from China, from Confucius and Chinese poetry, he draws on

China and her language for his way of attaining this precision

in English, the ideogrammic method. The Chinese character,

the ideogram, is a way of defining without generalizations

or abstract statements; it is not a picture of a sound or

group of sounds but of a thing or a group of things. Pound

uses the word red as an example of the difference between the

Western and the Chinese ways of defining. A European, if asked

to define red, would say that red is a colour which is a vibra-

tion of a certain length which is a mode of energy and so forth,

getting farther and farther from his or anyone's actual sense

experience of red or what he really knows of the word.

In contrast to the European, the Chinese has his defini-

tion of red right in the character, itself, which means red.

This character is composed of four very formalized pictures:

a rose, iron rust, a cherry, and a flamingo. The definition

is made of experienced particulars; abstractions or generaliza-

tions are avoided.[101]

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100. Pound, Guide to Kulchur, p. 50.

101. Pound, A. B. C. of Reading, pp. 19-20.

Pound has a complex generalization to communicate, but he lacks the terminology to communicate it exactly in an abstract statement.

"All knowledge is built up from a rain of factual atoms".[102] Since Pound lacks the terminology to communicate "knowledge" adequately, he bombards the reader with a "rain of factual atoms" from which the reader may build the knowledge. Being unable to communicate the generalization, Pound communicates the particulars and hopes the reader will relate them. "The tale of the tribe" is the subject of the generalization, and the subject matter groupings are the most important particulars.

The ideogrammic method has one more attraction for Pound. It forces the reader to think:

> On the other hand we also err in trying to FORCE abstract or general statement. We err in supposing that insincerity is peculiar to the man speaking. In nine cases out of ten we find an insincerity of the auditor, of the man who does not want to hear.[103]

The ideogrammic method both makes possible exact communication of abstractions and furnishes a means of prodding the reader's mind:

> The ideogrammic method consists of presenting one facet and then another until at some point one gets off the dead and desensitized surface of the reader's mind, onto a part that will register.[104]

This ideogrammic method, the particularized definition, is perhaps the most important unifying principle in the poem. The Cantos consists of a great mass of material much of which

102. Pound, Guide to Kulchur, p. 98.

103. Ibid., p. 128.

104. Ibid., p. 51.

is not explicitly related; the relating of the parts of the poem must be done by the reader. The reader constructs the unity and coherence of The Cantos by grasping the poem's meaning. Thus the unity of the poem exists only in the mind of the careful reader; the unity is the generalization which the reader makes from the materials of The Cantos. It is an idea implicit in the entire poem, as the philosopher's principle is implicit in the accumulation of his memory:

> Saith the Philosopher: You think I have learned
> a great deal, and kept the whole of it in my memory?
> He replied with respect: Of course. Isn't that
> so? It is not so. I have reduced it all to one
> principle.[105]

Pound's "one principle" can be expressed only in the several hundred pages of his poem. The "one principle," the idea, exists only in the mind of the reader; there, is the unity of The Cantos.[106]

However, Pound runs into a problem caused by the nature of written language when he attempts to utilize the ideogrammic method as the unifying principle in his long poem. The ideogram in the Chinese character causes no difficulty because the parts of the character are co-existent, and, like the parts of a painting, may be perceived simultaneously. But when Pound attempts to create an ideogram out of words instead of formalized pictures, he is forced to put the words one after another,

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105. Ibid., p. 15.

106. In The Poetry of Ezra Pound, p. 38, Hugh Kenner states in his discussion of the ideogram that the unity of The Cantos is Pound. This statement is inexact since any careful reader may grasp the ideogrammic unity of The Cantos. Thus the unity of The Cantos is not just Pound but an idea in Pound's or any mind that knows The Cantos sufficiently well.

and in a poem as long as The Cantos, any possibility vanishes of the reader perceiving all of the ideogram simultaneously. Pound's attempt to create an ideogram out of written language is an attempt to achieve simultaneity in a medium limited to consecutiveness. An ideogram like a painting exists in space, a dimension which written language lacks. Consequently the parts of Pound's ideogram are recorded consecutively, but the poem can not be understood unless they are contemplated simultaneously by the reader.

