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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature**

Band (Jahr): **18 (2006)**

PDF erstellt am: **17.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-100038>

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# The Abstract and the Historical: Structure in Ezra Pound's *The Fifth Decad of Cantos*

Mike W. Malm

The essay defines the "Fifth Decad" as a montage and collage text whose more diachronic than synchronic form does not strictly adhere to the rules of traditional, chronological narrative and historiography. Rather, the structure of the text is governed by programmatic, expressive and rhetorical purposes. Devices like parallelisms and antitheses often serve to intensify messages embedded in the poems. Pound also borrows structural models, e.g. from Chinese poetry, to underline specific messages. The "Fifth Decad" as a whole makes use of certain archetypal subjects, like usury or the godlike intellect of leaders. Those subjects are presented and developed on different levels of a hierarchy ranging from the abstract to the historical realization. Thus Pound designed the overall structure of the decad very much as a programmatic artist.

One of the riddles of Pound's *Cantos* is their structure. Even a critic like F. R. Leavis makes his case against the poem in terms of structure, claiming that its design lacks the definition, form, principle, and direction he praises in Eliot's *The Waste Land* (155-156). Other scholars do not criticize the structural aspects of Pound's epic that harshly, but were equally puzzled by what they read as incoherences in the poem. Consequently, they attempt to apply elaborate structural models to *The Cantos*, such as Dante's *Divine Comedy* or the fugue. Other scholars reach the conclusion that the one, ultimate key to the structure of the poem is either well-hidden or simply does not exist. I consider it a more promising approach not to apply, by force, some comprehensive model to Pound's poem, but to identify *partial* coherences. In analyzing *The Fifth Decad of Cantos* (1937), I will endeavor to develop a functional analysis of the ten Cantos' structure, and describe a number of dialectical elements and counter-elements used by Pound. I will not, however, enlarge on the musical implications of the *Fifth Decad*, as other scholars have already

shown the difficulties one faces when trying to apply musical principles to Pound's poems.<sup>1</sup>

Let us take a brief look at the individual poems of the *Fifth Decad*. C42 to C44 describe the creation and administration of the Sieneese bank, the *Monte dei Paschi*, founded in 1624.<sup>2</sup> We learn details about the economy and culture of Siena at that time, about the bank's financial regulations, and even about the conditions for shareholders. C45, the so-called "Usura Canto," is an almost biblical condemnation of usury and its corrupting powers. Filled with personal reminiscences and historical details, C46 is a prosecutor's presentation of evidence against the usurers and their activities in Pound's own time. C47 is a dithyrambic celebration of pagan myth, featuring Ulysses, Circe, and Adonis. C48 contains additional evidence lined up by Pound the prosecutor, interrupted by more personal memories. C49 has been called the "Seven Lakes Canto." It is a seemingly harmless description of natural phenomena set in an idyllic landscape governed by a wise emperor. The poem contains descriptions of peasant life as well as warnings against usury and a definition of imperial power. C50 continues Pound's history of Tuscany to the time of Napoleon and beyond. C51 mostly restates the themes and motifs of the other parts of the *Fifth Decad*.

What can be seen from the beginning is the montage character of the ten Cantos.<sup>3</sup> This term does not postulate overall criteria according to which Pound wrote the text, but may be used for theoretical clarity to locate the decad within a specific literary framework. In fact, describing it as a montage text is one of the few generalizations about the structure of the *Fifth Decad* that can be made with some validity. In articles on montage and collage in literature, Joyce is usually mentioned as one of the chief representatives of montage art, often together with Pound.<sup>4</sup> While some scholars see writers like Dickens and Flaubert as forerunners of montage writing, it became prevalent only after Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto of 1909.<sup>5</sup> Typical of Futurist texts was their condensation of conventional sentence structures, a condensation that went together with a negation of linear narrative and typographical conventions

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<sup>1</sup> Compare e.g. Davis, *Vision Fugitive* 18; Davis, *Fugue and Fresco*; Albright 82-83.

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of brevity, I will refer to individual Cantos in abbreviated form. E.g. "C42.24" refers to Canto XLII, page 24 of the 1995 New Directions edition of Pound, *Cantos*.

