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Ezra Pound and the Rhetoric of Address

Ezra Pound's repudiation of "rhetoric" constituted one of the principal strands in early modernism's attempt to define itself against the literary values of the nineteenth century. For Pound, Victorianism represented a culture of "the opalescent word, the rhetorical tradition";[1] in "A Retrospect" (published in 1918), he called famously for a "harder and saner" poetry, one freed from the previous century's "rhetorical din, and luxurious riot," "austere, direct, free from emotional slither."[2] Yet even as he argued for this "harder and saner" poetry Pound also discerned a dimension of poetry precisely as being in excess of directly communicable meaning. When his theorizing took a self-consciously "modern" turn with the poetics of imagism he tended to appeal to the visual as a model for an affective "pattern" capable of curbing the unfocussed expression of emotion he associated with the backwash of Romanticism.[3] It was here that the term "rhetoric" was constantly invoked as the enemy or the other of modernism. The imagist program, with its call for "direct treatment of the 'thing'," verbal economy, and rhythms determined by "the sequence of the musical phrase," was underpinned by both the Kantian criticism of rhetoric as "the art of persuasion, i.e., of deceiving by a beautiful show (*ars oratoria*)"[4] and by the assumption that rhetoric trafficked in some sort of merely verbal excess. Kant was not objecting to persuasion *per se*, of course, but to what he called a rhetorical "machinery of

[1] "The Prose Tradition in Verse" (1914), in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 371.

[2] "A Retrospect" (1918), in *Literary Essays*, 12.

[3] See Pound's account of his best-known imagist poem "In A Station of the Metro" in *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (1916; Hessle, East Yorkshire: The Marvell Press, 1960), 87: "I found, suddenly, the expression. I do not mean that I found words, but there came an equation [...] not in speech, but in little splotches of colour. It was just that—a 'pattern', or hardly a pattern, if by 'pattern' you mean something with a 'repeat' in it."

[4] Pound, "A Retrospect" (1918), *Literary Essays*, 3. This collection of early pieces includes Pound's famous "A Few Don'ts" (4); Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1951), 171.

persuasion" that he regarded as not proper to poetry. "In poetry," he argued, "everything proceeds by honesty and candor"; poetry has "sufficient influence upon human minds" that it can do without this "machinery" which "since it can be used equally well to beautify or to hide vice and error cannot quite lull the secret suspicion that one is being artfully overreached."[5] For his part, Pound saw in a poetics of the image a way of laying to rest this "secret suspicion": "The 'image'," he declared, "is the furthest possible remove from rhetoric. Rhetoric is the art of dressing up some unimportant matter so as to fool the audience for the time being."[6] Rhetoric, then, makes the work of art a kind of confidence trick, a sleight of hand in which one thing appears in the guise of another:

> The Renaissance sought a realism and attained it. It rose in a search for precision and declined through rhetoric and rhetorical thinking, through a habit of defining things always "in terms of something else."[7]

Yet even as Pound sought to banish rhetoric from the emergent forms of modernism, so he increasingly confronted a conundrum of his own making: if poetry was to be about more than moods and emotional "velleities, atmospheres, timbres, nuances, etc"[8] it had to confront the less tractable materials of history and politics, and it would thus have to engage its reader on a ground more "dialogic" than that of conventional sentimental identification. The question of the *address* to an audience would grow in importance to Pound, even though he was initially wary of its rhetorical entailments and ruled accordingly that poets should write only for themselves and their peers.[9] To Margaret Anderson, he

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[5] Ibid., 172.

[6] Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska*, 83.

[7] Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska*, 117. Pound is probably thinking of Aristotle's definition of metaphor in the *Poetics*: "Metaphor is the application of a word that belongs to another thing" (1457b, 7-8).

[8] Pound, "Henry James" (1918), in *Literary Essays*, 324.

[9] For general questions relating to poetic address, see William Waters, *Poetry's Touch: On Lyric Address* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2003). Waters notes that "The *you* that (perhaps) calls to the reader is a wild spot in poetics, a dynamically moving gap in whatever secure knowledge about poetry we may think we have; and 'live' as it is, this *you* makes palpable poetry's claim on being read, which is to say, its claim to make an accidental reader into the destined and unique recipient of everything the poem contains or is" (15).

fumed against "that infamous remark of Whitman's about poets needing an audience,"[10] a reference to the motto *Poetry* magazine took from Whitman for its cover: "To have great poets, there must be great audiences, too."[11] In refusing the too-comradely rhetorical embrace of *Leaves of Grass*, Pound was asserting the writer's radical independence, his lack of obligation to any audience's expectations. Yet only five years later, we find him declaring with equal confidence that "it's all rubbish to pretend that art isn't didactic."[12]