An examination of the cantos which do not fall into one of the subject matter groupings shows that Pound is quite conscious of the difficulties to be met in using the ideogrammic method for a long poem. Pound realizes he must make the reader aware of the simultaneous existence of the whole poem before the ideogrammic unity of the poem can be grasped. The cantos not included in subject matter groupings and the lines commenting on The Cantos which are found throughout the poem include many devices intended to juxtapose the subject matter groupings in the reader's mind, to give the materials of the poem a simultaneous existence.

The heterogeneous cantos have another function in the poem which should be mentioned before discussing their part in juxtaposing the subject matter groupings. Pound uses the heterogeneous cantos as an opportunity to include subject matter which would be out of place in any of the subject matter groupings and which is not of sufficient extent or significance to form a separate grouping. For example, Pound includes in Canto XXXVI his translation of the Donna Mi Prega by Guido

Cavalcanti. Since Pound has written an essay of more than fifty pages on this poem, it is obvious that he attaches some significance to the poem and the poet, but for his purposes in The Cantos, Cavalcanti's canzone merits only two and one half pages; the canzone is important enough to be included as a part of Pound's ideogram, but for some reason it is not important enough to form a subject matter grouping, like Sigismundo or the Monte dei Paschi. One definite function of the heterogenous cantos is to form a catch-all for these odd bits of material which Pound wishes to include in The Cantos.

The most important function of these cantos is the juxta-position of materials mentioned earlier. Each heterogenous canto is a mixture of new materials and materials from the various subject matter groupings. For example, the first half of Canto XL is made up of economic subject matter ranging from the Venetian bank of 1361, through Adam Smith, the United States civil war, the Rothschilds, to Mr. Morgan in 1907. The second half of the canto is an account of the voyage around 500 B. C. of the Cartheginian, Hanno, along the west coast of Africa.[107]

In this canto the transition, from economics to the voyage of Hanno, is made explicit:

One of which things seeking an exit.[108]

The "things" in this line are the economic subjects which directly precede it, and the "exit" which was for Hanno his

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107. This account is probably a translation of the Periplus, a Greek translation of Hanno's own account in Phoenician of the voyage. Both the voyage and the translation of a translation bring to mind the Odyssey and Pound's translation of Divius rather than Homer in Canto I.

108. The Cantos, XL, p. 49.

voyage is for Pound and the reader his telling of it. Thus
Canto XL indicates one relationship in The Cantos between
economics, history, and the voyage of Hanno and indirectly of
Odysseus.

Not all of the heterogeneous cantos make so obvious the
relationships between the different materials found in them.
Often Pound merely lists references to different subject mat-
ter groupings, apparently in the hope that the resulting
jumble will force the reader to bring the subject matter
groupings together in his mind; but occasionally Pound manages
to achieve moments of poetic synthesis in the midst of an ap-
parently chaotic mass of references to other parts of the poem
and/or new material. An excellent example of a moment of
poetic synthesis occurs in Canto XXVII where Greek mythology
and modern history are for an instant fused together.

> So that the Xarites bent over tovarisch.
> And these are the labors of tovarisch,
> That tovarisch lay in the earth,
> And rose, and wrecked the house of the tyrants,
> And that the tovarisch then lay in the earth
>   And the Xarites bent over tovarisch.
>
> These are the labours of tovarisch,
> That tovarisch wrecked the house of the tyrants,
> And rose, and talked folly on folly
> And walked forth and lay in the earth
>   And Xarites bent over tovarisch.
>
> And that tovarisch cursed and blessed without aim,
>   These are the labours of tovarisch,
> Saying:
>   "Me Cadmus sowed in the earth
>   And with the thirtieth autumn
> I return to the earth that made me.
> Let the five last build the wall;
>
> I neither build nor reap.
> That he came with the gold ships, Cadmus,
> That he fought with the wisdom,
> Cadmus, of the gilded prows. Nothing I build

> And I reap
> Nothing; with the thirtieth autumn
> I sleep, I sleep not, I rot
> And I build no wall.[109]

The use of "tovarisch" brings to mind the end of Canto
XVI which deals with the Russian revolution. The tovarisch
is associated first with the three Graces. Then he speaks as
though he were one of the armed men who sprang up when Cadmus
sowed the dragon's teeth, thus completing the poetic fusion
of Greek myth with modern history.[110] This examination of
poetic fusion can only attempt to point out how the synthesis
occurs; the lines themselves must prove its existence.

