

1 THE WANDERER AS EXILE: THE QUEST FOR HOME

From the very beginning of his work on *The Cantos* we can discern the importance of the figure of the wandering hero to Pound's conception of his epic's scope and purpose. His decision to place his translation of Book XI of the *Odyssey* as the opening canto, after its placement in the first schema as the third canto, is evidence enough that Pound's Odysseus plays a significant role in the early conception of *The Cantos*. In this chapter I shall examine how Pound develops his own version of the wandering hero and deploys him in the first fifty-one cantos to establish the initial direction and goal for his epic.

In the early cantos he follows Homer's Odysseus closely, for this heroic wanderer is characterized by an individualistic morality and cunning that the poet wants to adopt:

The *Odyssey* high water mark for the adventure story, as for example Odysseus on the spar after shipwreck. Sam Smiles never got any further in preaching self-reliance. A world of irresponsible gods, a very high society without recognizable morals, the individual responsible to himself. (GK 38)

By the time he writes these words, Pound has become a spokesman for Italian Fascism, and the general lack of social responsibility in the Homeric world is a certain and serious defect that reminds the poet of the current condition of most western states (excepting Italy and possibly Germany). When cut off from any cultural tradition that can provide responsible moral leadership for one's journey, the heroic individual must emulate the "self-reliance" of Odysseus and adopt the pose of an "adventurous" wanderer working in isolation from the rest of his culture, responsible only to himself. One can rely only on his own wit and must ignore the conventional morality that serves to repress the will that alone can bring one to a different destination. And Homer's hero provides for the modern poet

such a destination in his intense longing for a return to a lost home. Pound begins his epic with Book XI of the *Odyssey*, in which Homer's hero descends to the underworld to hear Tiresias' counsel about how to return home, in order to align his quest with Odysseus's. The poet considers that the modern world is cut off from any leadership or cultural authority that can provide the structures and categories of experience that fulfill desire and establish the comfort and ease associated with home. In Pound's estimation, "home" is nowhere to be found in the present state of culture and so he must wander in search of it. Pound's state of exile might be said to differ radically from Odysseus's: after all, the Greek was prevented from returning home by spiteful Neptune while Pound voluntarily adopts this pose. But, while his exile is a willed decision, it is the failure of his culture to provide a "home" that impels his wandering. Pound shares with Homer's Odysseus an intense nostalgia that propels a lonely journey guided only by one's native wit, what Homer calls "polumetis." As Pound describes Odysseus's wit in a letter to W. H. D. Rouse, "[W]hen a man's got a mind like that even the gods respect him" (*SL* 270).

But Pound's wanderer is not a simple replica of the Homeric model. This poet works with great care to find a way for his individual talent to draw upon and advance a larger tradition of epic wanderers than the Homeric epos provide. He turns to Dante, who also sought to place himself in a tradition of wandering heroes that he hoped his own work would culminate, for a more refined and spiritual understanding of nostalgia. For Dante too is a wanderer seeking a lost home, but that home becomes more than the place he left behind; Pound calls upon Dante to suggest that the "home" to be sought in *The Cantos* is similar to the earthly paradise of Eden, now lost beyond memory and regained only by the terrifying descent to hell and the painful ascent up Mount Purgatory. One ought to be struck by the absence of any mention of *The Cantos* in W. B. Stanford's classic account of *The Ulysses Theme*. In his final chapter, "The Re-Integrated Hero," Stanford credits James Joyce with successfully solving "a radical antinomy in the [Ulysses] tradition—the conflict between the conceptions of Ulysses as a home-deserter and as a home-seeker" (Stanford 215). Pound too seeks to reconcile these contrary motions, and he does so by reading Dante.

The Dantesque Paradigm: The Return to Origins

Ulysses is central to the *Commedia*. In *Inferno* XXVI, Dante hears the story of Ulysses, a voyager who disdains a return to Ithaca, his

literal home, and who instead seeks the intensity of new and forbidden experience. Employing Joyce's terminology, Stanford calls this Ulysses the "centrifugal" wanderer (Stanford 181), one whose thirst for new experience is so compelling that no obligation—"not fondness for a son, nor duty for an aged father, nor the love I owed Penelope"—could conquer it. He has been consigned to hell as a "false counsellor," for he in turn incites his companions to abandon in like manner the bonds of affection and duty that support civilized life. Ulysses and his companions break free from the Homeric version of "home" and all its "centripetal" obligations and travel beyond the Pillars of Hercules, beyond the assigned limits of our allotted experience. At last Ulysses sights a mountain, at which point a storm arises and sinks his ship. This journey, away from the familiar and toward experience as yet undifferentiated by human categories, ends in a violent storm of chaos that overwhelms the centrifugal wanderer.

While briefly noting that Dante might be "condemning a tendency to over-adventurous speculation and research in his own mind" (182), Stanford does not appreciate the central role Ulysses plays in Dante's epic. As Giuseppe Mazzotta remarks, "Ulysses will appear, even in *Paradiso*, as a constant reminder to the poet of the possible treachery of his own language and the madness of his own journey" (Mazzotta 105). Dante recognizes that his poetic language leads us on a quest that nearly duplicates Ulysses'—after all, what is the *Commedia* about if not what Ulysses seeks, "experience of the world and of the vice and worth of men"? In addition to Homer's centripetal wanderer, Pound responds to Dante's treatment of Ulysses as he deploys that figure in *The Cantos*.