I have suggested elsewhere that Pound set himself to solve this paradox of an avowedly didactic art with no acknowledged audience in part by transferring the affective properties normally associated with "rhetoric" to an ideal of poetic musicality.[13] The suasive powers of language, we might say, were thus to be activated not by the oratorical voice but by what Pound later called "melopoeia," a condition of writing in which "the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning."[14] Pound's vocabulary here (the word "trend" evoking "drift," the

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[10] Letter to Margaret Anderson, January (?) 1917, in *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1971), 107: "I have only three quarrels with them [*Poetry* magazine]: Their idiotic fuss over Christianizing all poems they print, their concessions to local pudibundery, and that infamous remark of Whitman's about poets needing an audience." It is significant that this letter is written in the year of the publication of the first Ur-Cantos where, as I note below, the question of audience is much debated. Pound here repeats an earlier protest about the use by *Poetry* of the Whitman quotation—see "The Audience," *Poetry* 5.1 (October 1914): 29: "I have protested in private, and I now protest more openly, against the motto upon the cover of POETRY. The artist is *not* dependent upon his audience" (emphasis in original).

[11] The sentence appears in Whitman's "Notes Left Over." See Hugh Witemeyer, "Clothing the American Adam," in *Ezra Pound Among the Poets*, ed. George Bornstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 91.

[12] Letter to Felix E. Schelling, 8 July, 1922, in *Selected* Letters, 180. Pound continues: "A revelation is always didactic. Only the aesthetes since 1880 have pretended the contrary, and they aren't a very sturdy lot."

[13] For this suggestion and for a fuller discussion of Pound's argument with "rhetoric," see my "Poetry and Rhetoric: Modernism and Beyond," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern and Contemporary American Poetry*, ed. Cary Nelson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 173-95.

[14] Pound, *How to Read* (1937), in *Polite Essays* (1937; Plainview, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1966), 170. Pound probably takes the term "melopoeia" from Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*.

natural course of a stream or current) is deliberately non-coercive, suggesting that we learn best not from the assertions of authority but from the altogether more congenial harmonies of music.[15] But verbal music offers perhaps only a partial answer, requiring a certain passivity in the reader and a susceptibility to the enchantments of melody. Beyond this, and complicating the didactic intention, the reader has to be drawn into the poem's occasion, induced to share the writer's thoughts at the time of their articulation. This was well understood in the nineteenth century, with its reformulation of traditional rhetorical devices. As Walter Pater put it in his influential essay on "Style," the writer's "argument" had to amount to something more than a mere "theorem," becoming "essentially an appeal to the reader to catch the writer's spirit, to think with him, if one can and will."[16] As his complaints about *Poetry*'s motto indicate, Pound had no sympathy for Whitman's rather similar conviction that the thoughts in "Song of Myself" would count for little "If they are not yours as much as mine";[17] as Hugh Witemeyer puts it, "Whitman's vision of the great poet speaking directly to a nation of enlightened equals seemed almost ludicrously remote from the realities which faced Pound and his fellow writers."[18] Yet, as the so-called Ur-Cantos amply demonstrate, attempts to counter the empathetic gestures of the Whitmanian address often produced a merely over-confident and dismissive tone. The issue remained that of the *directness* of address: while the first drafts of the Cantos stage lively colloquial encounters with literary precursors (especially with Browning) and occasionally with putative readers ("I knew a man, but where 'twas is no matter: / Born on a farm, he hankered after painting"),[19] the mode of address is so bound up with a weighing of the

[15] See my "Poetry and Rhetoric," 181 for the connection between music and teaching in the Homeric culture.

[16] Walter Pater, *Appreciations, with an Essay on Style* (London: Macmillan, 1931), 4-5.

[17] "Song of Myself," in *The Portable Whitman*, introd. Mark Van Doren (New York: The Viking Press, 1969), 81: "These are the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands—they are not original with me; / If they are not yours as much as mine, they are nothing, or next to nothing…"

[18] Witemeyer, "Clothing the American Adam," 91. For a rather one-sided account of Pound's early hostility to his audience, see Mark Kyburz, *"Voi Altri Pochi": Ezra Pound and his Audience 1908-1925* (Basel, Boston, Berlin: Birkhäuser, 1996).

[19] Pound, "Three Cantos of a Poem of Some Length" (1917), in *Early Writings: Poems and Prose*, ed. Ira Nadel (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 156.

respective claims of fact and fiction that it constantly folds back into self-involved reflection.

The "I" who speaks in these drafts conventionally presupposes a "you," though for the most part this is not the reader, but the poet himself and the artists he most admires (the "we" who "guess a soul for man," for example, are those like Picasso and Wyndham Lewis whom Pound regards as his peers).[20] This carefully deflected mode of address works thus to hold the reader at a distance and recalls Jonathan Culler's account of indirect or "triangulated address" which he sees as the characteristic mode of lyric poetry. "The lyric address to a 'you,'" writes Culler, "is fundamental to lyric but it does not signal direct address to the audience."[21] We must remember, though, that while Culler is here seeking to dissociate lyric from dramatic monologue and from interpretations of lyric poems that construe them as fictional and narrative worlds, Pound is working toward an "enlargement" of lyric that will retain elements of both.[22] Ur-Canto I recognizes Browning as a crucial precursor in this respect, Pound taking *Sordello* as a poem that strives deliberately to exceed what its author called "the lyrical element and capability," offering the modern world "a rag-bag to stuff all its thought in." [23] In the hybrid form that results, lyric, we might say, defines a

[20] Ibid., 150-51.