Although these moments of complete synthesis are few in
the poem, Pound often is able to draw together varied materials
by using what he calls "subject rhyme."[111] Pound uses "sub-
ject rhyme" in much the same way as the traditional poet uses
sound rhyme except that the echo is not in the sound of a word
or group of words but in their meaning. In the letter to his
father in which he uses the phrase, "subject rhyme," Pound
gives as an example the rhyme between Elvira on the wall and
Helen of Troy which appears in Canto XX.[112] The Elvira on the
wall--Helen of Troy rhyme is strengthened by the speeches of

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109. _Ibid._, XXVII, pp. 131-132.

110. These moments of synthesis do not occur often in the
poem. However I am unable to say whether these moments are
so few because Pound attempts synthesis only a few times, be-
cause he fails in the majority of his attempts at synthesis,
or because I fail as a reader to perceive more of these moments.

111. Paige (ed.), _The Letters of Ezra Pound_, p. 210.

112. _Ibid._

the old, Trojan men watching Helen which appear earlier in the poem.[113] In this example the similarity between Elvira and Helen on their respective walls is so obvious that Pound's reason for calling this association "subject rhyme" should be apparent. However, the rhyme is not always this close.

Canto II is an excellent example of "subject rhyme" in operation. The subject matter of this canto, like that of many other cantos, is arranged in a pattern of echoes and re-statement similar to a traditional rhyme scheme. Of course, this rhyme scheme does not include all the subject matter in the canto; it would be as absurd to require Pound to rhyme all the subject matter as to require any poet to rhyme all the sounds of all the words in his poetry. The rhyme scheme of Canto II can be examined by listing the subject rhymes, omitting all unrhymed material.

The body of Canto II is Acoetes relating to Pentheus the incident which brought him to worship Lyaeus, more commonly known as Dionysus.[114] Acoetes had been the pilot of ship whose sailors attempted to kidnap a young boy. Acoetes tried to stop them but was ignored by the crew. The young boy turned out to be Lyaeus who changed the rebellious crew into fish and caused the boat to become covered with vines and lynxes.

Almost half the canto is devoted to this subject while the rest of the canto is mostly material which rhymes directly or indirectly with the Acoetes narrative. These rhymes are

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113. Ibid., II, p. 6.

114. Blackmur, op. cit., p. 138 identifies this passage as an adaptation from Book III of Ovid's Metamorphoses.

best pointed out by listing the rhyming subjects in the order
in which they appear in the canto:

> Browning's "Sordello"
>
> So-shu
>
> Eleanor of Acquitaine
>
> Homer
>
> Helen and the old men on the walls of Troy
>
> Tyro
>
> Acoetes' narrative
>
> So-shu
> Tyro
> Acoetes[115]
>
> Proteus

The subject rhyme between the two poets is obvious;
Pound's prose re-inforces this rhyme since he praises both
Homer and Browning for their narrative abilities.

So-shu and Tyro are presented in rhyming situations:

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115. This fusion of So-Shu, Tyro, and Acoetes is another
example of a moment of poetic synthesis in The Cantos.

> And So-shu churned in the sea, So-shu also, using the
>   long moon for a churn-stick . . .
> Lithe turning of water,
>   sinews of Poseidon,
> Black azure and hyaline,
>   glass wave over Tyro,
> Close cover, unstillness,
>   bright welter of wave-cards,
> Then quiet water,
>   quiet in the buff sands,
> Sea-fowl stretching wing-joints,
>   splashing in rock-hollows and sand-hollows
> In the wave-runs by the half-dune;
> Glass-glint of wave in the tide-rips against sunlight,
>   pallor of Hesperus,
> Grey peak of the wave,
>   wave, colour of grape's pulp,
>   (Canto II, pp. 9-10.)

