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Four Voices of Pound
in
Cantos I-XVII

Malcolm Childress
April 18, 1986

Between 1922 and 1924, Ezra Pound completed the first sixteen Cantos. He had published three Cantos in 1917, but suspended work on them shortly thereafter. It was not until 1922, after he had moved to Paris that he resumed work on the Cantos, piecing together what now stand as the first sixteen by the summer of 1924. This places the creation of Cantos I-XVI at the same time as the writing of Ulysses and "The Wasteland." Cantos XVII-XXVII were published in 1929. In July of 1922 Pound wrote of the first Cantos in a letter:

The first 11 cantos are preparation of the palette. I have to get down all the colours or elements I want for the poem. Some perhaps too enigmatically and abbreviatedly. I hope, heaven help me, to bring them into some sort of design and architecture later.¹

Because these first Cantos represent such a freshly prepared palette, they provide an excellent microcosm in which to examine the elements of Pound's art. Although Canto XVII was written later than the first sixteen, sometime between 1922 and 1928, it adheres so closely to them thematically and stylistically, in many ways tying elements of the first sixteen together, that studying it with I-XVI is helpful in gaining a glimpse of Pound's nascent "design and architecture."

These Cantos begin with a translation of an incident in the Odyssey where Odysseus summons the shades out of Hades so that he may find Tiresias to seek prophecy. Before he can reach Tiresias, the dead begin to crowd around him. Odysseus reaches for his sword to "keep off the impetuous, impotent dead."⁽⁴⁾² By opening with this incident, Pound dramatizes his own poetic struggle in

the Cantos--going back to the world of the dead to find and return with wisdom. The Cantos can be seen as Pound's coming to terms with the dead, with the hellish and with the past; a search for knowledge to negotiate the present. Pound struggles to manage the shades of history which he evokes in his quest to discover and update past value. Like Odysseus, he is potentially threatened by the potential of the "impetuous, impotent dead" to overwhelm him.

One fruitful way to look at this artistic struggle is to examine the use of voices in the Cantos. T.S. Eliot has said, in an essay titled, "The Three Voices of Poetry" that, "the world of a great poetic dramatist is a world in which the creator is everywhere present, and everywhere hidden."³ By managing voices so that he is "everywhere present and everywhere hidden," Pound dramatizes his struggle without indulging in it. He avoids centering the poem around his own ego by breaking up the poetic consciousness into different voices. In finding voices to present differing points of view within the world and within himself, Pound both invites the reader to discover who the poet is through comparisons among voices, and also to resist that discovery. The position the reader is in mirrors Pound's dilemma as he struggles to synthesize elements of his heritage into a modern epic vision without artificially imposing order on them. Vocal patterns thus create meanings which underscore and accentuate themes.

I hear four different voices of Pound--a writer voice, a personal voice, a historian voice, and a visionary voice. The Cantos' social vision, its coming to terms with past and present

cultural values, is presented through the relationships among these voices. The vocal patterns in the Cantos represent both Pound talking to himself and Pound listening to his cultural heritage.

Four general patterns operate as a vocal logic. First, the voice of Pound as writer exerts a framing influence which contributes to how the other voices are heard and interpreted by highlighting their subjectivity and relationships to literary traditions. Second, the historian's voice responds to the personal voice by presenting material which speaks to the situation of the personal voice. Third, the historian's voice discovers and yields to secondary voices, voices which are not Pound's, in a sort of mediumship or possession which liberates Pound from the immediate moment. Pound's voice as historian arbitrates between the needs of the personal Pound and his visionary potential. Finally, the visionary voice is unstable, that is, not a unique and distinct voice, but rather an intensification of other voices into an otherworldly mode. It must borrow from other voices, be heard in translation or be suspended until other voices have controlled their material.

The voice of Pound as writer frames the body of the poem and keeps the reader constantly aware of the nature of the poetry as self-conscious artistry. This voice is first heard at the end of the first Cantos saying:

Lie quiet Divus, I mean that is Andreas Divus
In officina 1538, out of Homer.(5)

This abrupt imprecation to Andreas Divus, a translator into Latin of Homer, reveals the theme of putting the dead to rest and

makes the reader conscious of the Odyssey passage as a translation. Because the interrupting voice of Pound the writer is not set off by spacing or punctuation, it merges to some extent with Odysseus'. Even the "I" pronoun is repeated. Pound the writer comes to terms with these literary ancestors, both Homer and Divus, by letting his voice simultaneously merge with theirs, framing them, evoking some and telling others to "lie quiet." With this first interruption we are made aware that this voice is both present and hidden, that it addresses other writers, and that it modifies how we hear what goes on around it by manipulating the reader's suspension of disbelief. It punctures the illusion that we are sitting after dinner listening to Odysseus recount his adventures, invitng us not to suspend our disbelief in the artifice of dramatic poetry, but to investigate it.

