POUND AND THE LIMITS OF PROSODY: SOME NOTES ON THE *CANTOS*

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From *A Lume Spento* to *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, Pound's poetry has run the whole gamut of the English prosodic tradition. Beginning with a metrically regular versification, Pound quickly loosens it to include the metrically irregular, strong-stress verse, accentual verse, and finally a type of loose accentual verse where patterning becomes mainly a matter of speech cadencing. In the light of *Mauberley* and *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, this last development is particularly important. *Mauberley*, for all its " rhyme and regular strophes," is actually written to a very loose kind of accentual prosody. The rhythms, however, are not at all slack but give a strong sense of pattern. Pound achieves this effect by allowing the speech cadences to create their own design while at the same time controlling them in such a way that, when he wants a special effect, he imposes on them a pseudo-metrical pattern. This pattern sometimes emerges as the rhymed tetrameter quatrain and affords the poem a felt, if not an entirely obvious, symmetry.

A prosodic reading[1] of the opening stanza of *Mauberley*, for

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[1] In my approach to scansion, my view is the traditional one exemplified in such a work as George Saintsbury's *A History of English Prosody* (London, 1906), and more recently revived, on a theoretical level, by W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley in " The Concept of Meter: An Experiment in Abstraction," *PMLA*, 74 (December 1959), 585–93, and on a more practical level by Harvey Gross in *Sound and Form in Modern Poetry* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1964), Karl Shapiro and Robert Beum in *A Prosody Handbook* (New York, 1965) and Paul Fussell in *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (New York, 1967). I adopt the traditional foot prosody they recommend and the traditional nomenclature for scanning metre. All unmarked syllables occuring in conjunction with stressed syllables and all syllables marked with a cross (×), count as unstressed; all syllables marked with an acute accent (′) count as stressed. A grave accent (‵) marks syllables metrically unstressed but which carry a weight of rhetorical

example, may yield a loose anapaestic-iambic pattern:

> For thrée | yéars, | out of kéy | with his tíme,
> He stróve | to resúscitate | the déad | árt
> Of póetry; | to maintáin | 'the sublíme'
> In the óld | sénse. | Wróng | from the stárt— (*P* 187)[1]

The frequent syncopation, however, is an indication of the strong rhetorical movement. This movement often overrides the loose anapaestic-iambic metre and imposes a pattern of its own, made up of anapaests (in phrases like "out of kéy," "with his tíme," "from the stárt") interwoven with such rhythmic "spondaic" repetitions as "For thrée yéars," "the déad árt," "In the óld sénse." This rhetorical movement or speech cadencing frequently establishes its own loose accentual scheme to underscore an ironic effect:

> Incápable of the leást útterance → or composítion →
> Emendátions, → conservátion of the bétter tradítion, →
> Refínement of médium, → eliminátion of supérfluities, →
> Augúst attráction → or concentrátion. ↓ (*P* 212)[2]

Meaning seems lost as the rhythm is etiolated by the cascade of syllables which come with such rapidity that one notices nothing except the pace of the stresses. The artist, seeking for the "better tradition" and the "elimination of superfluities," has come out with just a mouthful of syllables and a "concentration" that eliminates all meaning except a thumping movement which is

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emphasis heavier than normal unstressed syllables. A vertical line (|) marks the division between feet. A double line (||) marks the caesura. Where "quantitative" scansion is employed, the long and short syllables are marked respectively with the macron (—) and the mora (⏑).

[1] I have adopted the following abbreviations for page references indicated in the body of the text. *P*=*Personae: Collected Shorter Poems* (London, 1961); *C*=*The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London, 1975).

[2] I use terminal junctures to indicate more clearly the speech phrases. ↓ stands for // (falling or fading juncture), ↑ for || (rising juncture), and → for | (sustained juncture).

made more emphatic by the balanced disposition of the phrases. Towards the end, a final judgment is made, and even the thumping movement peters out. The scansion follows the natural phrasing to establish a series of monometers:

> 'I wás |
> And I nó more | exíst;
> Here drífted |
> An hédonist.' | (*P* 213)

In the end, nothing seems to be left of the stanza except the rhymes "exist, hedonist," and even these have come as echoes of words in earlier stanzas, "dawn-mist, series, intermittences, this, drifted." The artist makes his exit, left only with the shell of his art. This is, indeed, a brilliant demonstration of how prosody can be used to reinforce meaning.