So-shu churned in the sea.[116]

> And by the beach-run, Tyro,
>   Twisted arms of the sea-god,
> Lithe sinews of water, gripping her, cross hold,[117]

There is also a slight rhyme between the So-shu lines and the Homer lines.

>   And poor old Homer, blind, blind as a bat,
>   Ear, ear for the sea-surge, murmur of old men's
>   voices:[118]

These lines lead into the speech of the old men as they watch Helen on the walls of Troy, and their talk of Helen rhymes with the appearance of Eleanor of Aquitaine earlier in the canto.

"Eleanor, ἐλέναυς and ἑλέπτολις !"[119]

The love scene of Tyro and Poseidon rhymes with So-shu, as previously noted, with the sea-god combination of the Acoetes narrative and is slightly associated with the Homer lines because of Tyro's appearance in the Odyssey.[120]

Most of the rhymes of the Acoetes narrative have been noted previously. Only the rhyme between the metamorphosis of

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116. The Cantos, II, p. 6.

117. Ibid.

118. Ibid.

119. Ibid. The Eleanor of this line is positively identified as Eleanor of Aquitaine in the following lines from Canto VII, p. 24.

> Eleanor (she spoiled in a British climate)
> "Ἔλανδρος and ῾Ελέπτολις, and
>   poor old Homer blind
>   blind as a bat,
> Ear, ear for the sea surge;
>   rattle of old men's voices.

120. Tyro appears in Book XI of the Odyssey. Odysseus sees her spirit in the underworld.
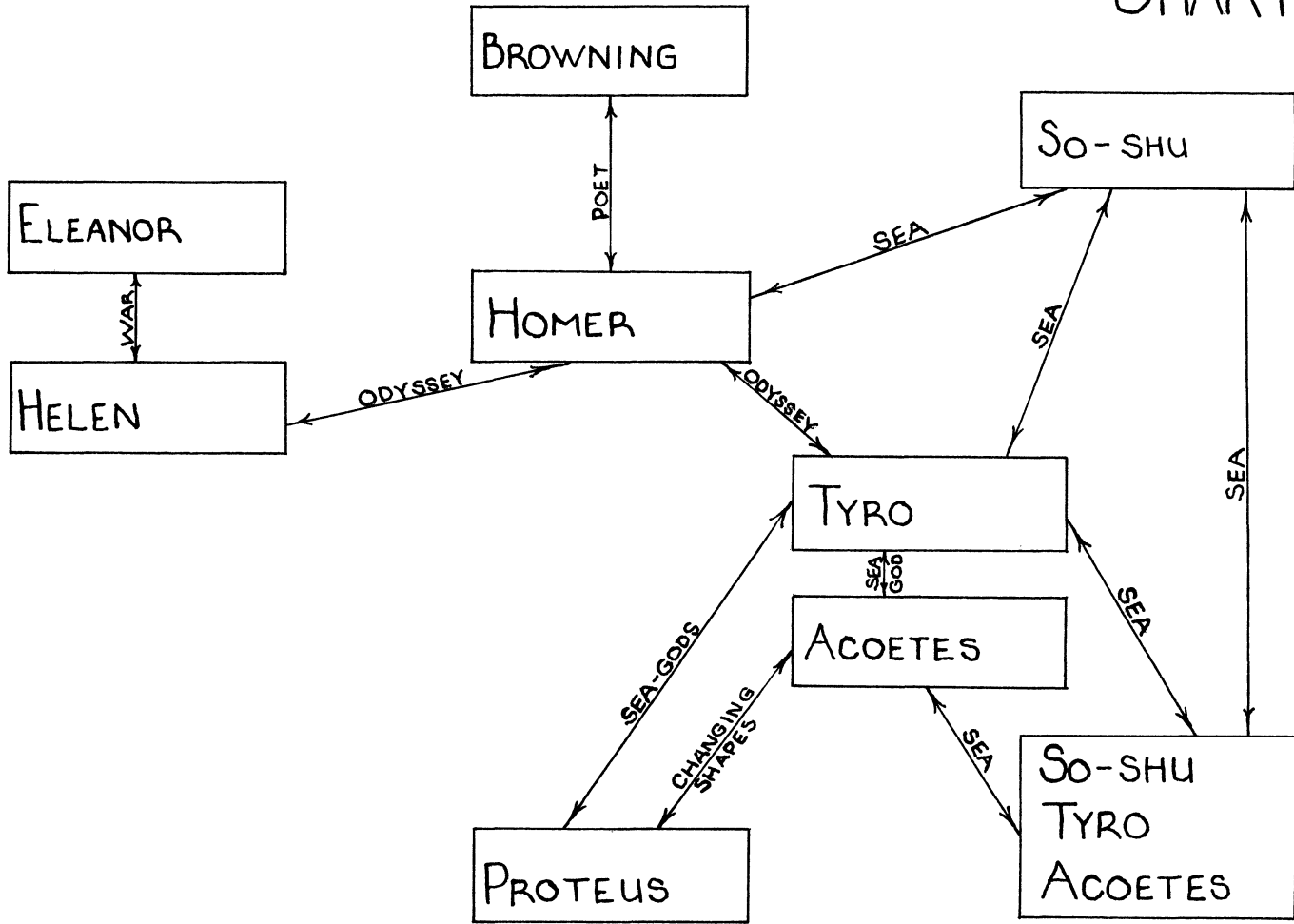
the boat and crew and the Proteus reference which closes the canto needs to be mentioned. Here the rhyme is two-fold: the changing shapes of the crew with Proteus' ability to change his shape, and sea setting of the Acoetes episode with Proteus as the old man of the sea.