But having said that much, in the opening of the second Canto, the same voice announces, in a tone of frustration and bewilderment,

Hang it all Robert Browning,
there can be but the one 'Sordello.'
But Sordello, and my Sordello? (6)

Here the same voice, characterized by first person, direct address and simple syntax, enlarges on the problems of his task. The voice again negotiates with its literary ancestors. Competition and fraternity are evident in the colloquial address to Browning. Also evident, however, is a sense of frustration that there is no figure comparable to Sordello available to the writer Pound. Pound does not want to dramatize an historical figure merely to project his own ego's struggles. The writer

voice enters the poem early and hints that the poem is a new kind of heroic art concerned equally with what heroes do and how those deeds are conveyed through language. Divus and Odysseus, Browning and Sordello become pairs in the eyes of Pound the writer. But then this voice disappears.

We do not hear it again until the sixth Canto, when it reappears in its familiar position at the beginning of the Canto:

What you have done Odysseus,
We know what you have done...(21)³

It is unclear specifically to what deed of Odysseus it refers, but the framing voice seems to want to keep the reader aware of its presence in order to link the internal action of this Canto with the other passages about Odysseus and also to segue from a Homeric context to a Renaissance one in a way which suggests the judging function of literature to re-define value for each age. The writer voice puts its characters on the spot with this sort of direct address, implying a sort of double status as exalted and human which makes a hero vulnerable to the changing values of each age.

And here it seems to jeopardize Odysseus' standing as archetypal hero. The slyness of "we know what you have done..." suggests a re-interpretation of the Greek hero by intimating that the legendary cunning may be manipulation and egotism. In Canto XX Pound expands on this alternative view of Odysseus:

"What gain with Odysseus
"They that died in the whirlpool
"And after many vain labours,
"Living by stolen meat, chained to the rowingbench,
"That he should have a great fame...(93)

This writer voice appears again at the beginning of Canto

VIII, paraphrasing Eliot's "The Wasteland":

These fragments you have shelved (shored).
"Slut!" "Bitch!" Truth and Calliope
Slanging each other sous les lauriers: (28)

By framing the first Malatesta Canto with these remarks, the writer's voice further raises questions of how to interpret the past and how to view literature. It highlights the conflict between the goals of objective history and heroic poetry. After this the writer voice fades out, but it influences how we hear the larger arrangement of voices throughout the Cantos by making the reader aware of a hidden but present poet and by linking the internal action of the Cantos to larger themes in literary history.

A second distinct voice is the personal Pound. In the vocal arrangement of Cantos I-XVII this voice strikes most of the unfulfilled notes--notes of aspiration confusion, nostalgia and questioning. It often assumes a kind of wistful, postcard tone. The personal voice is dramatized as both a speaker and a listener. It is self-reflecting but not entirely self-knowledgeable. It is heard first in Canto III:

I sat on the Dogana'a steps
For the gondolas cost too much that year,
And there were not "those girls," there was one face
And the Buccentoro twenty yards off howling "Stretti."
And the lit cross-beams that year, in the Morosini,
And peacocks in Kore's house, or there may have been. (11)

In this passage we hear a Pound limited by lack of money, by unresolved romance and very much bound up in time. This voice is confined to a specific historical moment, Venice, circa 1908. The voice hints at loneliness as Pound sits outside, isolated from the singing in the saloon. Suggested also is erotic

unfulfillment. The "one face" seems distant and inaccessible, a face without a body.

The personal voice appears again at the end of Canto IV, where Pound is again sitting:

And we sit here...
There in the arena...(16)

The plural pronoun indicates that some of the loneliness has been dissipated, but the setting of the arena suggests at once an audience, a fight to the death, and an impulse to re-live the cultural life of the classical past. This dual location or dislocation is emphasized by the paradoxical wording of "here" and "there."

This same phrase is echoed at the beginning of Canto XII:

And we sit here
 under the wall,
Arena Romana, Diocletian's, les gradins
 quarente-trois rangees en calcaire.(53)

Once again on the steps, this time forty-three tiers of limestone. The limestone steps recall the emphasis on building materials in the preceding Malatesta Cantos. It is as if the personal voice has been listening to the intervening Cantos, and learning. No longer fragmented into "here" and "there," the voice is able to focus on its immediate physical environment.