[21] Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 199.

[22] The term "enlargement" is Michael Hamburger's. See his discussion of Fernando Pessoa in *The Truth of Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), 162: "It is the feelings of the empirical self which poetry enlarges, complements or even replaces with fictitious ones, but only because the empirical self is not the whole self, cramped as it is in its shell of convention, habit and circumstance."

[23] Browning's phrase is from an unpublished letter to John Kenyon that Pound could not have known. It is quoted by Marion Thain in her "Victorian Lyric Pathology and Phenomenology," in *The Lyric Poem: Formations and Transformations*, ed. Marion Thain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 161-2: "Lyric is the oldest, most *poetical* of poetry, and I would always get it if I could: but I find in these latter days that one has a great deal to say, and try and get attended to, which is out of the lyrical element and capability—and I am forced to take the nearest way to it: and then it is undeniable that the common reader is susceptible to plot, story, and the simplest form of putting a matter 'said I,' 'said he,' & so on." Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 76 also quotes this passage but he does so to show that Browning nonetheless "admits the priority of the lyric." The reference to *Sordello* as a "rag-bag" is from Pound's Ur-Canto I, in *Early Writings*, 145.

condition of language rather than a genre or a mode.[24] Perhaps for that reason, Culler's helpful emphasis on "the performative temporality of the lyric" and its "attempt to create the impression of something happening now" has to be set within a context where that "now" is subject to a constant wavering or oscillation.[25] "Triangulation" is perhaps too neat a figure for what will happen in Pound's poem because, as we shall see, the notional addressee there is constantly unsettled and subjected to a sort of push-pull of only partial identification with the speaker's words.

The ambiguities of this oblique address are nicely epitomized by the appearance in Canto VII/26 of a line from Dante's *Paradiso* (II, 1): "O voi che siete in piccioletta barca," "'O you,' as Dante says / 'in the dinghy astern there'," as Pound will translate it much later in Canto XCIII/631 and in the closing line of Canto CIX/774 ("You in the dinghy (piccioletta) astern there!").[26] Dante's nautical reference recalls the opening of the *Purgatorio* (I.1-2) where, he says, "the little bark [*navicella*] of my wit now lifts her sails." In the *Paradiso*, though, it is we readers who occupy the little boat while the poet courses ahead in his ship "that singing makes her way." Rather unexpectedly, Dante tells those of us

[24] It is clearly something that falls outside Culler's definition of lyric as "a Western tradition of short, non-narrative, highly rhythmical productions, often stanzaic, whose aural dimension is crucial" (*Theory of the Lyric*, 89). Culler's attention to the functions of rhythm and sound remains, of course, highly relevant to lyric passages in *The Cantos*—see also my "Modernism and the Limits of Lyric," in *The Lyric Poem*, 178 on Pound's description in "Arnaut Daniel" (1920) of "an aesthetic of sound": "of clear sounds and opaque sounds, such as in [Daniel's] *Sols sui*, an opaque sound like Swinburne at his best; and in *Doutz brais* and in *L'aura amara*, a clear sound with staccato; and of heavy beats and of running and light beats, as very heavy in *Can chai la feuilla*."

[25] Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 63, 37.

[26] All quotations from *The Cantos* are from the New Directions 1986 printing. Pound had also quoted the passage in his essay on Dante in *The Spirit of Romance* (1910), 142 in Philip Henry Wicksteed's translation for the Temple Classics edition: "O ye who in your little skiff, longing to hear, have followed on my keel that singeth on its way, / turn to revisit your own shores; commit you not to the open sea; for perchance, losing me, ye would be left astray." C. S. Singleton in his translation of and commentary on *The Divine Comedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), *Paradiso*, vol. 3, part 2 remarks of these lines that "This is the most remarkable address to the reader in the whole of the *Commedia*. Such addresses are encountered elsewhere, but none so long and none addressed to such a group of readers, who are here urged to turn back in their little boats" (37). All quotations from the *Commedia* are from Singleton's edition.

who have followed him to this point not to "commit yourselves to the open sea" but to turn back to shore. Only a small group of others—"voi altri pocchi"—who have trained themselves in the mysteries are invited to undertake in *their* boat a voyage which, says Dante, will yield as many surprises as Jason's search for the Golden Fleece.[27]