The basic subject rhyme in Canto II is the sea. All of the rhyming subjects, except Browning's "Sordello" and Eleanor of Aquitaine, explicitly involve the sea, and both Browning and Eleanor are rhymed with subjects which involve the sea. The sea is present in So-shu, Homer, Helen, Tyro, Acoetes, and Proteus, furnishing a subject rhyme which runs throughout the canto. Over this basic rhyme are the other rhymes which cement the canto into an involved series of subject rhymes. (See chart number III).

The main source of complexity in subject rhyme is the large number of elements from which the poet may choose his rhyme in a set of subjects in contrast to the limited number of possible rhymes in a set of sounds. For example, a poet may rhyme the words mole and soul; any word chosen to rhyme with soul, such as hole, will also rhyme with mole because the number of possible sound echoes is limited by the first rhyme. When subject rhyme is being used, this first rhyme does not limit the number of possible second and third rhymes. Pound rhymes Browning with Homer because they are both great narrative poets and then goes on to rhyme Homer and So-shu by associating both of them with the sea. Thus he can make two completely different subject rhymes with only three subjects because each subject contains several possible rhymes while a

RELATIONS THROUGH SUBJECT RHYME IN CANTO II — CHART III

PAGE 6

PAGES 7,8

PAGE 9

PAGE 10

BROWNING

SO-SHU

ELEANOR

POET

HOMER

SEA

SEA

WAR

HELEN

ODYSSEY

ODYSSEY

TYRO

SEA

SEA

SEA-GODS

SEA
GOD

ACOETES

SEA

CHANGING SHAPES

SEA

PROTEUS

SO-SHU
TYRO
ACOETES

sound contains only one possible rhyme. This technique, that of making more than one rhyme on the same subject, makes it impossible to write out a neat rhyme scheme of Canto II.

Subject rhyme does not occur only within the canto, for Pound often uses it to link canto to canto. For example, the sea imagery of Canto I rhymes with the swimmers in the sea in Canto II who in turn rhyme with the swimmers described by Poggio in Canto III. This technique is used throughout The Cantos to draw together subjects which are only slightly similar. It is another of Pound's attempts to yoke together the subject matter groupings into a unified ideogram of considerable proportions.