Shifting into a colloquial American dialect, (e.g. "two buck niggers chained to him... to keep 'em from slipping off in the night") this personal voice begins its descent into the hell of the present with the seedy tales of Baldy Bacon, Jose Dos Santos and eventually quoting a monologue by Jim X.⁴ The personal voice begins to change here from nostalgic, romantic, and questioning

to its opposites--vituperative, cynical and almost paranoid:

...bored with their bloomin' primness...
Bored with the way their mouths twitched
over their cigar ends (55)

It is this side of the personal voice which speaks, or rather sputters, the Hell Cantos, XIV and XV.

The opening of XIV, "Io venni in luogo d'ogni luce muto;"(I came into a lightless place, p.61)⁵ echoes in its flat, first person declaration Canto III's, "I sat on the Dogana's steps." Here the earlier implicit dissatisfactions in the voice become explicit. Its contempt, disgust and hate are vented. In a purging almost overpowering to both reader and speaker, the emotional intensification of the personal voice pushes it into a visionary mode, capable of seeing the foul underworld which surrounds the "obstructors of distribution." This voice ends XV by describing an escape from hell. Vocally it climaxes in a series of breathless couplets which convey an immediateness and physicality of perception not heard before in the poem:

And the shield tied under me, woke;
The gate swung on its hinges;
Panting like a sick dog, staggered,
Bathed in alkali, and in acid.
Helios o Helios
 blind with the sunlight,
Swollen-eyed, rested,
 lids sinking, darkness unconscious. (67)

We hear in the progression of the personal voice a movement from isolation and cynicism to a recognition of present, sensual experience.

The historian side of Pound has another distinctive voice that discovers a range of secondary voices and structurally acts as a response to the personal voice. It is in the giving way to

secondary voices where Pound most risks losing control, of being flooded with other voices. By dramatizing so much material through secondary voices he risks that the reader will not follow the shifts. There is also a tendency that the poet who is "everywhere present and everywhere hidden" may be simply hidden, obscured by the tonal and thematic varieties of his characters.

The historian voice also comes closest to being a narrator in this mostly non-narrative poem. Its chief distinguishing feature is the use of the word "and" at the beginning of a line:

And he came down from Bivar, Myo Cid,
With no hawks left on their perches,
And no clothes there in the presses,
And left his box of sand, with pawn-brokers...(12)

or,

And he delighted himself in chancons
And mixed with the men of the court
And went to the court of Richard St. Boniface
And was there taken with love for his wife...(22)

Pound uses the conjunction so often that it has the effect of a narrative chant. It creates a unique temporal effect, a feeling of simultaneity and linkage, a sense that history gathers itself like the folds of a sheet.

The style of this voice is to plunge into obscure historical story-telling with no hint of context or motive. Great demands are made of the reader to identify references and link those references to the rest of the poem. In this way a great freedom is given the reader to construct his own poem. This voice easily paraphrases or quotes voices out of the past. For example, when narrating the life of Eleanor of Aquitaine in Canto VI, the historian voice lapses into French, mimicking an on-the-spot

witness, "Et quand lo reis Lois lo entendit/ mout er fasche (And when King Louis heard it he was very angry, p.21). In the Malatesta Cantos, VIII-XI, Pound's historian voice gives way to intertexts--letters to and from Sigismund Malatesta, the Renaissance warrior and patron. The voices of Malatesta and his correspondents dominate VIII and IX, culminating in the "post-bag" section of IX where fragments of Sigismund's correspondence are run together without comment.

The last voice I want to identify, before turning to a discussion of the dynamics among voices, is Pound's visionary voice. Visionary because it speaks of a divine world, finding a diction, a syntax and moreover a music to express that perception. This voice is unstable, not a consistent frame of mind, but rather a compression, ecstatic or repugnant, of other voices, particularly the personal, which transforms the scope, vocabulary and sound of those voices into something otherworldly. Its unique vocabulary emphasizes light, water and air, precious metals, the Greek pantheon, and, in the Hell Cantos, garbage and excrement. This voice speaks of the natural as opposed to the social world:

Marble trunks out of stillness
...the light now, not of the sun
 Chrysophrase
And the water green clear, and blue clear
On, to the great cliffs of amber...(76)

It appears first in Canto II and is the voice which adopts Ovid's story of metamorphosis. It recurs in III and IV, but is not fully realized in these Cantos, because its vision is limited by the personal Pound's tendency to observe rather than participate. The visionary voice is long silent after IV, but then amazingly

strikes its note again in the midst of Malatesta's struggles in Canto IX. It interrupts the historical voice to intone the haunting verse, "In the gloom, the gold gathers the light against it."(51) This voice appears in its negative mode during the Hell Cantos as a visionary intensification of the personal Pound's disgust with Usura. It identifies itself with the neo-Platonist Plotinus in XV, and in XVI with Blake:

And the running form, naked, Blake,
Shouting, whirling his arms, the swift limbs,
Howling against the evil,
his eyes rolling,
Whirling like flaming cart-wheels, (68)

Like the personal Pound, this side of the poet hears "howling," but it is the howling of another visionary. The present participles convey the tremendous energy with which the visionary voice sings.