In *Homage*, Pound writes in a form that is not even as fixed as that of *Mauberley*. The poem, prosodically speaking, is Pound's "last elaboration." Here, the loose anapaestic measure modulates easily into longer metrical units to produce the colloquial ease of

> Ánnalists | will contínue | to recórd | Róman | reputátions, |
> Celébrities | from the Tráns-|Cáucasus | will belaúd | Róman |
> celébrities |
> And expóund | the distén|tions of Émpire, | (*P* 217)

or the solemn music of

> For lóng níght | cómes | upón you |
> and a dáy | when nó dáy | retúrns. |
> Let the góds | láy cháins | upón us |
> so that nó dáy | shall ùnbínd them. | (*P* 229)

without losing the suggestion of an underlying pattern of pentameters and hexameters. It is this elusive skeletal pattern of "pentameters" and "hexameters," combined with the recurrence of a dactylic-anapaestic-spondaic rhythm, that just manages to give the poem a unified prosodic tone which serves to relate the loosest

rhythms to a controlling centre and keeps the loose prosodic structure intact.

Eliot regards *Homage* as " the necessary prolegomena to the *Cantos*."[1] Indeed, in its overall poetic method and specific prosodical character, it is close to the *Cantos*. Loose rhythms, oblique references, entanglements of mythological, personal and local allusions, sudden transition, often from line to line, of tones, images and ideas,—these give *Homage* its special character, and these are also familiar devices in the *Cantos*. In versification, the *Cantos* constitute an extreme prosodic mixture and many parts are written to no apparent rhythmic system. But where a " carrying metric " is discernible, the rhythm moves in a dactylic-anapaestic and spondaic combination.[2] This same combination characterizes the metric of *Homage*, exemplified in the two passages quoted and again in the following:

> Shádes of Calli|máchus, | Cóan | ghósts of Phi|létas |
> It is in your gróve | I would wálk |
> Í who come | fírst from the | cleár fónt |
> Brínging the | Grécian | órgies | into Ítaly, |
> and the dánce | into Ítaly. | (*P* 217)

Unlike the *Cantos*, however, *Homage* has thematic homogeneity. As Vincent E. Miller has argued, despite its complexity and variety of tone and references, *Homage* is a celebration of man's participation, such as exemplified in physical love, in nature's great creative force through an acceptance and affirmation of man's place in the natural cycles of birth and death.[3] It is true that the same subject is stated in Canto I, and for this reason, it is perhaps significant that this Canto, chronologically and prosodically close to poems like " The Seafarer " and *Homage*, " looks

[1] " Introduction," *Ezra Pound: Selected Poems* (London, 1959), p. 20.

[2] For a fuller discussion of this point, see below, especially pp. 100–101 and fn. on p. 101.

[3] " The Serious Wit of Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius*," *Contemporary Literature*, 16 (Summer, 1975), 452–62.

like a separate Poundian poem," in the words of Noel Stock.[1] For the rest, as the same critic has shown after an exhaustive analysis, the *Cantos* appear to be uninformed by any larger purpose. The truth of the matter seems to be that in *Homage* Pound has a goal to work towards, a prevision of aims and ideas, and therefore of structural methods, whether such prevision is conscious or subconscious. The *Cantos*, on the other hand, have a literally limitless and undefined subject to deal with and the thematic heterogeneity is reflected in the absence of a prosodic scheme such as is found in *Homage*.

Canto I begins promisingly enough and, except for the difficulty arising from obscurity of reference, it is clear. The measure is that of " The Seafarer "; the strong-stress metre with four heavy beats to the line is well sustained and modulates easily from formal to informal speech:

> And thén went dówn to the shíps,
> Set kéel to bréakers, || fórth on the godly séa, and
> We sét up mast and sáil || on that swárt shíp,
> Bóre sheep abóard her, || and our bódies álso
> Héavy with wéeping, || so wínds from stérnward
> Bóre us out ónward || with béllying cánvas,
> Círce's this cráft, || the trím-coifed góddess. (*C* 3)[2]

In most of the more colloquial passages which are marked by a greater " prose " movement, the strong-stress metre is replaced by a loose accentual versification. The three-stress line gives an unobtrusive pattern to the easy colloquialism of the following

[1] *Reading the Cantos* (London, 1967), p. 3.

