

poem's charms is the easy rapid conversational accent that accompanies the fantasy' (*Five Poems* 33). He discerns one quality pertinent to Eliot's interest, 'something central to Elizabethan ways of thinking: the agile transition from abstract to concrete, from ideal to real, from sacred to profane' (*World Picture* 98).

15 *Of Poetry and Poets* 136

16 Smith (pp 261-2, 325) indicates virtually all the possible theological references. Precedent in Eliot's writing for the tree of the Cross occurs in 'Journey of the Magi,' a poem closely contemporaneous with his 'Davies' essay which, like 'Little Gidding,' concerns a winter journey to revelation.

17 I am indebted to Professor Sarah Youngblood for the reference to Roethke. The student of Eliot will also light upon,

I tried to fling my shadow at the moon,  
The while my blood leaped with a wordless song.

...

Between such animal and human heat  
I find myself perplexed. What is desire? —  
The impulse to make someone else complete?  
That woman would set sodden straw on fire.

...

In the deep middle of ourselves we lay;  
When glory failed, we danced upon a pin.  
The valley rocked beneath the granite hill;  
Our souls looked forth, and the great day stood still.

'Four for Sir John Davies,' *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke*  
(Garden City, NY 1966) 105-7.

## Are the *Cantos* a Fugue?

One of the ways in which music can have a bearing on poetry is as an analogy for poetic structure. Pound compared the structure of the *Cantos* to fugue, and a number of critics have alluded to this supposed resemblance in defence of the poem's supposed incoherence; but no one, I think, has ever examined the analogy closely. I do not intend here an analysis of the *Cantos* using the vocabulary of 'subject,' 'response,' 'countersubject,' that Pound proposes. I do intend to examine the limits of the fugal analogy, in order to discover what was in Pound's head when he suggested it, how it may be applied justly, and perhaps more important, how it may not. For musical structure in poetry is a subject much bandied but rarely, it seems to me, rewarding. Critics who suggest musical analogies too often have a naïve textbook understanding of musical form as a *donnée* with no flexibility, no inner necessity of its own. Analogies are suggested casually, with no explanation of what verbal phenomena the analogy is supposed to single out. The various manipulations of harmony, tonality, melody, rhythm, that govern most musical structures simply correspond to nothing in a verbal text. When a text is said to have a musical structure, the question must be asked whether the structure is moulded to a textbook paradigm (as in a *jeu d'esprit* like Wallace Stevens's 'Peter Quince at the Clavier'), or if the structure is verbal, with perhaps certain necessarily vague resemblances to some musical procedure.

Pound, who once prided himself on refusing to define one art in terms of another,<sup>1</sup> was cautious in his own use of the musical analogy. He never declared the analogy in print. The references are all made in private correspondence, or in one case reported from private conversation by W.B. Yeats in *A Packet for Ezra Pound* (1929). All of Pound's references are themselves tentative. On the two occasions in his published letters when he refers to Yeats's report of his fugal idea, he disavows it angrily: 'God damn Yeats' bloody paragraph. Done more to prevent people reading *Cantos* for what is on the page than any other one smoke screen.'<sup>2</sup> Pound evidently regarded the analogy as something of a red herring. During the thirties, two articles appeared on the musicality of the *Cantos*, one by Louis Zukofsky, which Pound approved, the other by Dudley Fitts, which he dismissed as incomprehending; Fitts speaks at some length on the subject of 'counterpoint,' while Zukofsky, who knew of Pound's

ugue idea, never mentions it.<sup>3</sup> Equally significant, though, is the want of evidence that the fugal notion had ever occurred to Pound before 1927, the date of his earliest extant allusion to it in a letter to his father. At this late the first twenty-seven cantos were already written. Yeats must have received Pound's explanation early in 1928 when he was in Rapallo. For some reason Bach's fugues were on Pound's mind around this time: there is a reference in 'How to Read' (published January 1929) to taking a fugue apart and putting it together again.<sup>4</sup> None of Pound's references to 'fugue' or 'counterpoint' before 1927 relates in any direct way to the *Cantos*; the significance which he attached to the word 'fugue' around 1917, when the *Cantos* were begun in earnest, was even less definite, as we shall see, than the usage he discovered later. When Pound was writing the first cantos, he was notoriously vague as to their eventual structure. He wrote to James Joyce in 1917:

have begun an endless poem, of no known category. Phanopoeta or something or other, all about everything. "Poetry" may print the first three cantos this spring. I wonder what you will make of it. Probably too sprawling and unmusical to find favour in your ears. Will try to get some melody into it further on. Though we have not *ombra* and *ingombra* to end our lines with, or *uphloisbios* thalassas to enrich the middle feet.<sup>5</sup>

Melody, but no fugue. The *Cantos* have been subject to many generalized approaches by analogy, but the fact remains that they did turn out to be a poem 'of no known category,' and whatever structure they may possess must be demonstrated from the text.

Still, Pound did propose the fugal analogy himself, and the notion held enough meaning for him to repeat it in years after the war.<sup>6</sup> So it seems fair to ask what light it may shed on the thought processes embodied in the poem. Pound, however, always averse to the accepted categories, attached personal meanings to common terms like 'harmony' and 'melody,' and the terms 'fugue' and 'counterpoint' also had special associations for him.<sup>7</sup> Working from Pound's fairly extensive music criticism, one concludes that fugue appealed because it is (1) abstract, (2) melodic, or horizontal, and (3) intellectual. With an eye to the *Cantos*, we may add that fugue is (4) founded on a principle of juxtaposition, and that it is both (5) 'elastic' and (6) open-ended.

To say that fugue is abstract is simply to say that it is not program music. Despite Pound's fascination with Janequin (Canto 75), his musical aesthetic favoured what he calls 'pattern music' as opposed to 'impressionist' or 'emotional' music:

I do not mean that Bach is not emotional, but the early music starts from the mystery of pattern; if you like, with the vortex of pattern; with something which is, first of all, music, and which is capable of being, after that, many things. What I call emotional, or impressionist music, starts with being emotion

or impression and then becomes only approximately music. ... Programme music is only a weaker, more flabby and descriptive kind of impressionist music, needing, perhaps, a guide and explanation.<sup>8</sup>

Not bound in the *Cantos* by mimesis, Pound is free, for instance, with historical time. While historical events in the poem all have a date and a place, Pound rearranges them a-chronologically, just as a vorticist painter rearranges vision into meaningful form. This is what Pound called 'the musical conception of form,' 'the understanding that you can use form as a musician uses sound, that you can select motives of form from the forms before you, that you can recombine them and "organize" them into new form.'<sup>9</sup> Consistently, Pound prefers horizontal music to vertical music, melody to harmony. He rejected Debussy's impressionism, for example, as music which 'ascends like steam from a morass,' and declared, 'In the creation of music: FIRST, melody.'<sup>10</sup> Naturally, fugue is the epitome of horizontal music, calling on the intellect to perceive and synthesize in time not one but several melodies at once. Fugue, then, is intellectual music, appealing to more than the passively receptive senses. Pound's vorticism insists strenuously on this distinction:

You may think of a man as that toward which perception moves. You may think of him as the toy of circumstance, as the plastic substance receiving impressions.

OR YOU MAY THINK OF HIM AS DIRECTING A CERTAIN FLUID FORCE AGAINST CIRCUMSTANCE, AS CONCEIVING INSTEAD OF MERELY OBSERVING AND REFLECTING.<sup>11</sup>

In the Wagnerian aesthetic, 'you confuse the spectator by smacking as many of his senses as possible at every possible moment,' while in the Vorticist, you aim 'at focusing the mind on a given definition of form, or rhythm.'<sup>12</sup> Fugue is the least sensuous of musical genres. It depends upon a grasp of its procedures, and it does not overwhelm the listener with Wagnerian sonorities. Debate continues over what instrument Bach had in mind for *Die Kunst der Fuge*, and Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge* is notoriously ill conceived for its string quartet medium; both works were long considered *Augenmusik*, much admired, but on paper, little performed before recent times. Pound's poem likewise demands an intellectual grasp of its procedures, and, despite all his talk about the sound of verse, it is most un-Poundian merely to loll in the sonority of his melo-poeta.