Finally, we hear this voice clearly in XVII, which is as far as this discussion will trace it. It is really only in Canto XVII that the visionary voice can sustain itself clearly and powerfully because it manages to be united with both the personal Pound and the historian voice:

Borso, Carmagnola, the men of craft, i vitrei,
Thither, at one time, time after time,
And the waters richer than glass,
Bronze gold, the blaze over the silver,
Dye-pots in the torch-light,
The flash of wave under prows,
And the silver beaks, rising and crossing.(78)

Here the historian's references to Borso, Carmagnola and the craftsmen provide the basis for seeing the timelessness of Venice which is a starting point for a visionary intensification of the personal Pound's perceptions of night water scenes. In this way

the visionary voice takes historical reference and personal reflection as a foundation from which to approach poetically a divinely charged world. This kind of synthesis brings us to the next stage in an examination of voice--the dynamics and patterns among the voices.

The first pattern I want to comment on concerning the vocal structure is that Pound's writer voice frames the entirety of the first seventeen Cantos. The intrusive voice of the writer which asserts itself in Cantos I, II, VI and VIII is always addressing people--other writers, translators, heroes. These addresses always come at the first or last of a Canto. This voice reveals a concern with the poem as poem, with the Cantos place in literary history. The voice of the writer Pound, by consistently calling attention to the artifice of the poem and its status as an inheritor of literary tradition, supplies its own context. It suggests how we are to read.

By addressing Andreas Divus, a sixteenth century translator of the Odyssey, in the midst of a passage from the Odyssey, the writer voice reminds the reader that this is a translation, that it is subject to all the interpretive distortions, omissions and additions which translation implies. This self-consciousness of artifice which the writer voice forces on the work compromises the authority of all other voices. The voice of the writer speaks of Truth and Calliope cussing each other out, dramatizing the conflict in Pound's art between facts and fantasy, between music and objectivity. The effect this has on the other voices is that it heightens the contrast of a poetic consciousness being present and hidden at the same time. It invites the reader to hold a dual

experience of the poetry in mind; the voices are both evidences of literary construction and dramatized human experience. This voice invites us to enter into the modern theme of art's influence on daily life. The way our sense of reality is managed through language is structured in the Cantos by this voice.

In framing the Malatesta Cantos by this battle between Truth and Calliope, the writer's voice qualifies their content and purpose. Does the account of the Italian captain stand as an example of the heroic? Is Malatesta, Pound's epic figure, the Sordello which he begrudged Browning? Or is Sigismund Malatesta the crowning example of how translation and interpretation can turn a rapacious and licentious rogue into a hero? As Michael F. Harper has pointed out, Pound's literary treatment of Malatesta is far different from the "historical" record in its assessment of Sigismund's character.⁶ The voice of Pound the writer raises the question of the extent to which fantasy--imagination and poetry--generates the set of ideals which are culturally seen as heroic.

The historian voice's reliability and objectivity are put in question. This voice points out the paradoxes of literature as a vehicle for cultural transmission of value. It suggests implicitly that humanity can create poetic structures which extend beyond the capacities of human action. The hero-making function of literature can render figures divorced from the limitations of non-fictional humanity, too good to be true. "What you have done, Odysseus"(21) may be to have represented ideals which real people in present time cannot fulfill. "But Sordello,

and my Sordello?"(6) asks not just about who Pound's epic hero can be, but also about the legitimacy of the hero-making process. By speaking to issues beyond the poem and connecting the poem with the concerns of its literary tradition, Pound's voice as writer makes the questions of value, truth and beauty, which the content of the poem addresses, integral to the vocal shape of the poetry.

In the second pattern the historian voice responds to the personal voice through juxtaposition, thematic similarity and echoing, through shaping subjective connections in the reader's mind. The personal voice emphasizes sounds like the revelers in the Buccentoro "howling 'Stretti'." This sensitivity creates the context for a call and response kind of dynamic as do the personal voice's notes of nostalgia, questioning and unfulfillment for instance the ellipses which trail off after, "And we sit here..." seem waiting for answers or revelations.

