*Andrew Schelling*

*The CANTOS of Ezra Pound*

**Structure & Theme in the CANTOS of Ezra Pound I-XXX**

*N.B. This list is not meant to indicate that a particular Canto is “about” the theme. I have tried to highlight the significant focus of a Canto, or note new material when introduced by a Canto. Most Cantos are composed according to “the ideogram method.” This means they layer various time periods, actors, events, myths, and voices, with the intention that the “why” will eventually become clear by letting image, sound, and sense interplay with your psyche.*

*Ezra Pound: “It is dawn in Jerusalem and midnight at the Pillars of Hercules. All times are contemporaneous in the mind.”*

**Canto Theme**

***A draft of XXX Cantos*** (1930)

**I** **Odysseus** & the shamanic journey to the dead: “Nekyia” chapter of Homer’s *Odyssey*

**II** **Metamorphosis** & the cult of Dionysus (Lyaeus). Ovid.

**III** **El Cid** (old Spanish epic: a glimpse of the heroes)

**IV** **Disasters of Eros** & the Ideogram (Ovid, Troubadors, Noh plays)

**V-VI** **Poetry & Tradition** Sappho, Arnaut Daniel, Troubadors; Eleanor of Aquitaine, herself a patron & singer, 12th c. (Helen)

**VII** **London** The present, in the manner of TS Eliot

**VIII-XI** **Sigismundo Malatesta & the Tempio**

(Heroic Personality & architecture for the CANTOS)

**XII** **Economics** Baldy Bacon, Dos Santos, & Tale of the Sailor

(Productive investment vs. nonproductive Usury)

**XIII** **Kung** (Kung-fu-tzeu, or Confucius)

**XIV-XV** **Hell**

**XVI** **Hell’s Mouth** Purgatory of Earthly Wars

End of *A draft of XVI Cantos*, first publication of Cantos in book form.

**XVII** **Eleusis: The Mysteries** & Light of the Intellect

**XVIII-XIX** **Purgatory of Money** Currency, armaments, banks

**20** **Mysteries of Light** Odysseus, the troubador Arnaut Daniel

the roads of S. France from the 1912 walking tour

**21** **Thomas Jefferson** A heroic founder (rhyme with Malatesta)

**22** **Economics** an Ideogram, & glimpse of the *paradiso terrestre*

**23** **Eleusis** Visions of Light & Intellect

**24-26** **Italian Custom, Law, Architecture** Stories of Pound’s early travels

**27-28** **Xarites** & black darkness

**29** **Pearl, great sphere, and hollow**

Mysteries of intellectual light

**30** **Compleynt** *agaynst Pity*

Song contrasting the radiance of the Medieval World vs. the sloppiness of the modern

End of***A Draft of XXX Cantos***

***Eleven New Cantos*** (1934)

**31-33** **Jefferson / Adams Letters**

Founders and a dispute over banking systems

**34 Hell or Purgatory: Money & Warfare**

Chinese Ideogram: “Sincerity,” a person standing by one’s word

**35 Mitteleuropa**

**36 *Donna mi Prega*: Cavalcanti**

The Medieval world’s radiance in one love song

**37-38 Banks**

& the Falsification of Money

**39 Odysseus in Circe’s Bower**

**40 “If a nation will master its money”**

J.P. Morgan and the selling of arms at inflated prices

Exploits of **Hanno** the Cartheginian

41 **Mussolini**

The Fascist Era in Italy

***The Fifth Decad of Cantos XLII\_LI*** (The “Heart” of the Cantos) (1937)

**42-44 Banks**: “The Rock”

History of Florentine & Sienese Banking 1622-23

**45 Usura**: Contra naturam, “against increase”

**46 The Ages of Usury**

“You who think you will get through hell in a hurry”

19 years on the case: “the bank creates out of nothing”

*Hic hyperusura*

**47 Eleusis: The Mysteries of Love & Natural Increase**

**48 Economics, continued...**

**49 Seven Lakes Canto** (Chinese Poetry, how society is regulated: Kung-fu-tzeou)

**50 Economics**

**51 Light of Intellect**, vs. Usury

Precision of the Medieval World

Ideogram: “Right Name” (**Kung**) “call things by their...”

**Cantos LII – CXVII and fragments**

N.B. Up through the Fifth Decad, most Cantos can be singled out for theme, or grouped into material introduced. Cantos written after 51 are better thought of as *BOOKS*. The rhythms and themes begin to operate in larger dimensions, and much of the earlier material and insights begins to reappear in new configurations as history moves forward.

***Cantos LII-LXXI*** (1940)

**52-61 Chinese Dynasties**

Between **Kung** and **Eleusis**

**62-71 John Adams**

***The Salo Cantos* (the suppressed Cantos)** (1944)

(first published in the CANTOS 1986)

**72-73 Mussolini’s Salo Republic, 1944**

Written in Italian at the close of WW II,

unpublished until Pound’s death

Canto LXXII in Pound’s own translation is in current editions

***The Pisan Cantos 74-84*** (1948)

Written in the DTC at Pisa, Italy, while Pound awaited his fate

“The Pisan Cantos” receive the Bolingen Prize for Poetry

***Rock Drill 85-95 de los Cantares*** (1955)

Written at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, Washington DC

Named for Epstein sculpture

Largely based on etymologies of Chinese ideograms

***Thrones 96-109 de los Cantares*** (1959)

Written at St. Elizabeth’s

Published the year after Pound’s release

Trying to write “Paradise,” Thrones being Dante’s name for the circuit of

Paradise just below the summit

***Drafts & Fragments*** (1969)

**numbered CX to CXVII, with fragments**

The Na-Khi, rituals to ward off suicide

The order of Cantos and placement of a final Canto has changed several times,

eventual insertion of “The Salo Cantos” into the single volume edition.