Fugue is obviously founded on a kind of juxtaposition; but Pound was aware, as we shall see, that literature is not really capable of 'counterpoint' or simultaneity, but must place its themes in succession. There is nothing in verse parallel to melodies combined as in fugue, just as there is nothing in drama like the operatic ensemble. To say that fugue is 'elastic' and open-ended means only the commonplace that fugue is not a predetermined form in the same sense as sonata-allegro or minuet, but a musical

procedure founded on certain principles. Bach treated fugue more freely than Haydn or Beethoven treated sonata form. By calling the *Cantos* fugal, Pound implied that they were an on-going process, an unfolding development, not the filling out of a mould, and that he could bring them to an end at any time. With all these attributes of fugue in mind, we can turn to Pound's statements on the subject with a clearer idea how they may have been intended.

The most detailed explanation of the *Cantos* in fugal terms comes not directly from Pound but from Yeats:

Now at last he explains that it will, when the hundredth canto is finished, display a structure like that of a Bach Fugue. There will be no plot, no chronicle of events, no logic of discourse, but two themes, the Descent into Hades from Homer, a Metamorphosis from Ovid, and, mixed with these, medieval or modern historical characters. He has tried to produce that picture Porteous commended to Nicolas Poussin in *Le chef d'œuvre inconnu* where everything rounds or thrusts itself without edges, without contours – conventions of the intellect – from a splash of tints and shades; to achieve a work of art as characteristic of our time as the paintings of Cézanne, avowedly suggested by Porteous, as *Ulysses* and its dream association of words and images, a poem in which there is nothing that can be taken out and reasoned over, nothing that is not a part of the poem itself. He has scribbled on the back of an envelope certain sets of letters that represent emotions or archetypal events – I cannot find any adequate definition – ABCD and then JKLM, and then each set of letters repeated, and then ABCD inverted and this repeated, and then a new element XYZ, and then certain letters that never recur, and then all sorts of combinations of XYZ and JKLM and ABCD and DCBA, and all set whirling together ...<sup>13</sup>

Pound called this passage a 'smoke screen,' and said elsewhere,

You are right that Blackmur et sim. do *not*, etc. If Yeats knew a fugue from a frog, he might have transmitted what I told him in some way that would have helped rather than obfuscated his readers. Mah!!!<sup>14</sup>

Yeats betrays his partial comprehension of Pound in several phrases, but the only essential difference, I think, between his version of the fugal analogy and Pound's own is that Yeats, tone deaf and musically naive, puts his in the form of an unqualified assertion: the poem will, when finished, 'display a structure like that of a Bach fugue.' So monstrous a fugue was never known. Pound is more guarded:

Afraid the whole damn poem is rather obscure, especially in fragments. Have I ever given you the outline of main scheme :: or whatever it is?

1. Rather like, or unlike subject and response and counter subject in fugue.
- A. A. Live man goes down into world of Dead
- C. B. The "repeat in history"
- B. C. The "magic moment" or moment of metamorphosis, bust thru from quotidian into "divine or permanent world." Gods, etc.<sup>15</sup>

Pound is equally tentative in his only other pre-war allusion to the subject, in a letter of 1937, exactly ten years after the first:

Take a fugue: theme, response, contrasujet. *Not* that I mean to make an exact analogy of structure.