Here I would like to explore three examples of this dynamic. The first in Canto III which begins with the personal voice, "I sat on the Dogana's steps...." This voice then gives way to a visionary passage, ("Gods float in the azure air..."p.11), but it is unsustained vision. The lines of this passage reflect the same cognitive pattern as the personal voice; it catalogues perceptions of Panisks, dryads, and maelids without participating in this divine world. The parenthetical remark, "as Poggio has remarked,"⁷ indicates the same laconic detachment as "And there were peacocks in Kore's house, or there might have been." Furthermore, the unresolved impression of the last verse, "Green veins in the turquoise,/ Or, the gray steps lead up under the

cedars," suggests an incompleteness and duality of vision. The twin perception of the last verse calls attention to the skepticism Pound himself seems to feel about his visionary voice.

The voice of the historian steps in to mediate between the personal and visionary voices. This voice is not nostalgic, not sentimental, not visionary. It speaks in a third person, past tense. "My Cid rode up to Burgos," it declares, apparently feeling no need to inform the reader that he is now inside the Spanish epic, El Cid, in the eleventh century. This voice assumes such detail. The historian voice talks about Ruy Diaz, the Cid, and also about the murder of Ignez de Castro in 1345. Alfonso had her killed because she was the wife of Pedro, Alfonso's heir, and represented a threat to Alfonso's throne. After Alfonso died, Pedro had her body exhumed and placed next to his throne.⁸ These two incidents turn out to speak directly to the situation of the personal voice which was heard at the Canto's beginning. The figure of the Cid illustrates a man subjected to the limits of isolation and alienation, some of the feelings which Pound seems to have as he sits on the Dogana's steps. The episode from El Cid further shows Diaz swindling Jewish merchants Raquel and Vidas to "get pay for his menie" in order to continue "breaking his way to Valencia." (12) This resolution of the Cid's dilemma comments on Pound's own poverty by providing an example of a man surviving by his wits.

The Ignez de Castro incident speaks to the romantic yearning of the Pound who sees not "'those girls'" but only "one face." The incident lends a historical precedent for Pound's feelings of

separation and also comments on the distance and inaccessibility which the perception of the faceless body suggests. In Canto XXX Pound comments more about this murder, stressing the decay in time:

Time is the evil. Evil
 A day and a day
Walked the young Pedro baffled
 a day and a day
After Ignez was murdered.
Came the Lords in Lisboa
 a day and a day
In homage. Seated there
 dead eyes
Dead hair under the crown
The King still young beside her. (147,148)

Romantic inaccessibility is thus tied to a realization of mortality which makes Pound's romantic perception seem both tragic and absurd.

The historical voice concludes Canto II with the images of a disintegrating fresco ("Drear waste, the pigment flakes from the stone," p.12) in Mantua and the tattered pennant of another Mantuan, Isabella d'Este, "silk tatters, Nec Spe Nec Metu" (with neither hope nor fear). Paradoxically, the fresco still stands because it is in the Canto. Likewise, Isabella's pennant still flies. The way poetry thus resists the decay in time provides an alternative response to the temporal isolation heard in the personal voice.

Another example of this pattern of historian responding to personal voice occurs on a larger scale in Cantos V-VIII. When the personal voice trails off in ellipses at the end of Canto IV, "and we sit here..."(16), it virtually disappears until the beginning of Canto XII when it appears again from the arena--"And we sit here/Under the wall,/Arena Romana."(53) In between IV and

XII the historical voice is the controlling voice which manages and narrates the poetry. Canto V begins with Pound talking to himself, clarifying part of what is going on within him:

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. Weaving with points of gold,
Gold-yellow, saffron...
Titter of sound about me, always.(17)

This passage shows the tension between Pound's visionary capacity and his personal limits to express what is going on inside and around him. His ear is "dull" and the "vision" has a "will" of its own which Pound's will seems unable to challenge, furthering the idea of the poet as a medium.

From this acknowledgement of the personal limitations to vision, the Canto moves to the stories of various French troubadours before coming to the incident of John Borgia's murder, perhaps at the instigation of his brother, in 1497. Canto VI gives a short, oblique biography of Eleanor of Aquitaine and then mentions the intrigue between the Italian thirteenth century troubadour Sordello and Cunizza da Romano, the wife of an Italian noble. In VI we are so cut off from any mention of context, that only dedicated study of the references makes clear what is being talked about. Canto VII is a diatribe against the deadness of contemporary culture. Cantos VIII through XI deal with Malatesta. The point of this summary is that in these Cantos the historian voice takes over the poem in order to overcome the limitations of the personal Pound through a summoning of the dead.

In these Cantos the historian voice performs an evocation of heroes. The troubadours Poicebot, Maensac, Mauleon, Sordello, the Renaissance Helen, Eleanor and the warrior/patron Malatesta represent a struggle to negotiate the competing demands of art, politics and love. By calling forth these figures and telling their stories, Pound's historian voice in a sense claims these figures. Through these evocations, the poet no longer is isolated, but rather is in company with kindred spirits. By making clear who he is with, the poet can gain the personal strength to single out who he is against in the Hell Cantos, XIV and XV.