Inferno I opens as the pilgrim awakens "within a dark wood where the straight way was lost." He is stricken with fear, but soon he takes hope at the sight of a hilltop clothed with the sun's light. The pilgrim decides to climb this hill to reach the comforting light, but three wild beasts block his easy ascent and send him scurrying back. John Freccero demonstrates that in *Inferno* I Dante is taking issue with the Platonic conception of transcendence, that one can achieve a transcendent experience by means of a direct ascent to the light (Freccero 6–11). The opening canto insists that the path to God's light is no easy and direct ascent.

Freccero argues that Ulysses' voyage recounted in *Inferno* XXVI recalls the pilgrim's own aborted journey that the three beasts cut short: "In Dante's reading, as in the reading of the [medieval] neoplatonists, the voyage [of Ulysses] was an allegory for the flight of the soul to transcendent truth" (15). He then

demonstrates how *Inferno* I, *Inferno* XXVI, and *Purgatorio* I are all connected by the image of shipwreck (23). "[I]n the first canto of the poem," he notes, "the pilgrim seems to have survived, by pure accident, a metaphorical shipwreck of his own":

And as he who with labouring breath has escaped from the deep to the shore turns to the perilous waters and gazes, so my mind, which was still in flight, turned back to look again at the pass which never let any go alive. (*Inferno* I, 22–27)

While Ulysses' fate is to die at sea, "as One willed," the pilgrim is spared. At the end of *Purgatorio* I, having just completed the descent to hell that becomes the ascent up Mount Purgatory, he recalls both his own earlier survival and Ulysses' death by water:

We came then on to the desert shore that never saw man sail its waters who after has experience of return. (*Purgatorio* I, 130–132)

We are meant to recall that Ulysses drowns just as he sights a mountain that no one ever saw before, a mountain that in the medieval geography Dante follows can only be Mount Purgatory. As the pilgrim embarks on his own purgatorial experience up this mountain, the poet recalls Ulysses who failed to see the need for purgation before he set sail for ultimate experience. Unlike Ulysses, Dante undergoes purification as preparation for the return to an original state.

As Dante climbs Mount Purgatory, he purges sin after sin until he is free of all contamination. At the top of this mountain he enters Eden. Wandering in the earthly paradise, he recalls the experience of *Inferno* I:

Already my slow steps had brought me so far within the ancient wood that I could not see the place where I had entered. . . . (*Purgatorio* XXVIII, 22–24)

The "ancient wood" here recalls the "dark wood" of *Inferno* I. There, Dante was in a wood darkened by his own sin; here, he meanders in an ancient wood that is the place of humanity's pure origins. The difference between Dante and his Ulysses is not in their ambitions, for both seek transcendence of the present human condition bound by space and time; but in their methods, for Dante sees the need to purify himself of the stain and contamination that

being in space and time has placed upon him before he can reach the purity and health of a lost home. Both seek to move away from the conditions of the present, but Ulysses' voyage is a reckless attempt at escape while Dante's is a more deliberate effort at purification.

Like Ulysses, Dante may forsake his present home, his present culture that is contaminated by sin; but in his movement away from that home, he manages to reach his original home, Eden, whence he can ascend to his final home, union with God. The solution of a "radical antinomy" with which Stanford credited Joyce was achieved centuries earlier by Dante: the centrifugal impulse away from home has been reconciled with the centripetal impulse to find home. In precisely this pattern Pound deploys his Ulysses.

Cantos I-VII

Within this Dantesque paradigm, however, Pound still relies on Homer's hero; in fact, throughout *The Cantos*, Pound's wanderer is called either "Odysseus" or "no man," but never Ulysses. While I shall argue that Dante is the poet's main model, he needs the Homeric wanderer to emphasize that the modern journey to origins is an unmarked, unaided, and isolated endeavor: "I haven't an Aquinas-map; Aquinas *not* valid now" (*SL* 323); "Stage set à la Dante is *not* modern truth. It may be O.K. but *not* as modern man's" (*SL* 293). All three epic wanderers—Homer's Odysseus, Dante's Ulysses, and Dante the pilgrim—are present in Canto I.