[2] The scansion follows Pound's reading of the Canto as recorded in Caedmon Record, TC 1122. Pound emphasizes the four-beat structure of the lines by deliberately dwelling on the primary stresses, often, as in line 2, passing over even secondary stresses. He also puts extra emphasis on all the alliterated syllables (as in lines 3 and 4), and reads the intervening syllables in a brisk, even tone. But see below, pp. 100–101, for further comments on the strong-stress prosody of Canto I.

passage in Canto XII:

> The óle sáilor was agáin táken bád
> and the dóctors sáid he was dying,
> And the bóy cáme to the bédsìde,
> and the óld sáilor saíd:
> 'Bóy, I'm sórry I can't háng on a bit lónger,
> 'You're yóung yet.
> I leáve you re-spónsa-bílities.
> 'Wísh I could ha' wáited till you were ólder, (*C* 56)

We sometimes come across a passage written in the manner of Marianne Moore's rhythms:

> We desíre that yóu our fáctors gíve to Zohánne of Rimíni
> our sérvant, síx líre marchesíni,
> for the thrée prízes he has wón rácing our barbarísci,
> at the ráte we have agréed òn. The ráces he has wón
> are the Modéna, the Sán Petrónio at Bológna
> and the lást ráce at Sán Zórzo. (*C* 110)

The regular pace of the lines is maintained by a more or less regular distribution of stresses, a more or less uniform allotment of syllables per line, and by unobtrusive internal and end-rhymes, "Rimini, marchesini, barbarisci," "won, agreed on, won," "Modena, Bologna, Marchesa," "San Petronio, San Zorzo."

The strong-stress line as a sustained metric is discernible only in Canto I. But even here, the strong-stress pattern is often more apparent than real. The opening of Canto I is more heavily stressed than the scansion which Pound makes in his recorded reading of the poem suggests.[1] A few of the lines should hold five instead of the four or three stresses indicated in the scansion:

> Sét kéel to bréakers, fórth on the gódly séa, and
> We sét up mást and sáil on that swárt shíp,

[1] See preceding fn.

Bóre shéep abóard her, and our bódies álso
Héavy with wéeping, . . .

This " rhythmic undercurrent " characterizes the tendency of the strong-stress lines to move to the anapaestic-dactylic-spondaic combinations which have appeared in the prosody of *Homage*:[1]

Póured we li/bátions / unto éach / the déad,
Fírst méad | and then swéet | wíne, | wáter | míxed with | whíte flóur
. . . . . .
Dárk blóod | flówed in the | fósse,
Sóuls out of | Érebus, | cadá|verous déad, | of brídes,

[1] Albert Cook in " Rhythm and Persona," *New Approaches to Ezra Pound*, ed. Eva Hesse (London, 1969), pp. 345–64, makes an interesting attempt to trace the prosodic structure of the *Cantos* and finds it in the varying rhythm of " persona-voices." In other words, the rhythmic pattern of the *Cantos* is open-ended. This view looks attractive but faulty, and Cook gives himself away when he compares Pound's use of persona-voices in the *Cantos* with their use in *Personae*. Certainly, to say that the prosodic structure of the *Cantos* is analogical to that in *Personae* is not saying much. Cook's view appears to be an elaboration of the brief discussion on the subject that William McNaughton gave in his study, " Ezra Pound's Meters and Rhythms," *PMLA*, 78 (March, 1963), 136–46. Quoting Yeats and Eliot, McNaughton contends that the *Cantos* are written in " an effective free verse " (no explanation is given as to its structural principles) that is adaptable to all the different " articulations " in the work.