The historian evokes the dead heroes in order to overcome the temporal and cultural isolation which the voice of the personal Pound expresses in Canto IV. Cantos V and VI seem exploratory and searching; they are efforts to discover or recover heroes for the modern world. The voice shifts quickly from Poicebot to Mauleon to Maensac, touching upon incidents and outlines of these troubadours' careers. In these Cantos it is almost as if the historian voice is mumbling under its breath, reviewing the shades of history, screening candidates, until Malatesta emerges.

In the Malatesta Cantos two changes occur in the way the historical scholar voice speaks. First, it utilizes intertexts, primarily correspondence culled from Italian histories, to let Sigismund and his contemporaries speak for themselves. Secondly, in Cantos IX, X, and XI the voice speaks as a member of Malatesta's army. The historian voice sheds its distance and becomes a participant in the action, yet the difference between

a reporting, backward-looking voice and an eye-witness is muted. This demonstrates the artificiality of the distinctions between dramatic and non-dramatic poetry. The historian voice incorporates the voice of the colloquial soldier and it becomes another way for Pound to speak.

The historian voice, through its triumph of incorporating and synthesizing the profane and the prejudiced with the heroic in the voice of Malatesta's soldier, opens the door for Pound to speak this way personally in Canto XII:

Baldy Bacon

bought all the little copper pennies in Cuba:
Un centavo, dos centavos,
told his peons to "bring 'em in,"
"Bring 'em in to the main shack," said Baldy,
And the peons brought 'em;(53)

The voices in the poem mimic each other. On the inter-Canto level, the voice of the historian can be heard summoning up allies and new ways of being, acting, and talking in order to overcome the loneliness and estrangement heard in the personal voice.

A third example of the historical voice responding to the needs of the personal voice comes in the juxtaposition of Canto XII and Canto XIII. In Canto XII, the personal voice of Pound's disenchantment with the modern world begins to speak, having found its own idiom through the voice of a fourteenth century mercenary. Canto XII includes the stories of Baldy Bacon, an acquaintance of Pound's who once cornered the market on Cuban centavos and the story of Jose Maria Dos Santos who made a killing on pigs fattened on corn spoilt in the hull of a wrecked ship. It ends with a story by a character called Jim X. about a

sailor who raises a whore's son, thinking that he is the mother. The common theme of these three stories is the absurd beginnings of fortunes--Bacon's on pennies, Dos Santos' on water-soaked grain, and the sailor's on the industry of maternal love. In the repugnant tone of voice in this Canto, "bored with their bloomin' primness...Bored with the way their mouths twitched/over their cigar ends," (55) there is an implicit plea for an alternative to the absurdity, greed and unfairness which the personal Pound perceives in his economic system.

The next Canto is the reply of the historian voice to the personal voice. Its placing directly after XII and its theme of personal order indicate that it is a response to the previous Canto. The voice shifts to a respectably distanced third person; the present is abandoned. The scene is China, circa 500 b.c. This is the historian voice vacationing in Asia. It begins:

Kung walked
 by the dynastic temple
and into the cedar grave,
 and then out by the lower river,
And with him Khieu Tchi
 and Tian the low speaking
And "we are unknown," said Kung, (58)

In the immense quiet of history Pound the historian focuses on Confucious, dramatizing him, letting him say for himself that:

If a man not have order within him
He cannot spread order about him (59)

Coming immediately after the personal voice has just raised its disgust and concern with with the absurdity and disorder of the present, the historical voice's paraphrase of Confucious has an enormous impact. Its quietness is quieter, its wisdom simpler than if it had stood alone. Here again the voice of Pound as

historian responds through a juxtaposition to the voice of the personal Pound and the result is a dynamic tension, reaching for the extremes of human experience.

The third vocal dynamic in Cantos I-XVII which I want to discuss is the tendency for the voice of the historian to yield to other voices, and to permit historical figures to speak for themselves. This dynamic creates a poly-vocal effect of multiple viewpoint. By opening his historian voice to the multiple voices of history, Pound avoids the solipsism which might come from speaking and singing only in his own voices. The aesthetic risk is that control may be sacrificed. And sometimes the Cantos do seem almost out of control vocally, as if the voices are arbitrarily entering the poem, in transitions so abrupt and random that the feeling of a poetic consciousness both hidden and present is lost.

For instance, in the "post bag" section of Canto IX fragments of Malatesta's correspondence are run together haphazardly:

"...gone over it with all the foremen
and engineers. And about the silver
for the small medal..."