As Ronald Bush has noted (133), the very first of *The Cantos* begins precisely where Dante's Ulysses begins his personal narrative: "When I parted from Circe, who held me more than a year . . . I put forth on the open deep with but one ship and the company which had not deserted me." The fact that the poet translates Andreas Divus's medieval Latin translation of Book XI of the *Odyssey* is evidence enough that Pound's wanderer is based on Homer's centripetal, home-seeking Odysseus.¹ Moreover, Pound finds a "crime and punishment motif in the *Odyssey*" (*LE* 212-13), and the descent to the underworld, which he reads as a ritual of purification (Bush 132), might indicate that he does not need Dante's pilgrim as an example. As if to foreclose such a misreading, Pound follows Divus's mistranslation in which Tiresias asks Odysseus why he descends a second time. I imagine that Pound would have been aware that this is an error on Divus's part and that he leaves it uncorrected because it serves his own purposes:

to indicate that this is not simply a copy of Odysseus's descent but a "second" version, something new and distinctly his own. After Tiresias' prediction of Odysseus's lonely return through spiteful Neptune, the poet abruptly halts his translation of the Latin text: "Lie quiet Divus." The reader cannot fail to notice that a sharp break has occurred in the narrative, a break designed to cause the reader to take special note of the way the poet has chosen to continue Odysseus's wandering. The ritualistic solemnity of Pound's translation is suddenly broken by an agitated voice that pedantically cites his source:

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

Pound shifts for a moment to an editorial voice unnerved by the prospect before him: an Odysseus who ignores Ithaca and Penelope's arms and who travels instead toward unknown experience, uncharted seas. Rather than look upon and follow the centrifugal movement that is about to take place, this editor retreats to the shelter of scholarly pursuits. But the poet resumes his narration, again in a solemn voice but no longer following Homer's hero:

And he sailed, by Sirens and thence *outward and away*
And unto Circe.
Venerandam,
In the Cretan's phrase, with the golden crown, Aphrodite,
Cypri munimenta sortita est, mirthful, orichalchi, with golden
Girdles and breast bands, thou with dark eyelids
Bearing the golden bough of Argicida. So that: (I/5, my italics)

This Odysseus sails "outward and away," a distinct centrifugal movement away from all known and familiar bonds. Homer's Odysseus has given way to Dante's Ulysses; the model of the home-seeker is abandoned at this point and replaced by the reckless home-deserter who seeks new experience. Pound's wanderer, however, does not drown but attains instead a vision of the divine. By breaking free of all constraints and structures that "home" may come to stand for, he can return to humanity's first home, its original consciousness that can see "gods float in the azure air" (III/11). Forsaking Penelope, he finds "Aphrodite," a visionary experience of love and delight that is his true home.

Canto I establishes the initial and fundamental identity of Pound's wanderer: the wit and nostalgia of Homer's Odysseus, the

daring recklessness and intensity of desire of Dante's Ulysses, and the successful attainment of divine experience of Dante the pilgrim. The "So that:" ending the canto indicates that, with this figure developed and deployed, we are ready to embark on the epic journey away from the present corruption and back toward an original home.

The lines that celebrate the vision of Aphrodite come from Georgius Dartona's medieval Latin translations of the First and Second Homeric Hymns to Aphrodite and the First Hymn to Hermes. Pound's decision to translate these and Divus's medieval translation of Book XI of the *Odyssey* suggests his historical approach to the examination of culture. He proceeds backward in time until he finds an artifact that indicates a place and time that last had contact with the vigor and insight of the Homeric original. The early Italian Renaissance (still writing in Latin, at least in this instance) was the last moment in Western cultural history that enjoyed vital contact with the pagan world of energy and immanent divinity (see Makin, *Pound's Cantos* 127). And Pound does not translate Divus into modern English; instead, he chooses the measure and diction of Anglo-Saxon verse because, in this poet's estimation, poems such as "The Wanderer" represent the last time in English literary history that a poet manifested an understanding and appreciation of the hardships, toils, and pains of exile and the subsequent intensity of nostalgia akin to Homer's.² The opening canto returns the modern world to its last moment of cultural health, the last time it had contact with the vigor and beauty of "the original world of the gods" (*SL* 210).

In 1917, when Pound was working on this canto, Rudolf Otto was advancing a similar conception of the human mind. For Otto, the holy "is a purely *a priori* category," "an original and underivable capacity of the mind implanted in the 'pure reason' independently of all perception" (112). Otto makes the bold claim to have isolated an "original" category of the mind, a mode of perception natural and given as opposed to artificial and constructed. Canto I suggests that the original and natural human consciousness is one that sees the presence of the holy in the world. The home Pound's Odysseus seeks and glimpses is not a place but a way of being, not the familiar world of civilized duties but the lost and recoverable consciousness we originally enjoyed. Pound's insistence that "the gods exist" (*GK* 125), that pagan myths of gods and goddesses "are . . . *real*" (*SP* 92), strongly resembles the thesis of another neo-Kantian philosopher of Pound's time, Ernst Cassirer, who describes what he calls the "mythic consciousness." Visions of gods and daemons occur when the mind:

is captivated and enthralled by the intuition which suddenly confronts it. It comes to rest in the immediate experience; the sensible present is so great that everything else dwindles before it. For a person whose thinking is under the spell of this mythico-religious attitude, it is as though the whole world were suddenly annihilated; the immediate content, whatever it might be, that commands his religious interest so completely fills his consciousness that nothing else can exist beside and apart from it. The ego is spending all its energy on this single object, lives in it, loses itself in it. (32-33)