<sup>3</sup> For definitions of the umbrella-term *montage* and the sub-term *collage* see Möbius 28-29.

<sup>4</sup> For a reading of Joyce as a montage artist see Möbius 431-438.

<sup>5</sup> On Dickens and Flaubert as montage writers see Möbius 31-42.

(Möbius 147-148). Montage and ellipsis were used to create a density designed to express the movement and speed at which the Futurists aimed. In order to indicate the multiplicity and synchronicity of events, writers often incorporated elements such as newspaper excerpts into literary texts (Möbius 237-241).

One of the major features of montage is the citation of other texts. In his standard work on montage and collage, Möbius introduces the term *quotational montage* to describe works in which whole passages consist fully or chiefly of quotations from other, literary or non-literary, works (58). In the *Fifth Decad*, there is no Canto to which the principle of montage in general and of quotational montage in particular does not apply. This is most obvious in the historical Cantos (the three Siena Cantos, plus C46, C48, C50, and C51) in which the use of quotations is immediately apparent, but also applies to the three more lyrical Cantos: C45 is a montage of direct quotations (“*Adamo . . .*”) and indirect references to works of art. C47 uses elements borrowed from Homer and Bion, while C49 takes its components from Chinese poetry.

More specifically, some Cantos are collage texts. The collage developed in the years between 1910 and the outbreak of World War I. It came into use on several continents at the same time, when the boundaries between genres and media became increasingly blurred and writers experimented with new forms of literature. The word “collage” is derived from the French “coller,” i.e. paste, stick, glue (Perloff 6). As David Antin defines it, a collage is the “dramatic juxtaposition of disparate materials without commitment to explicit syntactical relations between elements.”<sup>6</sup> According to Perloff, collage art was governed by two assumptions: first, that linear discourse cannot fully convey the meaning intended by the artist; second, that transferring words into a collage can create new modes of signification (10).

The “Mr Rhumby” passage in C48 perfectly illustrates the collage aspect of *The Cantos* (C48.241). Pound pursues two different threads in a parallel movement and, as demanded in Antin’s definition of the collage, those separate elements are not connected syntactically. Instead, they form independent sentence clusters. The text jumps from one element (a letter about a pedigree dog) to the other (Mr Rhumby’s appointment) and back again, forming a dense sequence of oscillations without syntactical links. The initial lines of C51 adhere to a similar pattern – a

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<sup>6</sup> Antin, David. “Modernism and Postmodernism.” *Boundary* 2,1 (1972): 106; quoted in Perloff (6).

quotation from a poem by Guinizelli is followed, without any transitional remarks, by Napoleon's statement about mud and then again without transition, by the re-phrasing of a passage from C45 (C51.250). Defining *The Fifth Decad* as a montage and collage text enables us to identify some of the techniques that Pound uses to structure his poem. We can see a variety of techniques and their functions.

### Structural Function in the Work

Traditional history shows a strong bias in favor of narrative. Historians like Croce considered any historical account not written in a narrative form incomplete.<sup>7</sup> During Pound's lifetime, however, there developed a strong skepticism towards conventional narrative structures, which up to then had usually been organized chronologically. Some early exceptions exist, but even the flashbacks in *Melmoth the Wanderer* do not really break with chronology, whose decline begins with Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Authors set out to undermine a storytelling they thought "vulgar," as Antonia Byatt says (166). Some authors used epiphanies and streams of consciousness to avoid simple chronology and thereby reveal new layers of reality. Writers with a particular interest in history employed other strategies to achieve the same goal. Like some modern historians, Pound refuses to narrate history in the traditional way. He belongs with Burckhardt, Huizinga and Braudel, historians who replaced the diachronic view of history with a synchronic vision that depended less on chronological sequence and more on structural criteria. Similar tendencies can be found in *The Fifth Decad* and particularly in the Siena Cantos.

The Siena Cantos are remarkable for their lack of a linear chronology. From 1624 (C42.209) we move to 1623 (C42.210) and even further back to 1622 (C42.211). And from 1622 we jump forward in time to 1749 and 1766 (C42.222, C43.223). This may at first come as a surprise, given Pound's relatively orderly work with his sources. As Pound's Siena notebooks show, he worked through his sources very carefully from beginning to end and generally followed the chronological sequence of events as described in the sources.<sup>8</sup> In C50, for example, Pound adhered

<sup>7</sup> On historiography and narrative see White (10).