My view is closer to those of Delmore Schwartz and Harvey Gross, as presented in " Notes on Ezra Pound's *Cantos:* Structure and Metric," (1940), *Ezra Pound: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Eric Homberger (London, 1972), pp. 345–47, and *Sound and Form in Modern Poetry* (Ann Arbor, 1964), pp. 130–68 respectively. To their observations, I wish only to add that the paradigmatic figure which they see as forming the " Great Bass " of the *Cantos* wherever a consistent rhythmic is discernible, is not confined to the *Cantos*. This same figure has appeared in Pound's earlier poems, notably in *The Seafarer*, *Mauberley* and *Homage*. Interestingly enough, this figure even bears some resemblance to Hopkins' " sprung pentameters " and " hexameters," and the reason may be that both instances share some affinity with Anglo-Saxon strong-stress metre. One is therefore not sure whether this dactylic-anapaestic-spondaic paradigm has been deliberately deployed in the *Cantos*. All one can say is that this rhythm is heard very often and gives an impression of a consistent prosodic tone in parts of the *Cantos*.

Of yóuths | and of the óld | who had bórne | múch; | (*C* 3)

It is this mixture of anapaests, dactyls and spondees in lines of four and six feet, often cut up into half-lines of two and three feet or in dimeters and trimeters, that forms the metric of the *Cantos* following Canto I and gives them a fairly consistent rhythmic direction.

Canto III opens in these free rhythms, sustained, furthermore, by Pound's exquisite sense of syllabic duration:[1]

Góds flóat | in the áz|ure aír |
Bríght góds | and Túscan, | báck before | déw was | shéd. |
Líght: and the | fírst líght, | before é|ver déw | was fállen. |
Pánisks, | and from the óak, | dryas, |
And from the ápple, | mælid, |
Through áll | the wóod, | and the léaves | are fúll | of voíces, | (*C* 11)

The same rhythms move through Canto XXIX. In one passage, we have alternating trimeters of dactyls and of spondaic feet, the faint rise of the breeze and the settled calm of sunshine:

The tówer, ívory, the cléar ský
Ívory rígid in súnlìght
And the pále cléar of the héaven
Phóibos of nárrow thíghs,
The cút cóol of the aír,
Blóssom cút on the wínd, by Hélios
Lórd of the Líght's édge, and Ápril
Blówn róund the féet of the Gód, (*C* 145)

This rhythmical alternation is used to magnificent effect in Canto IV where the spondaic rhythm ushers in a sense of burdened excitement and suspense:

The sílver | mírrors | cátch the | bríght stónes | and fláre,
Dáwn, to our | wáking, | drífts in the | gréen cóol | líght;

[1] See the examples of "quantitative prosody" below, pp. 105, 107 and the fn. following.

Déw-háze | blúrs, in the | gráss, pále | ánkles | móving.
Béat, béat, | whírr, thúd, | in the sóft túrf | (*C* 13)

As the climax is reached, the lines move in simple dactyls and trochees:

And she wént tóward the wíndow and cást her dówn,
'Áll the whíle, the whíle, swállows crýing:
Ítyn!
'Ít is Cabestán's heárt in the dísh.'
'Ít is Cabestán's heárt in the dísh?
'Nó other táste shall chánge thís.'

The climax itself returns to the spondaic movement of the introduction:

And she wént tóward the wíndow,
the slím whíte stóne bár
Máking a dóuble árch;
Fírm éven fíngers héld to the fírm pále stóne;
Swúng for a móment,
and the wínd out of Rhódez
Caúght in the fúll of her sléeve.

The holding effect of the pause after " swung " upsets the delicate balance in line 4 which " held " maintains between the two sets of close-cropped stresses at either end. The rhythm then expands into rising anapaests as the wind momentarily catches up the body, and then descends in rapid dactyls.

So far, we have not come across a passage in blank verse or in any variation on the iambic norm. Indeed, these figure minimally in the *Cantos*, though we have occasional passages of Browningesque loose blank verse, as in the section on Henry James in Canto VII. Even here, the iambic movement is weakened by trisyllabic substitutions, and where lines scan as iambic, they can also scan as trochaic-dactylic:

And the gréat dómed héad, *con gli occhi onesti e tardi*

Móves befóre me; phántom with wéighted mótion
Grave incessu, drínking the tóne of thíngs,
And the óld vóice lífts itsélf
weáving an éndless séntence.
We álso made ghóstly vísits, and the stáir
That knéw us, fóund us agáin on the túrn of it,
Knócking at émpty roóms, séeking for búried beáuty; (*C* 24)

The rhythmic ambiguity, where the iambic half emerges and is half lost, beautifully creates an atmosphere of insubstantiality and sense of things lost but recovered in the emotions. In the larger prosodic context of the *Cantos*, this ambiguity shows the weakness of the iambic movement which, when it occurs, occurs within the general run of a strongly falling rhythm.