We can apply Cassirer's thesis to the end of Canto I, when Odysseus attains a vision of Aphrodite, to assert that the wanderer has managed to break free of all structures and categories that constitute the familiar objects of a secular world and has returned to an original consciousness whose intense concentration on the phenomenal world has resulted in the manifestation of the goddess. One accomplishes this return by "annihilating the world," by destroying the structures that determine our modern debased consciousness. Without these corrupt categories to interfere with our experience of the phenomenal world, one is free to become immersed in the intense concentration upon any object that "enthalls" or "captivates"; then, "the spark jumps across somehow, the tension finds release, as the subjective excitement becomes objectified and confronts the mind as god or daemon" (Cassirer 33). The philosopher is trying to explain why human beings originally saw gods and daemons, while the poet implies that his wanderer has actually returned to that original and healthy state. Canto I culminates in an experience of original beauty and divine splendour to announce that the first goal of the epic hero's wandering is to return to the purity of our lost origins, to a consciousness as it was originally and naturally constituted before the ill effects of history. In this way his project is aligned with the Dante who seeks and manages a return to the earthly paradise of Eden, where, after a certain ritual of purification, the pilgrim gains access to the divine splendour operating within the natural order. For Pound as well as the Dante he has invented, "home" is a state before history in which the human mind "sees" the holy in the world.

Canto II quickly resumes the depiction of an Homeric world by means of allusion to and translation of some lines from *Iliad* III that focus on Helen. The old men of Troy complain about her presence while admiring her almost divine beauty. Because she is ship- and city-destroying, she ought to be sent back to the Greek ships.

Though "blind as a bat," "poor old Homer" was able to represent, in words, the beauty that leads to the destruction of Troy, which functions for Pound as the first manifestation of the ideal city that will play an increasingly central role in his political theorizing. The poet then moves to the *Odyssey*, Book XI again (a purely mechanical connection to the previous canto that nonetheless serves to form a pattern of Homeric values) with the story of Tyro, who was raped by Poseidon; from this violent encounter with the god, she gives birth to Pelias and Neleus, great servants of Zeus. Sexual desire and female beauty can lead either to great destruction or construction, to the ruin of a world or to its establishment and strength. Pound's innovation in telling this story is to depict Tyro and the sea god locked in the act of love that will produce the great heroes. The Homeric world of pagan reverence for sexuality leads to the visionary experience of Canto I, to the conception of heroic strength, or to the utter destruction of the ideal city.

This scene modulates into the main action of this canto, Acoetes' narrative of the danger and glory of Dionysius. Those who do not recognize the divine in this boy are transformed into brutes, while the one who does see the presence of a god is spared and becomes a devotee. Acoetes is telling his story to Pentheus as a warning to that young king to end his opposition to Dionysius and to join the worship of the god. Acoetes' line—"I have seen what I have seen"—presents the attitude of one who has been a witness to the power and greatness of the god but who cannot explain or defend his vision. Acoetes is witness to the twin possibilities of the divine already established through Homer. The canto ends back with the seascape where Tyro and Poseidon lie together, the natural beauty of the world depicted as the proper setting for the manifestation of the holy. The modern secular world is in the position of Pentheus, who relies on the powers of human reason and so ignores the warning to his destruction. While Canto II does not present Odysseus, it has created an Homeric frame for the story of another wanderer, Acoetes, who has seen and believes. Something has been added to the figure of the wanderer, the role of witness (but not yet of prophet).

The next canto follows thematically, in that Pound himself is a witness in a similar way, and we can either accept his warning or, like Pentheus, become victims of our worldly scepticism.

Canto III is an important "wanderer" canto because in it the poet establishes himself, in his own person, as an exile whose visionary gift reminds us of the Odysseus from Canto I. He includes a very specific and real situation from his own past as relevant material for his epic:

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

He recalls his visit to Venice in 1908, when he left America for Europe to become a poet. Elsewhere, he will also recall this period of his life as a time of near despair, when he almost threw his manuscript of poems that becomes *A Lume Spento* in the water. Not even twenty-three, he finds himself unknown, impoverished (he cannot afford to ride in a gondola), and with doubtful prospects. Other young men would despair and chuck the poems in the canal, but this young man instead manages to achieve a visionary experience:

Gods float in the azure air,
 Bright gods and Tuscan, back before dew was shed.
 Light: and the first light, before ever dew was fallen.
 Panisks, and from the oak, dryas,
 And from the apple, maelid,
 Through all the wood, and the leaves are full of voices,
 A-whisper, and the clouds bowe over the lake,
 And there are gods upon them,
 And in the water, the almond-white swimmers,
 The silvery water glazes the upturned nipple,
 As Poggio has remarked. (III/11)

Instead of despair, the young poet enjoys a vision of beauty and delight as he gazes over the Grand Canal, transforming the secular scene before him into a pagan world where divine and semidivine creatures play. The scene he conjures is remote in time, "back before dew was shed," "before ever dew was fallen"; it is an original world, where "the first light" shines. He is blest with Cas-sirer's "mythical consciousness," able to transform the objects of reality into holy objects. It is all "as Poggio has remarked"; as in Canto I, he turns to a medieval Latin text to aid his concentration. This again marks Renaissance Latin Italy as the last time, language, and place that had vital contact with the "first light." This canto is important because it is Pound's claim that he has a visionary capacity, that he had it as a very young man with no prospects:

this capacity is his strength and distinction. Pound himself becomes part of the wandering figure he is developing in these early cantos.