"Magnifice ac poten"

"because the walls of..."(39)

The historian voice which we rely on to filter the fragments of past discourse here lets them run on uninterruptedly. This vocal vertigo weakens the traditional concept of history as linear and logical. A vigorously chaotic jumble of thoughts, actions and feelings predominates instead. This type of history is not easily translatable; the voices resist organization. By yielding to the

fragments of the past as fragments, the historian voice dramatizes the difficulties of reconstructing the past. This yielding process thus accentuates the same issues of interpretation and translation to which the writer voice points.

"Titter of sound about me always,"(17) declares the poet in Canto V. In some ways the historian voice in Pound is more like a medium, simply evoking the voices of the past as they register. In some cases it could even be said that this mediumship is almost a type of possession and the poem a kind of exorcism. The section in Canto V concerning John Borgia's murder is a good example of this mediumship. The story starts:

John Borgia is bathed at last.(Clock-tick pierces the vision)
Tiber, dark with the cloak, wet cat gleaming in patches
Click of the hooves, through garbage,
Clutching the greasy stone. "And the cloak floated."
Slander is up betimes. But Varchi of Florence,
Steeped in a different year, and pondering Brutus,
Then [Greek]
"Dog-eye!!" (to Alessandro)
"Whether for love of Florence," Varchi leaves it,
Saying "I saw the man, came up with his at Venice,
"I, one wanting the facts
"And no mean labor....Or for a privy spite?
Our Benedetto leaves it.
But "I saw the man. Se pia?
O empia? For Lorenzaccio had thought of stroke in the open
But uncertain (for the Duke went never unguarded)
"And would have thrown him from the wall
"Yet feared this might not end him," or lest Alessandro
Know not by whom death came, O se credesse(19)

The parenthetical "clock-tick pierces the vision" contrasts the co-present, pan-historicity of this section with "real" time. It calls attention to the process of conjuring up the past which the historian voice begins with its haunting declaration, "John Borgia is bathed at last." The telling detail, "And the cloak floated," floats itself. Its speaker is un-named and no punctuation sets it off. The temporal signal of "Then" refers to

both the visionary process and the narrative of the incident because the Greek which follows is Agamemnon in a tragedy of Aeschylus shouting for "Silence, I am struck a second time!" The historical voice which is being possessed with this vision hears the incident synthetically; Agamemnon speaks for Borgia in the open, associative region of Pound's consciousness.

Similarly, the voice of Benedetto Varchi, Florentine historian, is not integral to the event but rather the voice of another chronicler.¹⁰ By simulataneously dramatizing the incident and presenting a historians interpretation of it, Pound uses voice to show the interconnectedness of events and their tellings. Here the historian voice's process seems to be one of controlled loss of control as Pound's voice echoes and incorporates other voices.

The historical voice's capacity as medium enables an *intensification and* ~~amplification~~ amplification of topic through the secondary voices. The "titter of sound about me, always"(17) is not a nuisance for Pound, but a resource. By self-consciously demonstrating this process in Canto V, he reveals that another purpose of opening up to secondary voices is to liberate the self from the constraints of the immediate historical moment. This liberation is crucial as an in-between step if the isolated, personal Pound who is stuck in the present is to see and sustain a poetic vision.

The last pattern I want to mention is created by the instability of the visionary voice. The incident from the Odyssey in Canto I is again a model. Odysseus must first clear his way

through the shades before he can meet with the prescient Tiresias. Likewise, Pound can only meet his transcendent world, can only let his ecstatic voice sing after he has cleared away the complicating, unburied, Elpenor-like spectres which cloud his vision. Thus in Canto II, the account from Ovid's Metamorphoses of the divine world impinging upon the human world is prefaced by:

...murmur of old men's voices:
"Let her go back to the ships,
Back among Grecian faces, lest evil come on our own,
Evil and further evil, and a curse cursed on our children,
Moves, yes she moves like a goddess
And has the face of a god (6)

Helen's eroticism is so close to divine that it threatens the order, the hierarchy of human, angelic, and divine which holds together the Homeric and Poundian cosmos. The old men voices sound the note of caution and put the spectre of Helen's beauty in its perspective so that in the next lines a visionary voice is heard, singing of:

Twisted arms of the sea-god,
Lithe sinews of water, gripping her, cross-hold,
And the blue-gray glass of the wave tents them,
Glare azure of water, cold-welter, close cover.