A predominant mood marks the first thirty Cantos. This is elegiac in tone and exemplifies the pathetic change in time, a sense of recovery and loss of the beauty and mysteries of nature and life. The rhythmic force is continually maintained in dactylic-anapaestic and spondaic rhythms:

The stóne | is alíve | in my hánd, | the cróps |
will be thíck | in my déath-yéar | (VI, p. 21)

And óne dáy | he was sítting | in the chiéxa, |
On a bít | of cór|nice, a bít | of stóne | gróoved for a | córnice,
Tóo nárrow | to fít | his bíg béam, |
húnched up and | nóting what was | dóne wróng, |
(XI, p. 49)

And the síl|ver béaks | rísing and | cróssing. |
Stóne trées, | whíte and | róse-whíte | in the dárkness, |
(XVII, p. 78)

Whíte hórn, | pále in the | móon sháft, | and Titánia |
By the drínk|ing hóle, |
stéps, | cút in the | básalt. | (XXI, p. 100)

Léaf over | léaf, | dáwn-bránch | in the ský |
And the séa | dárk, | únder | wínd, (XXIII, p. 108)

Within the prosodic context we have outlined, Pound's "quantities"[1] also form a notable feature, often underlying the stress-patterns of the lines and slowing down their rhythm considerably. The grave lyric movement of the lines from Sappho in Canto V is not possible otherwise:

> Hūsh ŏf thĕ ōldĕr sōng: 'Fādes lĭght frŏm sēa-crēst,
> 'Ănd ĭn Lȳdia wālks wĭth pāir'd wōmēn.
> 'Pēerlĕss ămōng thĕ pāirs, thăt ōnce ĭn Sārdīs
> 'Ĭn săttĭĕtĭes . . . (*C* 17–18)

Pound does not reproduce the Sapphic line here, but the Aeolic nucleus of —⏑⏑—, around which the Sapphic line is built provides the rhythmic impetus of the passage. The quantitative dactyls and spondees in the following passage from Canto XX effectively reinforce the sense of onrushing and receding waves:

> Ănd thĕ blūe | wātĕr | dūsky bĕ|nēath thēm, |
> pōurĭng thĕre | ĭntŏ thĕ | cātărăct, |
> Wĭth | nōise ŏf | sēa ŏvĕr | shĭnglē, |
> strīkĭng wĭth: |
> hāh hāh | āhăh thmm, | thūnb, āh |
> wōh wōh | ārăhă | thūmm, bhaāa. | (*C* 93)

In the first thirty Cantos, we have a prosody which maintains a certain unity of tone and sound. There are beautiful sections in almost every canto. However, trouble begins, both with

[1] Quantity is an aspect of versification that has received a great deal of attention from Pound. He found fault with Eliot's theory of *vers libre* because it implied that "all metres were measured by accent" and "omitted all consideration of metres depending on quantity." There are numerous isolated lines in the *Cantos* which can be read as classical quantitative verse.

What Pound is after in these experiments, as he says, is not to copy the effect of classical quantitative measures, but to arrange, as in this example, the sequence of consonants and vowels into a pleasing and significant movement and proportion, and thus heighten the natural intonation into melody without distorting "the actual cadence of voices." See *Letters of Erza Pound*, ed. D. D. Paige (London, 1951), pp. 13, 87, 137, 248, 337, 421.

regard to content and form, in Cantos VIII to XI, and reaches uncontrollable degrees in Cantos XVIII and XIX where Pound leads us into a labyrinthine confusion of thought and expression. The "Malatesta Cantos" (VIII to XI) have a certain unity in a central character. But otherwise they consist of a chaotic entanglement of documentary facts which are arranged in no apparent significant rhythmic pattern. The only observable rhythm is provided by the endless list of "and's" which Pound uses here with increasing frequency and by the stuttering, heaving end-stopped lines. In other parts, Pound tries to drown out this lack of rhythm by an idiosyncratic idiom, in the form of loud-mouthed invective in the flat and inept style of his earlier poems from "Contemporania" and "Blast," or in the form of some self-conscious American dialect:

> And another day on the pier
> Was a fat fellah from Rhode Island, a-sayin':
> 'Bi Hek! I been all thru Italy
> An' ain't never been stuck!
> 'But this place is plumb full er scoundrels.'
> And Yusuf said: Yais? an' the reech man
> In youah countree, haowa they get their money;
> They no go rob some poor pairsons? (XXII, p. 104)

The above is bad not because Pound has attempted to use the vernacular, but because his use is not guided by any rhythm that will shed a deeper significance to what he is saying. The verse is completely superficial and stops short at Pound's uncontrolled anger or funny mimicry.