This canto divides neatly into two fragments of almost equal length, and their juxtaposition is telling. The other fragment is from the Spanish epic poem *Cantar de mio Cid*; Pound quotes from Part I, "The Exile." While this hero is meant to remind one of the composite Odysseus of Canto I, he also develops the character of the young poet already presented. As an exile, an outlaw, a man whom the authorities oppose and want to control, Ruy Diaz enables Pound to enlarge his own sense of isolation and danger. Like the young Pound, this resourceful bandit is out of funds, and economic privation is the main weapon that the powerful use to break its heroes. But as the young poet avoids despair and sees the gods, so myo Cid is able to transform his penury into capital. He fools Jewish moneylenders into thinking that a sealed trunk weighted down with sand actually contains gold. With such collateral, he is given the money he needs to raise an army and continue his outlawed existence.

The juxtaposition of these two fragments does more than present the poet himself as an outlawed hero whose cunning enables him to rise above the conditions of the present and continue his heroic enterprise. It also has aesthetic implications. Perhaps the vision of the gods that the young Pound manages is not "true" just as Diaz's sand is not gold.³ The greatness of both cunning heroes—myo Cid and Pound—lies in their ability to transform the worthless into the fruitful. Sand is not gold anymore than the poet's words depict or represent anything really "out there." But somehow the poet's language can create an illusion that works, a fiction of origins that can make a real difference. This canto suggests that the poet is aware that he is constructing a myth of origins that may or may not be true; the "truth" factor is not the important matter, what matters is that it makes of human origins the capacity to feel joy and delight. He creates a fiction, that human origins are healthy and holy, so he can restore humanity to a health it may never have enjoyed. Origins are a place for the poet to work, a place of power in that they are constructed foundations capable of determining the version of humanity and the culture to follow. I do not wish to provide a method of deconstructing Pound; rather, I wish to suggest that he has the essential insight of the deconstructionist, that origins are a construct the powerful establish and control. The poet is an outlaw like myo Cid because the system in place at present recognizes the implications of the poet's cunning skill.⁴

The next three cantos introduce the troubadours of Provence

and Tuscany as another component of the wanderer. These singers wandered throughout southern Europe, celebrating the joys of sexual love, female beauty, and heroic warfare. After Canto III in which Pound's poetic gift is made part of the wanderer's nature, these cantos connect this poet with a tradition of wandering singers who, he believed, had a secret and outlawed religion with ties to the pagan past:

Provence was less disturbed than the rest of Europe by invasion from the North in the darker ages; if paganism survived anywhere it would have been, unofficially, in the Langue d'Oc. That the spirit was, in Provence, Hellenic is seen readily by anyone who will compare the *Greek Anthology* with the work of the troubadours. (SR 90)

Ascetic and orthodox Christianity had less effect, Pound asserts, in Provence than in the rest of Europe and so an "unofficial paganism" survives there and reaches Tuscany in the thirteenth century. The orthodoxy is threatened by this pagan heritage:

If a certain number of people in Provence developed their own unofficial mysticism, basing it for the most part on their own experience, if the servants of Amor saw visions quite as well as the servants of the Roman ecclesiastical hierarchy, if they were, moreover, troubled with no "dark night of the soul," and the kindred incommunities of ascetic yoga, this may well have caused some scandal and jealousy to the orthodox. (SR 91)

Peter Makin shows that the troubadours were part of a religious cult that the orthodoxy considered heretical (see *Provence* 217ff). So Pound adds another dimension to his wanderer to place him in a poetic tradition whose celebration of erotic love renders it outlawed and which "culminated in Dante Alighieri" (SR 88–89). "I am constantly contending that it took two centuries of Provence and one of Tuscany to develop the media of Dante's masterwork" (LE 9–10). It is safe to assert that even this addition to the wanderer theme has its purpose in deepening Pound's relation to Dante.

Pound has each of these three cantos begin in ways that recall the opening cantos in order to connect the troubadours to the wanderer theme there established. Canto IV opens with a sketch of a burning Troy, which reminds us of Helen from Canto II whom the old men feared would bring doom to the ideal city. A ref-

erence to Cadmus follows in his aspect as founder of the fabulous legendary city of Thebes. Troy and Thebes are presented as realized examples of the ideal city that depend somehow on the pagan reverence for the divine that troubadour song preserves. The canto next presents two stories from Ovid that are retold in Provençal legend: the story of Ityn is paralleled in the life of Guillems de Cabestanh and the story of Actaeon in the life of Peire Vidal. These couplings suggest a continuity from Ovid through the Provençal singers, as do the many name places included, either from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or from Pound's own walking tour through Provence in 1912. Ovid, one of the few "safe guides in religion" (SL 183) because he is the least dogmatic and merely witnesses the appearances of the divine (Bernstein 76-78), is implied to be the classical source of the later singers. The canto also includes scraps from Catullus and Arnaut Daniel, furthering the sense of a survival of a tradition of erotic love songs from classical Rome through the time of the troubadours.