Pound seems to have overlooked the division in Dante's address here, his use of the quotation tacitly conflating the readers in the "piccioletta barca" with the "altri pochi" who are permitted to travel on with the poet. One suspects that what initially caught his attention in the passage was rather the motif of the poem as sea-journey, with its powerful classical antecedents and its links to the Odyssean *periplum* of his own long poem.[28] The line thus resonated strongly with the sense he already had of the readers of *The Cantos* following in their author's wake. As the long poem developed, though, the distinction Dante draws between the two groups of readers would become increasingly apparent, especially, as we shall see in *Section: Rock-Drill* (1955) and *Thrones* (1959). In Dante's lines, the doubled vocatives seem to give the reader the choice of identifying with one or other of the two groups, though in practice, unless we are to stop reading the poem at this point, it must be with the second, "voi altri pocchi," that we align ourselves—with those, that is, who have already acquired a taste for the learning that is the "pan delli angeli" (the adjective "piccioletta" now seems to intimate the first group's "little" knowledge of theology). Dante quietly recognizes his readers' desire to proceed with him to his final destination (they are "eager to listen" to him, "desiderosi d'ascoltar"), even as he sets limits to their ability to do so (as C. S. Singleton notes, while "many readers have been able to follow through the area or sea where Virgil is the guide," the second guide, Beatrice, will carry the poem into the more obscure realm of what in Canto I of the

[27] As Leo Spitzer notes in "The Addresses to the Reader in the 'Commedia,'" *Italica* 32.3 (September 1955), even this "happy few" will "be lost sight of in the last third of the cantica" (150). Mark Kyburz, *"Voi Altri Pochi": Ezra Pound and his Audience* takes its title from Dante's lines but does not explore the complexity of the address: "while the select few are permitted to follow the poet's wake to paradise in compensation for their inferential labour, the 'mob' is left behind to wander in error" (57). Dante's "voi" are hardly the "mob," but readers who have persisted in reading his poem up to the *Paradiso*.

[28] The ancient comparison of the poem with a sea-journey had already been authoritatively discussed by Ernst Curtius in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1948), as Spitzer notes in his article (149).

Paradiso has now been termed the "transhuman"[29]). Canto II proceeds to demonstrate that those accustomed only to "scientific" reasoning will have to make strenuous efforts to comprehend the wisdom of Beatrice (it was indeed her account of the spots on the moon in this Canto that so "bogged" Beckett's Bellacqua in *More Pricks than Kicks*[30]).

But how *are* readers meant to proceed? What in the poem will give them heart to continue with their task after having been warned that they lack the knowledge to do so? Interestingly, one possible answer to that question was being broached at the time Pound was working on *Section: Rock-Drill* of *The Cantos*. In an article in *Romance Philology* in 1954, the celebrated philologist Erich Auerbach commented on what he regarded as Dante's invention of the direct address to the reader in the *Commedia*, noting that "[I]t is difficult to find anything similar in earlier European literature."[31] While the device had an obvious debt to the classical apostrophe, the latter was "seldom addressed to the reader," Auerbach observed. The novelty of the apostrophes deployed in the *Commedia*—there are some twenty of them—is that only there does "the accent of authoritative leadership and urgency reach its full strength—and it is there linked to brotherly solidarity with the reader."[32] This is not to suggest, of course, that the reader is regarded by Dante as in any sense his equal—Auerbach observes rather that Dante "creates his reader" and he does so as a disciple (significantly, the Dantescan address often combines a vocative with an imperative—"Voi che siete in piccioletta barca […] tornate a reveder li vostri liti"[33]). As Leo Spitzer remarked in a response to Auerbach's article, "Dante's discovery of a new auctorial relationship with the reader was the consequence of the nature of his *vision* in which the presence of the reader for whom it is told is required."[34] As both Auerbach and Spitzer emphasized, the rhetorical address employed in the *Commedia* could command a whole range of nuanced implications. In the lines

[29] Singleton, *Paradiso*, 38. For the idea of the "transhuman," see *Paradiso* I, 70.

[30] Samuel Beckett, *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934; New York: Grove Press, 2010), 5.

[31] Erich Auerbach, "Dante's Addresses to the Reader," *Romance Philology* 7 (1954): 268. Auerbach here develops the recent study of the address by Hermann Gmelin in *Deutches Dante—Jahrbuch* 29-30 (1951).

[32] Ibid., 273.

[33] Ibid., 276, 271.

[34] Spitzer, "The Addresses to the Reader," 160 (his emphasis).

from *Paradiso* II, for example, readers might try to imagine themselves as members of the "altri pochi," but they would do so with a simultaneous sense of their own shortcomings.