After the first thirty Cantos, the poetic power is less sustained. The initial rhythmic impetus that begins so powerfully in Canto I and kept up till Canto VII, begins to falter and is broken by large blocks of prose. Cantos XXXI to LI consist of economic propaganda, for the most part considerably less sensitive in phrasing than dry prose. Parts of the series which show any significant and consistent rhythm include Cantos XXXVI, XXXIX

and the last half of Canto XL (pages 199 to 201), the powerful litanic chant of Canto XLV, the sustained lyricism of Canto XLVII and the beautifully-ordered Canto XLIX. The familiar dactylic-anapaestic and spondaic movement is again heard in these parts. In Canto XXXIX, we find a remarkable piece of "quantitative" verse:

> Wĭth plūm | flōwĕ̆rs ăbōve | thēm |
> wĭth āl|mōnd ŏn thĕ̆ blāck | bōugh |
> With jās|mīne ăn̆d ŏlīve | lēaf, |
> Tŏ̆ thĕ̆ | bēat ŏf thĕ̆ mēa|sūre |
> Frŏ̆m stār-|ūp tŏ̆ thĕ̆ hālf-|dārk |
> Frŏ̆m hālf-dārk | tŏ̆ hālf-dārk |
> Ŭncēasĭng | thĕ̆ mēasūre | (*C* 195)

Pound seems to use, for his lines here, the second pherecratean, whose paradigm is

$$\overline{\smile} \; \underline{\smile} \; | \; — \; \smile \; \smile \; | \; —$$

For the last two lines, he switches to the bacchic half of the first pherecratean, whose form is

$$— \; \smile \; \smile \; — \; | \; \smile \; — \; —$$

Canto XLIX reminds one of the charming brand of strong-stress verse with its gnomic grammar which Pound uses in the *Confucian Odes:*

> Sun up; work
> sundown; to rest
> dig well and drink of the water
> dig field; eat of the grain
> Imperial power is? and to us what is it? (*C* 245)

Viewed in the context of twenty-one Cantos, the occurrence of these lyrics is, to say the least, sporadic. Furthermore, they diverge too much in mood, tone and style from the miasmic looseness of the rest of the section as to become virtually independent,

isolated units which therefore cannot provide even a loose rhythmic to strengthen the articulations of the weak rhythms. The poetic power which we discover in the first thirty Cantos falters considerably in the next twenty-one and the two series following, Cantos LII to LXI, which narrate the history of China, and Cantos LXII to LXXI, which deal with John Adams.

Canto LII opens unpromisingly with the invective carried over from the previous section. But halfway through, it suddenly breaks into one of the most beautifully sustained canticles in the whole of the *Cantos*, a brilliant redaction from the Chinese *Book of Rites*. In lineation, it recalls the Cathay poems, but the rhythm is tauter, in quite regular anapaests and dactyls, frequently punctuated by spondees:

Velox	7–4–2	The láke wárden to gáther rúshes
Planus	5–2	to táke gráin for the *mánes*
Tardus	9–6–3	to táke gráin for the béasts you will sácrifice
Planus	5–2	to the Lórds of the Móuntains
Planus	5–2	To the Lórds of gréat ríver̆s
Tardus	9–6–3	Inspéctor of dýe-works, inspéctor of cólour and bróideries
Planus	5–2	sée that the whíte, blácḱ, gréen be in órder
Planus	5–2	let nó fálse cólour exíst here
Tardus	8–6–3	blácḱ, yéllow, gréen be of quálity (*C* 259–60)