Canto V begins with "Ecbatan, City of patterned streets," another historical manifestation of the ideal city that is now made the product of the poet's "vision":

Measureless seas and stars,
 Iamblichus' light,
 the souls ascending,
 Sparks like a partridge covey,
 Like the "ciocco", brand struck in the game.
 "Et omniformis": Air, fire, the pale soft light.
 Topaz I manage, and three sorts of blue;
 but on the barb of time.
 The fire? always, and the vision always . . . (V/17)

As in Canto III, Pound presents his own visionary capacity as material for his epic; it is relevant for this poet to inform his reader of what sorts of visionary experience he can "manage." It is worth noting that, among other medieval Neoplatonic sources, he alludes to *Paradiso* XVIII, Dante's image of sparks flying upwards from a burning log that describes the souls of blessed warriors rising to form a great eagle. Pound implies that his vision of the ideal city is in the tradition of Dante's heavenly city; a further layer has been added to Pound's wanderer, as one whose vision reaches transcendent knowledge of heavenly justice and harmony. The canto then connects this vision of the ideal city to the singers of erotic love songs—Catullus, Sappho, Poicebot, and Peire de Maesnac

First he establishes a literary tradition in which he seeks to operate as a poet/wanderer himself. He begins by recalling the scene out of *Iliad* III where the old men complain about Helen even as they praise her beauty. But this time she is connected to her later incarnation as Eleanor of Aquitaine, who was the subject of the previous canto and of whom Bernart de Ventadorn, Bertrams de Born, and Arnaut Daniel all sung (Makin 132). Then he turns to a passage from Ovid's *Ars amatoria* that gives advice to young men about how to seduce beautiful girls. What these two episodes establish are the powers and dangers of female beauty. Then comes a fragment from Bertrams de Born's poem that celebrates the coming of spring—not for its renewal of sexual passion and love but for the return of the glory of battle. Bertrams's poetry rails against those too cowardly to enjoy in warfare the same aesthetic delights as in love: his "propaganda is against fear" and his belief is "in the contagiousness of courage" (Makin 42, 44). The inclusion of Bertrams's ethic prepares the way for Dante's complex vision from *Paradiso* XVIII where the souls of the blessed warriors fly upward like "ciocco" to form a great eagle that is the heavenly symbol of the strength and vision required for the achievement of harmony and justice. Sexual love for women as sung by Homer and Ovid is the stuff that incites warriors and rulers to aim for heavenly justice in Dante. Pound then jumps more than five centuries, from the heaven of Dante to "the age of prose" that documents the bourgeois materialism of Flaubert's France. The contrast is drastic, from a world of great passion and courage to the precise depiction and diagnosis of a decadent world of sterile emotion and ornamental bricabrac. This great tradition ends with Henry James, whom Pound presents purging his old voice above the others. He is compared to Sordello from *Purgatorio* VI, who watches Dante and Virgil pass "*con gli occhi onesti e tardi*"—"with eyes honest and slow." James is like this watchful couching lion who comes to recognize the poets as fellows and guides them only as far as the entrance to Purgatory proper (which is still denied him). Or James is like those great poets of antiquity from *Inferno* IV (Dante's limbo). Their solemn movement—"grave incessu"—announces their difference from the rest of those in this dimly lit part of hell whose only pain is the eternal loss of hope. In that canto Dante associates himself with great poetic forebears and indicates that he is both one of their number and beyond them, for he will leave hell, climb the purgatorial mountain, and achieve union with God. James then is the watchful artist who, in "weaving an endless sentence," mimes the mental paralysis of the modern bourgeois culture and who leads the poet someday toward a purgatorial experience denied himself.⁵

The prose tradition of Flaubert and James provides the context for a depiction of Pound himself, seeking buried beauty as he climbs the stairs of Purgatory:

We also made ghostly visits, and the stair
 That knew us, found us again on the turn of it,
 Knocking at empty rooms, seeking for buried beauty;
 And the sun-tanned, gracious and well-formed fingers
 Lift no latch of bent bronze, no Empire handle
 Twists for the knocker's fall; no voice to answer.
 A strange concierge, in place of the gouty-footed.
 Sceptic against all this one seeks the living,
 Stubborn against the fact. (VII/25)

The decadent world created by the bourgeois consciousness that sees no value other than accumulation of material has been bereft of the true beauty that the poet seeks. Pound has indicated a literary tradition of sexual passion, courage, and beauty that has been brought to the modern age only in the guise of prose fiction—Flaubert and James—which can diagnose the disease of the modern world. Pound picks up after James as the poet succeeds the master of English prose and seeks to uncover the beauty that the bourgeois mind has buried. Only the poet can find and record this beauty, which he believes still exists though the “facts” presented by the prose writers would indicate otherwise. He is “sceptic against all this,” disbelieving that only the gross and ornamental bricabrac of the bourgeois world exists. The poet is a purgatorial figure who works to restore our vision to the beautiful, as Homer, Ovid, and Dante saw it. He establishes his own project as the creation of an epic poem in the age of the novel, an attempt to write in a genre appropriate to heroic ages and to be made vital once again. The first step in the restoration of the epic poem in the “modern” age is the heroic search for beauty in a culture that seems to have lost its capacity to see the beautiful.