I am not suggesting that Pound was aware of this scholarly debate, but simply that the new academic interest in the Dantescan address might be seen to parallel in some ways his own[35] (in parenthesis, though, we might note that some of his regular visitors at St Elizabeths did have a close knowledge of the *Commedia* and its scholarship, and that one of them, Giovanni Giovannini, a Professor at the Catholic University, would later write an essay on Pound and Dante[36]). What was at issue was the directness of Dante's intermittent vocatives and the sense that they produced a new way of situating the reader. A more recent consideration of the Dantescan address by William Franke, for example, argues that "For Dante, the written word itself has become an event, specifically an event of interpellation of the reader, rather than remaining merely a mimesis of spoken address."[37] Franke argues that the *Commedia* mounts "a diffused, continuous address to the one concerned by reading. In these as well as in other ways, the phenomenon of presencing the reader subtends the whole poem, determining its every line."[38]

Dante's innovation thus prefigures one of the most significant features of lyric poetry after him, its "performative temporality," as Culler calls it.[39] Yet in the

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[35] There is no reason, either, to suppose that Pound read Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1946; English translation, 1953), though again the account there of Dante's "realism" (his "closeness to the actual in the realm of the sublime" [185]) would have resonated with Pound's own appreciation of Dante's imagery and diction.

[36] Giovanni Giovannini, *Ezra Pound and Dante* (1961; New York: Haskell House, 1974).

[37] William Franke, "Dante's Address to the Reader and its Ontological Signficance," *Modern Language Notes* 109.1 (January 1994): 120. The term "interpellation" has gained currency from its use by Marxist theorist Louis Althusser to define the workings of ideology. See his "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Essays on Ideology* (1970; London: Verso, 1984), 49: "Ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects […] by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'"

[38] Ibid., 118.

[39] Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 63.

Commedia, and arguably also in Pound's *Cantos*, the "now" in which the reader is "presenced" or situated is a fundamentally pedagogical one which necessarily still announces a division or difference between poet and audience. We can see this in another remarkable address in Canto X of the *Paradiso*:

> Or ti riman, lettor, sovra 'l tuo banco,
> dietro pensando a ciò che si preliba,
> s'esser vuoi lieta assai prima che stanco.
> Messo t'ho innanzi: omai per te ti ciba;
> ché a sé torce tutta la mia cura
> quella materia ond'io son fatto scriba.[40]

The reader is brought vividly into the poem's present tense—"*Or* ti riman," "*omai* per te ti ciba"—and is instructed to sit on his bench and mull over the wonders of which he has been given a foretaste. But Dante himself has new and higher things to pursue, and with an almost symmetrical emphasis the second tercet ends with the word "scriba," thereby emphasizing the distance between reader and writer. As with the reference to the "piccioletta barca," what Auerbach calls a "brotherly solidarity with the reader" is complicated by the pedagogical responsibility that Dante assumes and by the way that this necessarily obstructs any simple identification of "I" and "you." Pound's most genial construals of the pedagogical relation rather similarly combine mutuality and difference: "There is no man who knows so much about, let us say, a passage between lines 100 to 200 of the sixth book of the Odyssey that he can't learn something by re-reading it WITH his students, not merely TO his students."[41] The "you" in the Cantos tends to be tantalizing and slightly oblique because, as in this example, a social relation is increasingly mediated by literary allusion. Notice, for example, the indeterminacy attaching to the second person in Canto II. Here the lines move from a clear direct address ("And you, Pentheus had as well listen to Tiresias and to Cadmus") to a passage set in "a later year": "If you will lean over the rock…" (II/9). Here the "you" is unspecified, and so

[40] *Paradiso* X, 22-27. Singleton translates: "Now remain reader, upon your bench, reflecting on this of which you have a foretaste, if you would be glad far sooner than weary. I have set before you; now feed yourself, because that matter of which I am made the scribe wrests to itself all my care" (109).

[41] Pound, *ABC of Reading* (1934; London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1968), 85.

drifts toward an impersonal third person, even as it retains the intimacy of a speech taking place in an imagined present ("now ivory stillness"). This is characteristic of some of the visionary sections of the early Cantos—in XX, for example, the evocation of a landscape of rocks, waters and pines leads to the reflection that "You would be happy for the smell of that place" (XX/90), where the addressee is in part the reader, though it might also be some other who is unnamed. Such effects contrast markedly with the vocative address in the more prosaic reaches of the poem which provide conventional ways of nudging and even chiding the reader: "That, I assure you, happened. / Ego, scriptor cantilenae" (XXIV/112), "The gentle reader has heard this before" (XXXVIII/187), "damn blast your intellex" (XXX/190), and so forth.

With Canto XLV the address to the reader starts to assume greater complexity. The opening lines present Usura as a force of cultural negation, the three-times repeated phrase "no man" ("hath no man a house of good stone" [229], etc.) leaving us quite unprepared for the sudden transition to the archaic "thy": "with usura, sin against nature, / is thy bread ever more of stale rags / is thy bread dry as paper." So Pound's readers find themselves abruptly interpellated by his "grand prophetic style," as Peter Makin has called it,[42] and compelled *now*, in the present tense of the poem's utterance, to acknowledge a shocking continuity between their own world and that of the sixteenth century when, according to Pound, the Church had abandoned its stand against usury.[43] The possessive "thy" here works ironically to lock the reader in place, an effect reinforced by the writing itself in this Canto. As Christine Brooke-Rose has observed, the rhythm is "heavily spondaic" and the mode one of declaration rather than of argument.[44]

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[42] Peter Makin, *Pound's Cantos* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 205.