<sup>8</sup> See particularly Pound's notes in his notebooks in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (Yale University) collection, call number 43, box 115, folder 4898.

to standard chronology much more closely than in C42 to C44. Consequently, in the Siena Cantos he was not primarily interested in the actual sequence of events and, therefore, granted priority to other structural criteria. Even if the sequence of events in the Siena Cantos is partly determined by the sequence he found in his sources, it was still Pound's deliberate decision to adopt that sequence, because he considered it revealing. This applies particularly to C42 and C43 with their combination, as is the case throughout the Siena Cantos, of documentary quotations and interpolations by the narrator. Even if we acknowledge the presence of a narrator as an item of structure in the poem, his presence does not entail conventional narrative structures. Rather, the narrator handles chronology in a way that suggests programmatic motives.

C42 is a case in point. After an exposition, C42 begins with a list of the benefits of the *Monte* (C42.209-210). The next passage continues to list the benefits and adds some details on the historical situation of Siena in the 1620s ("Siena had no income" etc., C42.211). A quotation from a document of 30 December 1622 (C42.212) concludes the summary of the founding provisions for the bank, while the following paragraphs add more details. With "OB PECUNIAE SCARCITATEM" we learn about the reasons for the bank's foundation. The final passage of C42 is an explanatory conclusion – "get that straight" – of financial details and an affirmation of the good intentions of the bank (C42.214). The overall sequence is: exposition – benefits and historical context – foundation – reasons for the foundation – affirmative conclusion.

C43 repeats some motifs already used in C42. It first confronts readers with a cluster of administrative acts. They culminate in a repeated assertion of good intentions, which is followed by another list of the town's economic problems, interrupted by a Sienese ritual, which is followed by another collage-like cluster of details, this time culminating in an assertion of responsibility. After an interlude concerning maritime fraud, we learn about the founding act and its aftermath. As a sub-motif, fertility comes to the fore with the "fruit of nature" (C43.218) and the "Grass" (C43.219), as well as with the town prostitutes and illegitimate children. The following passages offer several references to the capital and the beneficent interest rates of the bank (particularly C43.221), repeating some previously quoted parts. The final lines, starting with a

reference to the year 1749, then guide us into the more chronological C44.

Hence, the overall pattern of C43 is much more broken than that of C42. The structure of C42 is argumentative, intended to convince us of the beneficence of the *Monte dei Paschi*. From the beginning, we learn about the benefits of the bank and are provided with such details as make its foundation seem reasonable. This is emphasized throughout the poem, up to the affirmative conclusion. Pound uses the very first Canto in the sequence to state his point and leave no doubt about the importance of the *Monte*. The structural emphasis on the benefits of the bank, which is created by listing them at the beginning of C42 (and of the *Decad* as a whole), clearly underlines Pound's intention. C43, with its clusters of repeated details, reinforces the case made in C42. Repetition is here used for intensification. By contrast, C43 introduces a structural counter-element to balance the administrative emphasis of the Siena Cantos: details from Sieneese town life.

C44 is the center of the triad, because, first, it draws the most complete picture of Siena as a city, including its economic, administrative and social life, plus a celebration of Duke Pietro Leopoldo. Second, it opens out to a view of historical events beyond the city and to the Tuscan and European political upheavals and battles of C50. All in all, the Siena Cantos show how Pound avoids chronological narrative in favor of argumentative structures. The structure of the three Cantos is ultimately governed by rhetorical, or expressive purposes.