Pound regards himself as an epic poet in the age of prose. After some lingering in the debased and sordid “contemporary” world, Pound resumes the theme of eros that earlier in the canto was seen as culminating in Dante’s heavenly vision:

The sea runs in the beach-groove, shaking the floated pebbles,
 Eleanor!

The scarlet curtain throws a less scarlet shadow;
 Lamplight at Buovilla, e quel remir,

And all that day
 Nicea moved before me
 And the cold grey air troubled her not
 For all her naked beauty, bit not the tropic skin,
 And the long slender feet lit on the curb's marge
 And her moving height went before me,
 We alone having being.
 And all that day, another day:
 Thin husks I had known as men,
 Dry casques of departed locusts
 speaking a shell of speech . . .
 Propped between chairs and tables . . .
 Words like the locust-shells, moved by no inner being;
 A dryness calling for death. (VII/25-26)

Pound places his own appreciation of the "naked beauty" of Nicea (variously identified but certainly in part a reference to Helen of Troy through Poe's "Nicean barks") in the tradition of erotic song from Homer (Helen) through Ovid (the detail of the scarlet curtain comes from Golding's translation of the description of Atalanta's naked beauty as she races Hippomenes) to Arnaut Daniel (whose "*e quel remir*" is from a poem in which he asks to gaze upon his beloved's naked body in the lamplight). In the modern world only the poet and the beautiful Nicea "have being," while the rest of humanity is hollow and desiccated. He has found and can marvel at the "naked beauty" before him, while the husks and shells of what once were men call for death to end their empty existence. Even the words these hollow men speak are only "the shell of speech"; fallen men speak a fallen language. He continues the depiction of this weak and passionless people for most of the rest of the canto, but he is careful to insert a line from Dante that continues his work on the wanderer:

 The old room of the tawdry class asserts itself;
 The young men, never!
 Only the husk of talk.
 O voi che siete in piccioletta barca,
 Dido choked up with sobs, for her Sicheus
 Lies heavy in my arms, dead weight
 Drowning, with tears, new Eros,

And the life goes on, mooning upon bare hills; [. . .]
 Passion to breed a form in shimmer of rain-blur;

But Eros drowned, drowned, heavy-half dead with tears
 For dead Sicheus. (VII/26-27)

As he calls attention to this partial humanity, he quotes the opening line of *Paradiso* II, in which Dante distinguishes his voyage from Ulysses':

O ye who in a little bark, eager to listen, have followed behind my ship that singing makes her way, turn back to see your shores again; do not put forth on the deep, for, perhaps, losing me, you would be left bewildered. The waters I take were never sailed before. . . .

Ye other few that reached out early for the angels' bread by which men here live but never come from it satisfied, you may indeed put forth your vessel on the salt depths, holding my furrow before the water turns smooth again. (*Paradiso* II, 1-15)

Like Ulysses, Dante claims to sail waters "never sailed before," and like Ulysses he promises wonderful experience. But unlike Ulysses, who is consigned to hell as a false counsellor for inciting others to follow his dangerous quest, Dante does not seek to seduce so much as to warn. And unlike Ulysses, who drowns in sight of Mount Purgatory, Dante has already undergone purification on that mountain and has begun his ascent through Paradise. Dante calls those few who, like himself, "reached out early for the angels' bread," to follow his "ship that singing makes its way"; the poet's true song, and not Ulysses' false counsel, can lead fellow voyagers safely back to purity and then forward again to blessedness.

Pound marks the crucial distinction between Dante's Ulysses and Dante: where the former's wandering is a reckless escape from the oppressive conditions of a corrupt and decadent civilization, Dante's journey is a more deliberate leading of those few who are brave enough to follow a dangerous path toward a new way of being. In this regard, Pound's wanderer is not like Homer's, who simply wants to return to the home he was forced to leave, nor like Dante's Ulysses, who recklessly leads others from home to their destruction, but like Dante himself, whose songs can lead a select few away from the present state of being and toward a new one, away from an inadequate and unsatisfying home toward the lost purity of an original home. The husks and shells of men lack the courage and will to follow Pound's ship that singing makes its way, his "Cantos," but a few people with "inner being" might be able to

traverse the dangerous waters to a true home. Pound quotes this moment from *Paradiso* here (and elsewhere) to indicate that his wanderer's vessel sings its way to a new home. This moment establishes that his wanderer is primarily a poet whose song can lead people to a new way of being.

While Cantos IV through VI present a series of troubadour poets whose celebration of eros is relevant to the wanderer's identity, it is Dante who is most important to Pound, for he culminates this tradition by making erotic desire historically significant. The passage that includes the line from *Paradiso II* also refers to *Inferno V*, where Virgil points out Dido who "slew herself for love and broke faith with the ashes of Sichaeus." Pound is following Dante here in presenting a Dido sobbing for Sichaeus, and not for Aeneas who spurned eros for a public destiny as founder of an Empire. Aeneas is not congenial to the poet in his rejection of sexual passion and its utter severance from the public sphere of historical causality. Eros has been drowned, perhaps by the present culture that fears its tremendous potential for destruction. A world that has denied Eros has created a hollow and desiccated humanity not worth ruling over, and Pound, like Dante, wants to make sexual desire once again a factor in the creation of a new and better world.