...
There is a wine-red glow in the shallows,
a tin flash in the sun-dazzle.(6,7)

In the early appearances of the visionary voice, in Canto II and then again in Canto IV, the theme is one of transgression against the divine world. Failure to recognize Dionysius seals the boatmen's fate in Canto II. In Canto IV Actaeon is punished for glimpsing Diana while she bathes. The instability in Canto IV takes the form of a slowness and hesitancy indicated by the preponderance of repetition; "Gold, gold...blaze,blaze in the

sun...Stumbling, stumbling along in the wood."(14) The rhythm of the voice is so slow--hypnotized almost--that it suggests a difficulty of perception. It is as if the watcher needs slow-motion to catch all the detail. Also, the inconsistency of the voice when it suddenly pulls out of its divine vocabulary to compare Diana's valley to the Church roof in Poitiers, reveals a lack of complete perception, a difficulty with vision.

It is not until after the historical voice has found its heroes, particularly Malatesta, or rather come to terms with the poetic capacity to create heroes out of the imagination, to populate the world with ideals, and meet its demons in the Hell Cantos, that the visionary voice is really heard in Canto XVII.

Canto XVII is remarkable because here for the first, and perhaps only time in the Cantos, the visionary voice sings a sustained passage. The visionary voice in this Canto is actually a synthesis of the voices of the personal, the writer, the historian and the visionary because it adopts and transforms elements from all these voices to achieve a density and scope not found before. The "So that" which abruptly opens the Canto is not as abrupt if thought of as a response to the "So that" of Pound's writer voice which so abruptly ended Canto I. The first-person ("my fingers") and immediate physicality of the voice share something with Pound's personal voice, as do the references to a personal Venice:

Flat water before me,
 and the trees growing in water,
Marble trunks out of stillness,
On past the palazzi, (76)

The historian voice is incorporated by the visionary voice

incorporates elements of the other voices it has a unique strength and clarity.

The unique quality of the voice in XVII is a result of the way the separate voices organize and re-organize in the reader's consciousness. The reader is led to share in a struggle for meaning with the poet through the vocal fragmentation of this poetry. The challenge of this demand on the reader is made up for by the rewards of participating in a poetic synthesis. The patterns of shifts among voices create a network of relationships which hold disparate elements, for example Pound on the Dogana's steps and the Ignez de Castro murder, together. These relationships also help catapult the poet into intense passages, the undercurrent swelling to the surface, as in XVII.

This undercurrent also acts as an undertow; the relationships among voices manifest the tensions and contradictions in the poet, as in the writer voice's skepticism of its hero-making enterprise, or the visionary voice's long subordination to the historian. But by dramatizing his own self-division, Pound shows us his relentless honesty, letting the reader experience the difficulties of self-discovery rather than hearing of them.

In the Cantos the difficulties of self-discovery have to do with the capacity to bring the energy and wisdom from historical and divine worlds into present time. The vocal patterns help to dramatize this process by allowing the reader to feel both the nearness and the distance of these other worlds from a mundane realm represented by the personal Pound's Venice. Categories of experience such as real, historical or otherworldly are shown by

the vocal patterns to be too narrow to do justice to the life possibilities suggested in the depth and breadth of experience in the Cantos. The four voices reveal Pound attempting to compress his struggle to renew and re-live all that he could of a valued heritage into a poetic form without compromising any of that struggle's pains or rewards.

Notes

1. Ezra Pound, quoted from Myles Slatin, "A History of Pound's Cantos I-XVI, 1915-1925," American Literature 35 (May 1963), p.191.
2. Citations from Pound in the text are to The Cantos of Ezra Pound (New York: New Directions, 1948).
3. T.S. Eliot, "The Three Voices of Poetry," On Poetry and Poets (New York: Noonday Press, 1961), p. 112.
4. Jim X. is a pseudonym for John Quinn, 1870-1924, American lawyer, authority on modern Irish literature; collector and patron of modern art. (Reference from John H. Edwards and William W. Vasse, Annotated Index to the Cantos of Ezra Pound, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957 p. 181)
5. Cf. Inferno, 5, 28.
6. Michael F. Harper, "Truth and Calliope: Ezra Pound's Malatesta," PMLA, 96, no. 1 (January 1981), 86-103.
7. Gian Francesco Poggio Bracciolini, 1380-1459, Italian humanist; known for his discoveries of lost Latin classics in various monasteries. (Edwards and Vasse, p. 175)
8. Ines de Castro, ?1320-1355, a Castilian noblewoman whom Pedro, heir to the throne of Portugal, secretly married after the death of his wife, Constance, in 1345. (Edwards and Vasse, p. 32)
9. Giovanni Borgia, d. 1497; son of Pope Alexander VI. (Edwards and Vasse, p. 23)
10. Benedetto Varchi, 1503-1565; author of Storia Fiorentino, a history of Florence, 1527-1538, commissioned by Cosimo de' Medici. (Edwards and Vasse, p. 236)

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