In the *Fifth Decad* we also encounter rhetorical intensification in a different, more contrastive form. As should be emphasized, contrasts are an integral part of the structure of many Cantos. They sometimes appear as antitheses, while at other times, dualisms assuming the form of parallelisms. The Usura Canto may serve to exemplify parallel composition in *The Fifth Decad*. Its main subject is usury, introduced in the first line (C45.229). The subject is unfolded in terms of two ideas: usury as a destroyer of art and craftsmanship and usury as a "sin against nature." C45 begins with the first idea, conjuring up the decay of art under usury. After "sell quickly" the second idea is introduced — unnatural usury affects the quality of food. The "against nature" motif is here presented in a restrained form, with fewer lines than the art and craftsmanship motifs. With "line," "demarcation" and "Stonecutter" the text returns to the first idea, referring to crafts in particular. After "WITH USURA" the crafts motif continues and then broadens again to cover all works of art,

with additional references to craftsmanship. Repeated references to stonework establish an additional sub-motif ("house of good stone," "Stonecutter," "rusteth the chisel"). In the final passage, after "Memling," the "against nature" motif recurs in extended form and with stronger images than before, up to a victory of the profane (C45.230). In the final passage, "CONTRA NATURAM" serves as a structural node, around which two sub-units of the passage center: one about the loss of procreative powers, another about profanation.

This dual structure can be represented as: art – contra naturam – art – contra naturam. A concluding return to the initial motif, art, is denied. Instead, the poem ends with an urgent warning about the spiritual evils of usury. Structurally, the parallelism rests on the idea of the importance of art (which occupies the major part of the poem), out of which the more fundamental threat of unnaturalness and profanation emerges in two steps – first, as a hint, finally as a thorough-going danger to fertility and religion. The latter element is emphasized by the two-fold, parallel structure.

C51 is more antithetical and contrastive. The structure of the Canto is determined by the function of the poem as a recapitulation of the whole *Decad*. C51 contains some "lyrical" passages like the Usura section (C51.250), an imitation of C45, or the song of the fly-fisher, whose georgic wisdom refers back to the Pleiades passage in the Adonis Canto (C47.237) and of course to Vergil's *Georgica*.<sup>9</sup> Lyrical as these passages may be, the final stanzas of C51 (after "Granham") strongly disrupt the unity of style and language we find in the actual lyrical Cantos of the *decad* (C45, C47, C49). Opposed to them, the final part of C51 combines several references to historical and philosophical texts in what is only a small part of the poem. From a Latin quotation we move to proverbial wisdom ("Grass . . ."), a political speech, a Dantean vision, Geryon's monologue, and finally to a political alliance. The density of references and allusions is far more typical of the "evidence Cantos" (C46, C48) than of the lyrical Cantos. C51 may therefore be called a structurally and stylistically antithetical composite of elements used throughout *The Fifth Decad*. Pound contrasts them in order to avoid any impression of reconciliation at the end of *The Fifth Decad*. As C51 states, the gap between the ideal of the enlightened "doer" and usury-ridden

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<sup>9</sup> As should be noted, Pound does not repeat the direct quotations used in C45, "*harpes et luz*" and "*Adamo me fecit*," but only alludes to them.

reality is still wide. A dialectical resolution is not part of the structure of the poem; the narrative is to be continued in the subsequent Cantos.

### Structural Aspects of Borrowing

Some elements in Pound's *Cantos* seem, at a first glance, to be identifiable as structural borrowings, because of their closeness to some existing poetic tradition. This applies, for example, to Pound's extensive translations from the Chinese. The Chinese tradition provides a suitable starting point for an analysis of C49. Pound's relation to the Chinese poetry he admired is more complex than his borrowing of some anonymous poems might suggest. Old Chinese poetry often used strict patterns and exactly positioned parallelisms. Poets sought to create semantic juxtapositions or complicated parallel structures.<sup>10</sup> This included parallelisms between lines. If one line read noun – verb – noun, the next line would repeat this sequence. This could even apply to things (e.g. animals) or properties (parallelization of colors). Dense and intricately designed poems were the result. The *lü shih*, for instance, was a delicate, but regular form with eight lines per stanza and five or seven words per line, including two rhymes.<sup>11</sup> Pound offers a glimpse of Chinese regularity in the layout of the "KEI MEN RAN KEI" passage in C49 (C49.245). His condensed style of writing finds its counterpart in the lyrical short forms of Chinese poetry. Pound tries to imitate them in the elliptical verses of C49 with their frequent lack of articles ("hills rise about lakes / against sunset," C49.244) and syntactically minimalistic sentences ("Sun up; work / sundown; to rest," C49.245). On this surface, the structure of the Canto is imitative of Chinese grammar, syntax and stanza form. Yet we should not be deceived by the outward simplicity of the poem. C49 is more challenging in terms of structure than its surface suggests.