The ritualistic movement is further sustained by the rhetorical device of cursus endings (marked on the left margin),[1] and by syntactic parallelism. The passage opens with a nominal phrase followed by three verbal phrases and rounded up by two complements. The pattern is then repeated, a nominal phrase followed by two verb-clauses and a co-ordinate phrase. The syntactic

[1] The cursus is a system of clause endings used in oratorical prose. The numerals indicate the position of the stressed syllables counting from the last syllable of the line. For an exposition of the cursus, see Morris W. Croll, " The Cadence of English Oratorical Prose," in *Style, Rhetoric and Rhythm, Essays by Morris W. Croll*, ed. J. Max Patrick & Robert O. Evans (Princeton, 1966), pp. 304–05, 312–13, 344–36.

structure appears to be built on triple repetitions. Thus the three verbal phrases at the beginning are balanced by the three adjuncts of the " Inspector ": " dye-works, colour, broideries," the triple pattern then echoed in " white, black, green," and " black, yellow, green." In the Cantos which follow, the ear can hear no significant rhythm except in very occasional lines, until we come to the all too brief passage in Canto LVI on " Ouang Chi," and the " Li Sao " and " Ousan " passages at the end of Canto LVIII (pp. 305, 322–23).

In the Adams section, our ear is occasionally caught, but fleetingly, by the falling dactylic-spondaic movement:

> Númbers of | smáll bírds | from the shóre |
> ínstant they | líght on a | shíp |
> dróp a|sléep from ex|haústion | (LXV, p. 370)

Throughout the two sections, our attention is repeatedly confused by the mass of details which Pound often transcribes literally but in an obscure, short-hand form from books on Chinese and American history and from John Adams' diaries. There are lists of dates, names and incidents, jumbled together helter-skelter and lacking any sense of rhythmic arrangement or coherence.

In the Pisan Cantos (LXXIV to LXXXIV), Pound's poetic power seems to return, and these Cantos on the whole show greater artistic restraint. Like the previous sections, they are filled with chaotic prosaisms, incomprehensible references, diatribes, Chinese ideograms and other visual devices, but these are more frequently interspersed with lyric passages so that both the rhythm and the mood they sustain are more easily and readily heard and felt. The elegiac tone of the first seven Cantos returns with the familiar dactylic-anapaestic and spondaic movement. Indeed, this prosodic " signature " is written on page after page of the *Pisan Cantos:*

> and ó|live trée | blówn whíte | in the wínd |
> wáshed in the | Kíang and | Hán |

what whíteness | will you ádd | to this whíteness, |
what cándour? |
'the gréat | périplum | brings in the | stárs to our | shóre.' |
(LXXIV, p. 425)

nó cloúd, | but the crýs|tal bódy |
the tán|gent fórmed | in the hánd's cúp |
(LXXVI, p. 457)

cléar in the | chóir that would | ríng píng | on the hígh | áltar |
in the Bách | chórals | (LXXX, p. 504)

in the drénched tént | there is quíet |
séred éyes | are at rést | (LXXXIII, p. 529)

The "Pisan" section contains a greater amount of verse in regular metre than can be found in the other sections. There is the "Libretto" in Canto LXXXI in trochaic tetrameter:

Ere the season died a-cold
Borne upon a zephyr's shoulder
I rose through the aureate sky
Lawes and Jenkyns guard thy rest
Dolmetsch ever be thy guest, (*C* 519)

In the same Canto, we find the oft-quoted passage beginning with "The ant's a centaur in his dragon world," which is in blank verse with irregular rhyme. There is also the rare rhymed iambic pentameter verse in Canto LXXX, written in the Rubaiyat stanza:

Tudor indeed is gone and every rose,
Blood-red, blanch-white that in the sunset glows
Cries: 'Blood, Blood, Blood!' against the gothic stone
Of England, as the Howard or Boleyn knows. (*C* 516)

Occasionally, we find hokku-like passages, like the following, in dactyls and spondees:

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

shone from the unmasked eyes in half-mask's space.
(LXXXI, p. 520)

Often, what appears as free verse is actually built on a metrical ground plan. This is obvious in the passage on Yeats in Canto LXXXIII where the initial anapaestic trimeter

There is fatigue deep as the grave

sets the rhythm for the three- and two-stress lines to follow.