[43] Benjamin Nelson, *The Idea of Usury*, 29-30: "The Age of Luther and Calvin is the time of Deuteronomy's crisis and demise." Cf. Pound, "The Individual in His Milieu," in *Selected Prose 1909-1965*, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), 243: "[t]he Church slumped into a toleration of usury. Protestantism as factive and organised, may have sprung from nothing but pro-usury politics." Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Structural Analysis of Ezra Pound's Usura Cantos* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1976) also notes the effect of "The sudden appearance of the possessive *thy* [which] automatically brings in an implicit 'I,' the poet (the indictor, the prosecutor, the emitter of the message), as well as 'you' (us, the reader, the public, the jury, we, the recipient)" (19).

[44] Brooke-Rose, *A Structural Analysis*, 61, 67. Brooke-Rose also notes that the verse of the Canto contains fewer end spondees, usually associated with Pound's visionary mode.

Structurally, the Canto seems to fall into two balanced halves, each of twenty-five lines, the second half beginning with the line "Usura is a murrain, usura," and this underlying formal symmetry is reinforced by the syntactical parallelisms that gather around the key phrases "with usura" and "by usura."[45] The rhythm here articulates a resistance to the force of negation the Canto condemns, asserting recurrence against the destructive momentum of usury.[46] At the same time, though, the archaism of Pound's language and its use of syntactic inversion ("Came not," "Not by") acknowledge with frustration the sheer difficulty of mounting such resistance. Indeed, in the opening lines of the next Canto, Pound buttonholes the reader who would dismiss this Canto as a retreat into archaism, who would think that "the Reverend Eliot / has found a more natural language […] you who think / you will / get through hell in a hurry" (XLVI/231). In contrast to Eliot's ironic play with modern idioms, the "unnatural" rhythms of Canto XLV, with their weighty stressing and reiterated phrases, produce a self-retarding movement that leaves little doubt that this is a hell from which we shall not easily escape.[47] And as if to drive home that lesson, Canto LI proceeds to reprise the themes of Canto XLV, but does so precisely in a more "natural language":

> Wool does not come into market
> the peasant does not eat his own grain
> the girl's needle goes blunt in her hand [...]. (LI/250)

There is no direct address to the reader this time; that will be postponed until the fly-fishing passage that follows can specify a contrasting set of productive actions ("A starling's wing will give you the colour," etc). The rhythmic shape of Canto XLV certainly remains, though now it works in tension with a preponderance of passive constructions ("the girl's needle goes blunt in her hand" instead of "blunteth the needle in the maid's hand"). The "more natural"

[45] I follow Brooke-Rose in including the Canto's "title" in the line-count.

[46] Cf. Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, 56: "Distinct from meter, which belongs to the formal order, rhythm makes for the perceptibility of time. For rhythm is not simply the fact of temporal repetition or periodicity; it requires a perception of periodicity *as* rhythmic."

[47] Brooke-Rose notes similarly the "curiously non-temporal effect" of the Canto (*A Structural Analysis*, 28).

vocabulary that shadows our recollection of Canto XLV—"girl" rather than "maid," "cancer" rather than "canker," for example—and the seemingly deliberate flatness of some of the new lines—"It destroys the craftsman, destroying craft" in place of "It rusteth the craft and the craftsman"—these reformulations suggest that we are indeed actors without agency, trapped in "a stage set," as the monstrous figure of Geryone tells us at the end of the Canto (LI/252).[48]

Placed between the two Usura Cantos and complicating their modes of address we have the powerful mythic invocations of Canto XLVII where the "you" is aligned at first with the wily Odysseus. In the opening lines, Pound adroitly shifts from the narrative "he" of the epic ("So full of knowing that even the beefy men know less than he" [XLVII/236]) to a direct address which at once records the prophetic words of Tiresias to Odysseus and interpellates the reader who, as in the *Commedia*, is also "sail[ing] after knowledge." The primary addressee remains Odysseus ("To the cave art thou called, Odysseus"), but the repeated declarations that "By this gate art thou measured" (236, 237) give the address a universal relevance and expand the story of Odysseus and Circe to include the beautiful evocation of the Cave of the Nymphs in Book 13 of the poem ("The cave has two gates"), a passage that received celebrated allegorical commentary by the Neoplatonist Porphyry.[49] This "you," then, acquires multiple resonances through repetition, and when we arrive at the line "Begin thy

[48] Not all readers have seen the transition from the archaisms of Canto XLV to the abstracted modern idiom of Canto LI as a deliberate and powerful movement in the poem. For example, A. David Moody, in *Ezra Pound: Portrait of the Man and his Work*, Volume II: *The Epic Years 1921-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) detects a certain failure of art in the idiom of Canto LI: "The devastations caused by usury are not so much preached against as stated as plain fact. There is passion still in the words, but the rhythm has lost its assurance, its power, and the sense of the good things in nature and art is much subdued" (231).