The major part of the poem consists of complex references to and quotations from Chinese painting and poetry, and presents them in a coherent whole, creating a rural idyll of political and economic tranquility. Vocabulary, motifs and even typographical conventions of Chinese literature are reproduced. On the structural level, however, C49 is less

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<sup>10</sup> Wang Wei (12-13) and Hawkes offer many remarks on the particularities of sentence structure and meaning in Chinese poetry.

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed rhyme and verse pattern see Lu Yu (xvii).

uniform. While chiefly constructed from excerpts from a manuscript book owned by the Pounds, its internal coherence is interrupted by genuinely Poundian interpolations. Although it simulates an imitation of a Chinese poem, C49 does therefore not fully embrace the illusion of authenticity. The poem uses the Chinese elements merely as a style, not as a complete structural model. Its Chinese style is a façade for the political message Pound makes explicit in the final stanzas of the poem – the fight against debt and Geryon (i.e. usury), and the endorsement of a strong ruler who controls the finances of the state.

Functionally, the rural idyll is the opposite of the powers symbolized by Geryon. Pound integrates these elements into a tripartite structure, in which the depiction of an ideal world is juxtaposed with financial malpractices, which is finally resolved in the definition of all-embracing, supreme, and imperial power at the end of the poem. Pound does not degrade the Chinese quotations to mere illustrations of his point, but uses them to create a link to an ancient tradition of governance. No poetical innocence is involved in this, but rather a political program. In fact the genuinely Chinese passages in C49 only gain their full effect when read in combination with Pound's political statements. When Pound seems to indulge in references to beautiful landscapes, he is in fact making his case against economic wrongs and is calling for strong leadership. This goes beyond mere imitation: although old Chinese poetry transports and teaches its own political ideals, the "fourth dimension" and the "power over wild beasts" are specifically Pound's concepts that achieve a metaphysical status in the *Cantos*. It is the ideological dimension of the poem, not its imitation of Chinese style, which makes C49 important. Only if we take this into consideration, can we understand the programmatic-rhetorical intentions behind the poem's structure. Its contrastive sequence of idyll, threat, and heroic monarch reveals more about the inner mechanisms of the decad than the cunning craftsmanship shaping its surface.

### The Archetypal and the Historical

In their explanations of structural aspects of *The Cantos*, scholars have shown almost as much imagination as Pound when he wrote his texts. Kay Davis's book *Fugue and Fresco* explains some of the most widely used models applied to the poem. According to Davis, the most simple

pattern in *The Cantos* is the transition “from dromena to epopte, darkness to light, terror to grace, [. . .] human error to divine wisdom” (Davis, *Fugue* 19). This is the initiation process once undergone at Eleusis. Davis also finds a “nesting organization” in the poem, a system of intricate units and sub-units, the most basic of which Davis calls “subjects.” They are connected by subject rhymes, of which Davis offers the following definition: “If two words rhyme because they sound the same, two ideas or images will rhyme because their meaning is the same” (Davis, *Fugue* 31). Accordingly, two periods or persons may “rhyme,” because they played similar roles, or formed similar constellations, under different historical circumstances. In addition, Davis discovers instances of ring composition in some Cantos, i.e. symmetric parallels centering around a node.<sup>12</sup> Other scholars (and not a few) identify Dante’s *Commedia* and its sequence of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise as a structuring principle (Makin 65), while others emphasize Pound’s sometimes very close work with his sources and his adherence to their structures. In the Adams Cantos, for instance, Pound reduces 8,000 pages of Adams to 80 pages of poetry, borrowing fragments of text from Adams exactly in the same order in which they appear in Adams’s works (Moody 79). As Moody points out, Pound did not just choose random elements, but seeks to create inner coherence (85). In portraying, for instance, Adams shortly before he became president, Pound employs the strategy of extracting from the politician’s writings and diaries certain elements not explicitly stated, but which he brings to light in the Cantos. I have pointed out a similar method in my discussion of the Siena Cantos above.