The *Pisan Cantos*, if disjointed, have at least a certain unity of tone and an audible versification. Little of such unity or versification exists in *Section: Rock Drill* or in *Thrones*. Canto CVI is the only Canto where the dactylic-anapaestic and spondaic rhythm is distinctly heard:

Seléna, | fóam on the | wáve-swírl |
Out of góld líght | flóoding the | péristyle |
Trées | ópen in | Páros, |
Whíte féet | as Carrá|ra's whíteness | (CVI, p. 755)

Lines can be extracted from Cantos XCI to XCIII and Canto XCIX which are both beautiful and rhythmical, but even these Cantos are so frustratingly cryptic that what audible versification there is affects the ear too faintly. Furthermore, the visual devices, which in the *Pisan Cantos* have already gained a disturbing prominence, become, in these two sections, oppressively dominating. Printed ideograms, hieroglyphics, line arrangements, spacing, and peculiar orthography have replaced an audible rhythmic form as the principle "structural" elements.

In the last Cantos that Pound wrote (Cantos CXV–CXVI), we find a new measure of coherence. The visual "prosody" of *Rock Drill* and *Thrones* has disappeared, and in its place, there is a shift back to rhythmic stability:

A blówn húsk | that is fínished |
but the líght síngs | etérnal |
a pále fláre | óver | márshes |

Where the sált háy | whíspers to | tíde's chánge |
Tíme, spáce, |
néither | lífe nor | déath is the | ánswer. | (*C* 794)

The music returns as it rediscovers the security of the familiar dactylic-anapaestic and spondaic movement.

From *Homage* to the *Cantos* is a step backward rather than forward. The *Cantos* read much like a prosodic " handbook " which contains all the prosodic modes Pound has been experimenting with. As with such a handbook, the *Cantos* do not show any consistent metric. One is hard put to find a line or passage that can be identified as the " Great Bass " of the work. This lack of prosodic consistency is perhaps a direct reflection of the kind of subject-material it treats of. A typical passage from the *Cantos* reads:

a man on whom the sun has gone down
the ewe, he said had such a pretty look in her eyes;
And the nymph of the Hagoromo came to me,
as a corona of angels
one day were clouds banked on Taishan
or in glory of sunset
and tovarish blessed without aim
wept in the rainditch at evening
Sunt lumina
that the drama is wholly subjective
stone knowing the form which the carver imparts it
the stone knows the form (*C* 430)

Each line or two articulates an image or " constatates a fact."[1] But nothing, not even an implied grammar, or an emotional consistency or semantic coherence, articulates one image with another. Prosodically speaking, each line is isolated from the rest.

[1] Pound's term, in one of his essays in the series, "Approaches to Paris," *New Age*, 13 (October 1917), 662.

The poem is made up of " bits of rhythm "[1] placed one after the other unrelated to any definite base. In spite of the pleasant sequences of sounds and of light and strong syllables making up individual lines, there is no sense of movement and duration in the passage, no sense of that harmony of meanings and connections which, according to Eliot, forms the " music " in poetry.[2] The *Cantos* are supposed to relate the " tale of the tribe "[3] but they consist of such a heterogenous mixture of myths and personal history, of facts and supposed facts, of chronicle and assertions that it is difficult to see the design and direction of the poem.[4] Pound himself, as Hayden Carruth has pointed out, acknowledges the " improvised structure " of the *Cantos*.[5] The lack of any goal to work towards, of an "Aquinas-map " to direct him,[6] and the consequent adoption of " make-shift " patterns for individual episodes of the poem, lead to a structural disintegration that is all too clearly mirrored in the lack of a firm and consistent prosodic tone throughout this gigantic work.

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[1] A term that Pound used in another context in his " Treatise on Harmony," *Patria Mia and the Treatise on Harmony* (London, 1962), p. 82.

[2] " The Music of Poetry," *On Poetry and Poets* (London, 1965), p. 32.

[3] *Letters of Ezra Pound*, p. 385.

[4] Though Daniel D. Pearlman, in *The Barb of Time* (London, 1969), has successfully argued that the *Cantos* are informed by the author's consistent purpose centring on the theme of time, still the question of the overall structure of this sprawling poem remains unanswered.

[5] " The Poetry of Ezra Pound," *Perspectives U.S.A.*, No. 16 (Summer, 1956), 145–46.

[6] *Letters*, p. 418.