[49] *Odyssey*, 13.102-112. On the particular relevance of this passage to Canto XVII ("Cave of Nerea"), see Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos, *The Celestial Tradition: A Study of Ezra Pound's* The Cantos (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1992), 109-14 and Peter Liebregts, *Ezra Pound and Neoplatonism* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), 166-78. Tryphonopolous (146-52) provides a helpful account of the "composite rite" of Canto XLVII. On the two gates in the Cave of the Nymphs, see Robert Lamberton, *Porphyry On the Cave of the Nymphs* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1983), 35-8.

plowing" we may add Hesiod's brother "foolish Perses" to the number of those addressed, though as a kind of almanac the passage also again generalizes the object of its address. So too with the lines that follow, where the repeated construction "Hast thou […] Hast'ou" evokes the subtly poised eroticism of Ben Jonson's "A Celebration of Charis: IV. Her Triumph" ("Ha' you felt the wool o' the beaver? Or swan's down ever?"), phrasing later to be echoed with cumulative force in Cantos LXXIV/449 and LXXXI/520. These richly mediated versions of the second person are arguably what then allow Pound in the final section of the Canto to deploy the first person as a kind of collective singular ("By prong have I entered these hills: / That the grass grow from my body" [XLVII/238]). Pronouns thus lead a curious life in this poem as devices by which to situate the personal voice as a medium for the interwoven strands of a complex cultural tradition. This is (to quote Paul Valéry), a "strange discourse, as though made by someone *other* than the speaker and addressed to someone *other* than the listener. In short, it is a *language within a language*."[50] Such a language will convey the immediacy, the "now," of a speech act while giving its pronouns "I" and "you" a kind of citational function, making them iterations of prior literary expression. A notable example is the opening of Canto XX, where the ringing of the wedding bells ("quasi tinnula," from Catullus) and the ideal of clear song ("Ligur' aiode," from Homer) lead into two addresses to the beloved, one from the troubadour Bernart de Ventadorn ("Si no'us vei"), the other from Propertius ("Possum ego naturae /no meminisse tuae!"). Each of these speeches to a lady highlights the immediacy with which she is present to thought rather than to the senses, thus testifying to the power of memory to give being to one who is absent ("Qui son Properzio ed Ovidio": "Qui," "here," the tradition thus made present).

The bluntness of the first line of Canto LII that opens the new decad indicates that this sequence will be quite different in the nature of its address: "And I have told you of how things were under Duke Leopold in Siena" (257). The transparency of this phrasing will set the dominant tone of both the China (LII-LXI) and Adams Cantos (LXII-LXXI), though the extended passage from the *Li Ki* (*The Book of Rites*) with its seasonal instructions places a weight of emphasis

[50] Paul Valéry, *The Art of Poetry*, trans. Denise Folliot (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958), 63-4. Culler refers to Valéry a number of times, but not, surprisingly, to this passage which seems quite relevant to his argument.

on the current speech context (the word "now" appears thirteen times in the *Li Ki* section). After Canto LII, however, the mode becomes more insistently narrative, and the reader is barely addressed (tellingly, perhaps, one of the infrequent uses of "you" seems to invoke Mussolini: "TSONG of TANG put up granaries / somewhat like those you want to establish" [LV/298])."[51] If readers have found these middle Cantos less engaging than those that went before, it is perhaps because narrative urgency extinguishes the "performative temporality" of the poem, leaving the reader on its margin with little to do but passively absorb.[52] These Cantos represent a rather large parenthesis when we are focusing on the intricacies of address in the poem, but with the Pisan sequence the extremity of Pound's situation once more produces a highly nuanced and mobile relation between writer and reader. Take, for example, the section of Canto LXXXI that is framed as "libretto" (519). Here the names of Lawes, Jenkyns and Dolmetsch preside over a lyric tradition for which the music played on viol and lute expresses joy in precision, the perfectly shaped curve of the instrument's bowl seeming to have the power "To draw up leaf from the root" (520). The principal motif here is one of modulation, of transitions from one key or tonality to another ("both the grave and the acute"), echoed in allusive shifts within the address itself. First we have another reprise of Ben Jonson's "The Triumph of Charis" ("Hast 'ou fashioned"), then a fluid shift to the opening lines of Chaucer's "Merciles Beauté" ("Your eyen two wol sleye me soddenly / I may the beauté of hem nat susteyne") and finally the opening of Pound's own lament, "What thou lovest well remains." Here the "you" slips between the poet speaking to himself, to the reader, to the couturier Paquin, and, perhaps, to the US military. This section is testing for Pound's audience which will find itself

[51] "History is a school book for princes," Pound writes in Canto LIV/280. For the intermittent references to Fascist Italy in these Cantos, see my *Ezra Pound: Politics, Economics and Writing* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 112.