Thus the heterogeneous cantos exhibit several of these techniques intended to make the ideogrammic unity of the poem more easily apprehended. Through subject rhyme and moments of poetic synthesis, Pound attempts to force together some of the varied subject matter of the poem, but most often he is content to pack the heterogeneous cantos with a variety of material, new material and references to the subject matter groupings, and then hope that the reader will be jarred into at least seeking for a common denominator when he finds, for example, Thomas Jefferson and Sigismundo side by side.

The lines in which Pound comments on The Cantos form the last body of material to be examined in this chapter's search for attempts to yoke together the subject matter groupings. Even on a first reading certain parts of The Cantos stand out as the poet speaking as poet. These asides often seem designed

only to remind the reader that he is reading and that the poet
is always behind the poem controlling and shaping it.

>Keep the peace, Borso!" Where are we?
>>"Keep on with the business,[121]

>Or another time . . . oh well, pass it.[122]

>(That, I assure you, happened.
>>Ego, scriptor cantilenae.)[123]

>And I have told you of how things were under Duke
>>Leopold in Siena[124]

>>And he wrote
>>a poem on the Beauties of Mougden
>and condensed the Ming Histories
>>literary kuss, and wus Emperor
>for at least 40 years.
>>Perhaps you will look up his verses.[125]

>>As a lone ant from a broken ant-hill
>from the wreckage of Europe, ego scriptor.[126]

>>and to change the value of money, of the unit
>of money
>>METATHEMENON
>>we are not yet out of _that_ chapter[127]

This list of lines from various parts of The Cantos con-
tains only a few of the passages in which Pound, like some
curious stagehand, can be seen peering over the set at the
audience. Pound wants to make certain the reader is always
conscious of The Cantos as an artifact in order for the jumble

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121. The Cantos, XXI, p. 96.

122. Ibid.

123. Ibid., XXIV, p. 112.

124. Ibid., LII, p. 3.

125. Ibid., LXI, p. 86.

126. Ibid., LXXVI, p. 36.

127. Ibid., LXXVII, p. 46.

of fact and fiction, of time and place, which is the world of
The Cantos to become acceptable to a literal minded reader.
These lines are Pound's way of getting around the reader who
demands a one for one correlation between art and life.

However, the most important comments on The Cantos are not
as obvious as the lines just mentioned. These comments are
usually indirect; that is, only occasionally is the connection
between the Odysseus passages, for example, and the plan of
the entire poem made explicit. In this most important group
of lines commenting on the poem, Pound presents to the reader
a point of view, a perspective to take towards The Cantos,
which should draw the subject matter groupings closer together
and thus make the ideogrammic unity of the poem more apparent.

The first element of the perspective offered the reader
is to consider The Cantos as an account of a voyage. The idea
of The Cantos as a voyage is introduced in Canto I with the
sailing of Odysseus from Circe's isle and reappears through-
out the poem in the many references to Odysseus, Hanno, and
the other voyagers. By viewing The Cantos as a voyage whose
landmarks are the subject matter groupings and whose goal is
apprehension of the poem's ideogrammic unity, the reader becomes
conscious of a purpose in the poem, of a sense of direction.

> Ere thou come to thy road's end,
> Knowledge the shade of a shade,
> Yet must thou sail after
>   knowledge
> Knowing less than drugged beasts.[128]

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128. Ibid., XLVII, p. 30.

Not until the "Pisan Cantos," when Pound believes his
personal experience has become significant enough to form a
subject grouping, does he explicitly associate himself with
Odysseus.

> ΟΫ ΤΙΣ, ΟΫ ΤΙΣ? Odysseus
>   the name of my family.[129]

With Pound as a modern Odysseus and The Cantos as his and his
reader's voyage after knowledge, the subject matter groupings
can be seen to have a tenuous thread of narrative running
through them.