The first seven cantos form a pattern in their development of a complex figure of an heroic wanderer who desires a movement away from the present order of things and back to an original, lost home that has the potential to become, in turn, the center of a new order. The wit and nostalgia of Homer's Odysseus, the daring and thirst for new experience of Dante's Ulysses, the lyric skill and outlawed religion of the troubadour poets, and above all the example of Dante the pilgrim who successfully negotiates a return to Eden and then leads an elite through the spheres of the blessed: all these qualities are accumulated and added to the character of the poet himself as he creates a composite hero who begins the epic quest for a lost home. These opening cantos establish the palimpsest of an epic tradition over which Pound will attempt to execute a modern epic in the age of the novel. He has developed and begins to deploy an epic wanderer operating within a dense and honored tradition of epic journeys; Pound's poem is indeed nostalgic, not only in the search for a lost home but in the attempt to revitalize an ancient genre. The modern epic begins with an movement "outward and away" from the present, away from "history," seeking the point of origin where the human mind was healthy and whole.

Cantos XIV-XVII

The next set of cantos to continue the development of the wandering hero is Pound's most explicit, literal, and derivative borrowing from Dante in the whole of *The Cantos*. In fact, his use of the Dantesque landscape in this sequence is so obvious that it would hardly merit examination except that it does advance his understanding of the problems facing the hero he has established.

Cantos XIV and XV are the famous (or, more properly, infamous) Hell Cantos and one is so repelled by their shrill, strident, violent tone and language that a comparison to Dante's fuller, richer, and more subtle version always makes Pound's seem wholly inadequate and unsatisfying. We should try instead to see what element he is working to add to his wanderer theme, not as if this is his only moment of Dantesque reading and application but merely as one in a series that continues to the final words of the epic.

The sequence begins with a direct quotation from *Inferno* V, "Io venni in luogo d'ogni luce muto"—"I came then to a place where all light is mute." These words announce Dante's entry into the second circle of hell but the first in which are found active sinners. While Dante's hell is varied and subtle in presenting human sinfulness, Pound's contains only one type of sinner, the "monopolists, obstructors of knowledge,/ obstructors of distribution" (XIV/63). The light of the holy does not shine in the modern world because of the concerted actions of those who advance the claims of usury, all those who block the free circulation and just distribution of knowledge and money. Pound rails at profiteers, financiers,

And the betrayers of language.

..... n and the press gang

And those who had lied for hire;

the perverts, the perverters of language,

the perverts, who have set money-lust

Before the pleasures of the senses. (XIV/61)

The capacity to enjoy the world and possibly see its divine splendour has been reduced by those who, in obstructing the circulation of wealth, have made us all competitive, aggressive, and greedy for money. Lust for money has replaced the sensual pleasure that would render the world a delightful place of ease and comfort, a home. Those who block circulation make what would be healthy a morass of filth and disease; Pound resorts to the grossest scatological images to indicate that beauty has been covered by the

debased categories and perceptions of a diseased culture. The usurers are seen "plunging jewels in mud, / and howling to find them unstained" (62); that is, beauty cannot be destroyed but only buried, and we recall Canto VII where Pound himself was making ghostly visits in search of this buried beauty. Beauty can only be hidden under the vulgar bricabrac produced by a decadent culture obsessed with the mass production and uncritical accumulation of material. The poet has identified what he understands as the single major factor in his alienation from the world as a home: the effects of an economic system that hides beauty and distorts a true hierarchy of values.

It is somewhat surprising to notice Pound's claim that he is only following Dante in this. In answering a scholarly quibble about whether Dante meant Plutus or Pluto as the guardian of lower hell, Pound claims for Dante's poem what he will foreground in his own: "Dante meant *plutus*, definitely putting money-power at the root of Evil" (*SL* 255). He seems anxious to find in Dante's poem authority for his own insight:

One advantage of having [the *Commedia*] in penetrable idiom is that we see more clearly the grading of Dante's values, and especially how the whole of hell reeks with money. The usurers are there as against nature, against the natural increase of agriculture or of any productive work. Deep hell is reached via Geryon (fraud) of the marvellous patterned hide, and for ten cantos thereafter the damned are all of them damned for money. (*LE* 211)

Although this analysis of Dante's scheme is highly questionable and strained, it demonstrates Pound's need to find corroboration of his insight in Dante, who makes visionary capacity the key to one's damnation or salvation. He anxiously claims the security of believing that, even in what might appear highly idiosyncratic, he is only following the master.

After continuing the hysterical indictment of the various personnel in the hire of usury, Canto XV presents a comic escape from hell. Pound's guide, Plotinus, finds a way to make the foul matter into which the two are sinking become solid enough to permit their departure:

and again Plotinus:
 To the door,
 Keep your eyes on the mirror.