[52] In the China Cantos, Pound's ritually expressive "now" is paradoxically rooted in the past: "Now in Chang-tou was ruin […] Of MING were now 200,000" (LVI/307), "Now were the new maps published" (LVII/312). This habit in the Chinese Cantos is more of a rhetorical attempt to keep the narrative moving than it is an exploration of the interaction of discourse and narrative. For the latter in regard to Faulkner's handling of narrative, see Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 180: "The Faulknerian 'now' at this point becomes something more than a feature of free indirect discourse and is transformed into a whole vision of the interpenetration of temporalities in a non-chronological experience of what is still place."

intermittently cast as the object of attack and as the sympathetic recipient of the writer's wisdom ("What thou lovest well remains..."). And while Canto LXXXIII will conjure again with eyes and offer what is from Pound an extraordinary invitation to "pass and look *from* mine / between my lids" (535), the closing lines of Canto LXXXI open up (not surprisingly) a more familiar distance between writer and reader ("But to have done instead of not doing / this is not vanity..." [521]).

It is this distance that we encounter in a more systematic way in *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones*, where Dante's distinction between those in the little boat and the others who consume the "pan delli angeli" comes to resonate decisively in Pound's text. For the first group, a certain directness of address is necessary—"get it across e poi basta," as he had already said in Canto LXXIX/486—while for the "altri pocchi" heightened rhythms and passages of fitful polysemy will intimate wonders beyond normal apprehension. As we have seen, such a division had always been latent in *The Cantos* but it is only in the late sections of the poem that the literary tradition is fully elided with the mysteries or what Pound now begins to call "the secretum":

> The Duce and Kung fu Tseu equally perceive that their people need poetry; that prose is NOT education but the outer courts of the same. Beyond its doors are the mysteries, Eleusis. Things not to be spoken of save in secret.
>
> The mysteries self-defended, the mysteries that *can* not be revealed. Fools can only profane them. The dull can neither penetrate the secretum nor divulge it to others.[53]

This idea of the ineffable, of what cannot and should not be uttered, warns us against the kind of reading that would seek to interpret mysteries that are concealed behind doors and available only to the initiate. Yet mysteries tease; they invite innuendo (literally, a "nodding" to suggest a secret knowledge shared). And by teasing they tempt us to a sort of circumlocutory reading that accepts in advance its failure to penetrate to the core of the mystery and is satisfied with—indeed, delights in—the echoes and associations it can weave

[53] Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (1938; London: Peter Owen, 1966), 144-5.

around the text. Pound is fascinated by the idea of sacred enclosures, by spaces literal and figurative that control admission to the mysteries: as he puts it in *Guide to Kulchur*, "Every knowledge in our time has its outer courts and its portals."[54] In Canto XCVIII, an allusion to "Kung's porch" (691) takes us to the Chinese character *mên*[3] which Pound's source here, translator F. W. Baller, glosses as "Lit., door: hence the entrance into a sect, or the sect itself: ep. 'disciples of the Porch'."[55] This notion of a threshold to cross suggests an "arcanum" (XCI/615) that the uninitiated cannot enter, and the late Cantos return again and again to their privileged enclosed spaces—groves with altars, temples, pools, caves, the "green deeps of an eye," and so on. The ritually affirmative "now" is much in evidence in the visionary passages of these Cantos, but it is spoken out of a silence to which it quickly returns. There is, in fact, "a hush in papyri" (XC/607) and on the rare occasions when the reader is addressed it is often in the spirit of Canto XCVIII's "ne quaesaris," "ask not" (704), an invitation to suspend all questioning in favor of a transcendent quietness.[56] In Canto XCI it has already been said that "They who are skilled in fire // shall read [ideogram] tan, the dawn" (615)—"They," it would seem, are Dante's "altri pochi," but are we, Pound's readers, of their company? That *The Cantos* proper should end with the reader still "astern" (CIX/774) suggests, perhaps, that we are not, and that the pedagogical imperative means finally that we can never enter fully the "now" of the poem's address. Pound invites us into that present tense but in the end we find ourselves summoned less as participants than as those who have heard this before, who remember the signs and can reactivate their values. Which of Dante's boats that leaves us in remains an open question.

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[54] Ibid., 145.

[55] F. W. Baller, trans., *The Sacred Edict* (1924; Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1979), 5, n. 8.

[56] See *The Odes of Horace*, trans. James Michie (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), 38-9 (I.11.1): "Tu ne quaesieris, scire nefas, quem mihi, quem tibi / finem di dederint, Leuconoe…": "Don't ask (we may not know), Leuconoe, / What the gods plan for you and me…"