Other scholars explain the overall structure of the poem in terms defined by the contents and functions of textual units, as Kenner does with reference to the earlier Cantos, which he divides into an overture (C1-3), a “phantastikon” group (C4-7), the Malatesta Cantos (C8-11), moral exempla (C12-13) and a hell group (C14-16) (Kenner 416-417). Surette mentions Pound’s tendency to group a block of cantos around a “single individual or historical period” (18). But not only individuals or periods serve as structuring nodes. Institutions like the *Monte dei Paschi*, too, provide the basis for structural clusters, as do intellectual-political-

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<sup>12</sup> On ring composition in the *Cantos* see chapter 3 of Davis, *Fugue*.

geographical entities. For example, one of Pound's manuscript notes on a group of Cantos has "Mitteleuropa" as a heading.<sup>13</sup>

My own reading of the Decad is based on the structural function of the various elements, which allows us to become aware of the inner dialectics of the whole section. If we read the Siena Cantos as one unit and, for the moment, exclude C51 as a conclusion, we find the lyrical C47 at the center of the Decad. However, the central position of C47 does not necessarily make it the actual core of the section. Rather, C47 is one step in a three-fold dialectical process, which is marked by the three most lyrical Cantos of the Decad: C45 confronts us with pure evil, unrestrained usury, with no balancing force to contain it. After that, C47 guides us into an ideal realm of sacred rituals and natural rhythms. Whereas C45 describes what is ultimately unnatural, C47 celebrates nature itself, its processes of dying and renewal, as symbolized by Adonis and the returning constellations. C45 is a warning against profane and desecrating economic thinking, which seeks to corrupt Eleusis, while C47 is a hymn to fertility and mysteries, like those celebrated in Eleusis. Foreshadowed by the echoes of the Georgics in the Pleiades passage of C47, C49 presents a rural world of balanced forces. It includes a glimpse of the Geryon of C45, but only as a short warning which briefly disturbs the Canto's balance between humanity and nature. The people in the poem live in accord with the rhythms of nature and move harmoniously within landscapes governed by rhythmical processes, like harvests or changes of weather. The monarch and his subjects form a perfect symbiosis, too. C49 combines and transforms the main elements of C45 and C47 in the context of society.

The dialectical progress moving from one lyrical Canto to the next gains its momentum from the factual Cantos C46 and C48 in between. By their abundance of historical references, quotations, and personal reminiscences, they are in contrast to the thematic clarity of the lyrical Cantos and at the same time complement them. The Cantos unfold evidence of the historical and contemporary reality, as Pound perceived it, while the lyrical Cantos unfold a timeless, if not abstract, panorama of those forces Pound considered crucial – the spiritual, nature, good government, but also usury and corruption. These Cantos of documentation do not simply constitute "Hell Cantos" as opposed to ideals presented in lyrical form, because the three lyrical Cantos themselves are

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<sup>13</sup> See Pound's notes in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (Yale University) collection, call number 43, box 73, folder 3309.

not merely concerned with ideal worlds. Rather, C46 and C48 form one part of a tripartite structure, in which the Tuscan history Cantos represent a second part and the lyrical Cantos the center. In other words, the metahistorical forces and values present in the lyrical Cantos find their historical, but still meaningful incarnation in the Tuscan history Cantos, while Cantos C46 and C48 confront us with a storm of minute details in which the metahistorical almost disappears beneath the layers of the contemporary and casual.

A partial key to the structural levels of the Decad is offered by Pound's division of elements in *The Cantos* into permanent, recurrent and casual (Laughlin 111-112). This three-fold concept interested Pound particularly in the 1930s. In a letter to John Drummond of 18 February 1932, Pound distinguished the three elements.<sup>14</sup> And as Pound stated in 1933, his poem "should establish an hierarchy of values, not simply: past is good, present is bad [. . .]. If the reader wants three categories he can find them rather better in: permanent, recurrent and merely haphazard or casual" (*PC&P* VI, 46). The quotation shows one of the characteristics of the long poem after Whitman, as outlined by Conte: a desire for hierarchy, which manifests itself in structural and political terms (37). At the top of the hierarchy we find the permanent, followed by the recurrent, finally the casual. In *A Packet for Ezra Pound*, Yeats refers to Cosimo Tura frescoes in the Palazzo Schifanoia, which depict virtues and values (the Triumph of Love) at the top, astrology and cosmology in the middle, particulars and contemporary details at the bottom. Pound showed Yeats the frescoes to explain the structure of the *Cantos*. In his memory of the event, Yeats mentions "emotions or archetypal events" to characterize the timeless features, and continues: "The descent and the metamorphosis [. . .] his fixed elements, took the place of the Zodiac, the archetypal persons [. . .] that of the Triumphs, and certain modern events [. . .] that of those events in Cosimo Tura's day" (3).