In addition to proposing a perspective of The Cantos as
a voyage, Pound proposes a perspective on the form of the
voyage. The substance of the voyage, the subject matter of
the poem, has been cast into a form borrowed from the Divine
Comedy.

> Under the portico Kirbe . . . .
> "I think you must be Odysseus . . . .
>   feel better when you have eaten . . .
> Always with your mind on the past . . . .
> Ad Orcum Autem Quisquam?
>   Mondum nave nigra porvenit . . . .
> Been to hell in a boat yet?[130]

The voyage of The Cantos is through inferno, purgatory, and
paradise. It is significant that Canto I presets not only
Odysseus sailing from Circe's isle but also his calling up of
the dead. Lines scattered throughout the poem place the voy-
age in the inferno, purgatory, paradise framework.

> And if you will say that this tale teaches . . . .
>   a lesson, or that the Reverend Eliot
> has found a more natural language . . . . you who

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129. Ibid., LXXIV, p. 3.

130. Ibid., XXXIX, pp. 44-45.

> think you will
> get through hell in a hurry.[131]

By the "Pisan Cantos" the voyage has passed through what

Pound has variously referred to as hades, inferno, or hell.

> How soft the wind under Taishan
>   where the sea is remembered
> out of hell, the pit
> out of the dust and glare evil[132]
>
> we who have passed over Lethe[133]

Since the poem is not finished, a statement by Pound in

a letter to George Santayana is the only available evidence

that the voyage will end in paradise.

> I have also got to the end of a job or part of
> a job (money in history) and for personal ends have
> got to tackle philosophy or my "paradise."[134]

Some danger lies in attempting to draw too close a paral-

lel between The Cantos and the Divine Comedy. Although Pound

does take the inferno, purgatory, paradise framework from

Dante, he adapts it to his own purposes by adding other ele-

ments. Pound realizes the difficulties inherent in using the

Dantean structure for a modern poem.

> Stage set a la Dante is not modern truth. It
> may be O. K. but not as modern man's.[135]
>
> And we agree, je crois, that one can no longer
> put Mr. Purgatory forty miles high in the midst of
> Australian sheep land.[136]

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131. Ibid., XLVI, p. 25.

132. Ibid., LXXIV, p. 27.

133. Ibid.

134. D. D. Paige (ed.), The Letters of Ezra Pound, p. 331.
This letter is dated December 8, 1939. Cantos LII through
LXXI were published in 1940; "The Pisan Cantos" in 1948.

135. Ibid., p. 293.

136. Ibid., p. 190.

Consequently, Pound makes no attempt to recreate the
Dantean machinery. The inferno, purgatory, paradise frame-
work is merely suggested throughout The Cantos, adding a sec-
ond element to what might be called the overall metaphor of
the poem, a voyage through inferno, purgatory, and paradise.

Pound adds a third element to the perspective on The
Cantos he proposes to the reader. The voyage which The Cantos
describe is a voyage through a vision. Although the "osmosis
of persons,"137 the metamorphosis of subject into subject
which is the essence of the vision, first appears in the Acoetes
narrative in Canto II, the first, explicit mention of the poem
as vision does not appear until Canto V:

> Topaz I manage, and three sorts of blue;
>   but on the barb of time.
> The fire? always, and the vision always,
> Ear dull, perhaps, with the vision, flitting
> And fading at will.138

In these lines Pound characterizes The Cantos as a vision
which he, as a very conscious technician not completely lack-
ing in inspiration, has created. As was previously noted,
Pound always keeps both the artist and the artifact before the
reader. Possibly the only way to make a vision acceptable to
a modern reader is by emphasizing it as only a poetic device,
or so Pound appears to believe.

However, the most important aspect of the vision is that
all its parts exist simultaneously. The consecutive appear-
ance of the parts of the vision is caused by the poem being a

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137. The Cantos, XXIX, p. 145.

138. Ibid., V, P. 17.

record of a voyage through the vision. The reader, the voyager, must move through the poem, the vision; but the reader moves, not the poem or the vision.