If applied to *The Fifth Decad*, the above concept immediately raises some basic questions. First, whether only positive values or archetypes are among the permanent forms, or whether we can also include such persistent evils like usury among them. After all, C45 condemns a timeless evil, despite its references to specific historical periods. It is not clear from Pound's hints whether we have to define usury as permanent or merely recurrent. And Yeats, in his description of the permanent,

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<sup>14</sup> From this and other evidence, Pearlman derives the notion of a three-fold movement of the *Cantos* in three steps, united by one central idea, time (12-13).

only refers to the Triumphs, that is, to positive ideals. Second, while we may claim that the documentary Cantos are filled with casual elements (like the death of an ex-sultan or the Viennese coffee-houses), they at the same time contain the banker, Rothschild, who, for Pound, embodies usury. Hence, a permanent or recurring evil is present in the figure of Rothschild. Is this a combination of the permanent and the casual? The different elements appear mixed and not clearly discernible as permanent, recurrent or casual.

Still, the three-fold model is helpful for an understanding of the inner structure of the whole Decad, as long as we avoid oversimplifications. I would argue that *The Fifth Decad* makes use of certain *archetypal subjects*, which are presented and developed on different levels of a hierarchy ranging from the abstract to the historical. The archetypal subjects do not succeed each other in a progressive, linear movement. Instead, we have to imagine them as being always present throughout the poem, sometimes in a pure form, but mostly clouded by the density of references or by the complexity of historical details. One subject is usury, which appears in its almost pure form in C45 and assumes a historical shape in other Cantos, for example, in the "usurer" Rothschild's remarks in C48, and in the figures of Metternich and Wellington in C50. This also applies to the idea of good government. The beneficent ruler as an eternal ideal is praised in C49, while he enters the historical stage as Pietro Leopoldo in the Siena Cantos. The two notions cluster in C51, where a Latin quotation about the godlike intellect (abstract) appears near a reference to a speech by R. Hess (historical). Another major subject is ritual, which we encounter in its most pure form in C47, preceded by the historical celebration in C43 and succeeded by the equally historical processions in C48. As we can see, the archetypal subjects are developed and modulated in the Cantos like musical themes.

The archetypal subjects determine the poems' structure indirectly, in terms of priority. Pound created a *Usura Canto*, and a sequence of lyrical patterns, because he was committed to the fight against usury. Starting from what he considered the most pressing issue and presenting it in its unveiled form in C45, he supplied developments and variations of the subject, following it through history. Pound wrote the *Seven Lakes Canto* as another key node in *The Fifth Decad*, because he put a strong emphasis on good government, a concept he isolated in C49 and treated in an historical context in the Cantos about Leopoldo and Ferdinando III. Although Pound's general montage method, as used in C48, is not

genuinely derived from a particular subject, I would claim that the subjects govern the overall structure of the section.

On the one hand, Pound had a thoroughly contemporary sense of structure, a sense that led him to the use of montage, collage and patchwork techniques. On the other hand, he was very much a programmatic and rhetorical writer and broke rules for expressive purposes, which distinguishes him from other modern poets. Arthur Rimbaud and Georg Trakl, for example, composed poetry that, in many places, contains sequences of visionary images with no explicit political or other messages. Although Pound, too, includes many visionary moments in his *Cantos*, they are permeated with an ideological zeal that has its precedents in earlier writers such as Dante, Milton, and Blake, whose major works are inseparable from their personal ideologies. In composing and structuring the *Fifth Decad*, Pound was just as programmatic, a poet with a mission.

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