> and saw the waves taking form as crystal,
> notes as facets of air,
> and the mind there, before them, moving,
> so that the notes needed not move.[139]

This idea of the vision existing all at once while the voyager moves through it, of the poem existing all at once while the reader moves through it, is one more attempt to meet the basic difficulty of the ideogrammic method when used in English. Pound attempts to force the reader into a realization of the essential simultaneity of The Cantos by providing him with this metaphor of a voyage through a vision.

> Lalage's shadow moves in the frescoe's knees
> She is blotted with Dirce's shadow
> dawn stands there fixed and unmoving.
> only we two have moved.[140]

By treating The Cantos as a voyage through a timeless vision, Pound hopes to suggest to the reader the simultaneity of the poem, but he admits that the attempt is not always successful.

(Clock-tick pierces the vision).[141]

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139. Ibid., XXV, p. 119.

140. Ibid., L, p. 43.

141. Ibid., V, p. 18.

CONCLUSION

The question posed at the beginning of this paper was, what is the unifying principle in The Cantos? Since definite groupings of subject matter were found in the poem, the question becomes, what are the relationships among these groupings?

The ideogrammic method was found to be the basic relationship between these groupings. They are related in much the same way as formalized pictures are related into an ideogram. The groupings are the particulars which when they are contemplated simultaneously form an idea, and this idea is the unity of The Cantos.

Although the ideogrammic method indicates the basic relationship among the groupings, it does not fully describe the unity of The Cantos, for this relationship is complicated by an important difference between an ideogram and The Cantos. An observer can apprehend the parts of an ideogram simultaneously, but a reader comes upon the subject matter groupings consecutively. Before The Cantos can function as an ideogram, Pound must make the reader aware of the poem's essential simultaneity, and his attempts to give the poem this simultaneity form relationships among the groupings which are secondary to the ideogrammic relationship.

Material from different groupings is juxtaposed in the heterogeneous cantos in what usually seems a random fashion. But sometimes these varied references are related by explicit, transitional statements, by subject rhymes, or by moments of poetic synthesis. Pound suggests to the reader a perspective

towards The Cantos which emphasizes the coexistence of the groupings. Besides these relationships which I have found, Pound in a letter to his father suggests another, a fugal pattern,[142] which I have not discussed because I feel an extended analogy with musical forms is an approach to The Cantos outside of the scope of this paper. All these devices create secondary relationships among the subject matter groupings, relationships intended to make the ideogrammic unity of the poem more easily grasped. By drawing the groupings together with these relationships, Pound hopes to overcome the problems inherent in using the ideogrammic method in a long poem.

I believe that Pound has successfully met these problems, but of course my opinion is based only on my own experiences in reading The Cantos. The two greatest obstacles to a successful reading of the poem are the necessity of keeping in mind over five hundred pages at once and unfamiliarity with the ideogrammic method. A reader who is willing to spend time reading and re-reading the poem, however, can surmount both of these obstacles. Consequently I believe that The Cantos are a success--if the reader is willing to devote the necessary time and energy to the poem.

But for the average reader the poem is chaos.

> All of which is mere matter for ....rs and Harvard instructors unless I can pull it off as reading matter, singing matter, shouting matter, the tale of the tribe.[143]

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142. Paige (ed.), The Letters of Ezra Pound, p. 210.

143. Ibid., p. 294.

If judged by these standards, The Cantos are a failure, and there can be little hope that the last sixteen cantos will improve this situation.

The limited scope of this paper's inquiry does not do justice to many fine qualities in The Cantos. The strength of Pound's translations from the Odyssey, the exactness of the imagery describing scenes on the Mediterranean, the humor in many of the modern cantos, and above all the mastery of sound exhibited throughout the poem are but a few aspects of The Cantos whose success is beyond question. Most readers will be put off by the structural complexity of the poem and will find only moments of brilliant poetry, but after the careful reading which I believe The Cantos deserve, some readers will grasp the structural unity of the poem. Only then will they realize the extent of Pound's achievement.

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