Vide, incidentally, Zukofsky's experiment, possibly suggested by my having stated the *Cantos* are in a way fugal. There is at start, descent to the shades, metamorphosis, parallel (Vidal-Actaeon). All of which is mere matter for little ...<sup>16</sup> and Harvard instructors, *unless* I pull it off as reading matter, singing matter, shouting matter, the tale of the tribe.<sup>16</sup>

Pound's version corresponds to Yeats's in certain obvious ways. We see the same 'theme' and 'response' of the first two cantos – the descent, the metamorphosis – singled out. We see the same algebraic use of letters to represent the themes. Pound apparently even reversed the letters to represent fugal inversion (or retrograde?), attempting to show how his themes reappear in various guises. Nothing is gained, however, from pressing a comparison of Pound's treatment of his themes to fugal devices of inversion or retrograde; these musical procedures correspond to nothing that can happen in language. Pound is merely declaring that his themes are not static, not bound to historical or sequential time. Perhaps in telling Yeats that the themes in the end would all be 'set whirling together,' Pound suggested something like a fugal stretto, which is in a vague sense what happens. Yeats also stresses the notion, clearly in Pound's mind, that the poem would have no necessary linear progression; his themes were free to appear and disappear at will, rather like themes in a fugue, which have not the relatively fixed positions for first or second or codetta themes as in sonata-allegro. Pound was aware of fugue as an unfolding process.

Considering all of Pound's statements, I can only endorse the view of Daniel Pearlman in his superb study of the *Cantos*:

In comparing his scheme to the organization of a fugue, Pound seems clearly to be limiting his discussion of structure to an explanation of his local technique, the varied juxtaposition and repetition of themes that will remain his consistent method of organizing image-complexes throughout the whole of the *Cantos*. He is making no conscious attempt here to display a "main scheme" in terms of the overall plan of progressive development that would define the poem's major form.<sup>17</sup>

Pound used other analogies for describing the *Cantos* (the Cosimo Tura fresco described in the same passage from Yeats, for example), and other analogies for his technique of juxtaposition – the Chinese ideogram, for one, or the film 'cut,' a less widely discussed parallel:

The life of a village is narrative; you have not been there three weeks before you know that in the revolution et cetera, and when M. le Comte et cetera, and so forth. In a city the visual impressions succeed each other, overlap, overcross,

they are "cinematographic," but they are not a simple linear sequence. They are often a flood of nouns without verbal relations.<sup>18</sup>

The abstract, rhythmic episodes of Fernand Léger's film *Ballet mécanique*, with George Antheil's music, provided Pound with a fair analogy. Yeats may not have known 'a fugue from a frog,' but his explanation of the fugal idea seems reasonably accurate. Pound was perhaps annoyed that Yeats laid so much stress on architecture. Surely he was not pleased with the talk of Cézanne and art which 'thrusts itself without edges,' although this description too is not devoid of meaning. In any event, it should be apparent now, if it wasn't in 1929, that very little can be gained from comparing the *Cantos* taken as a whole to the structure of a musical form which rarely lasts longer than a few minutes.

At the time when Pound began writing cantos, his notion of fugue was bound with the generalized conception of 'musical form' in his vorticist writings:

One uses form as a musician uses sound. One does not imitate the wood-dove, or at least one does not confine oneself to the imitation of wood-doves, one combines and arranges one's sound or one's forms into Bach fugues or into arrangements of colour, or into "planes of relation."<sup>19</sup>

He describes one of Gaudier's pieces in terms of fugue, meaning no more than that the abstract triangles and circles create a self-consistent whole as in a piece of music:

We have the triangle and circle asserted, *labeled* almost, upon the face and right breast. Into these so-called "abstractions" life flows, the circle moves and elongates into the oval, it increases and takes volume in the sphere or hemisphere of the breast. ... These two developed motifs work as themes in a fugue. We have the whole series of spherical triangles, as in the arm over the head, all combining and culminating in the great sweep of the back of the shoulders, as fine as any surface in all sculpture.<sup>20</sup>

Pound chooses the word 'fugue' in these passages for its intellectual prestige and for its quality of 'mathematical' abstractness, but he could have substituted any other musical form. In his article on Joyce for *Mercur de France*, in fact, Pound uses an analogy with sonata form in much the same way:

Qu'est-ce que l'*Ulysse* de James Joyce? Ce roman appartient à la grande classe de romans en forme de sonate, c'est-à-dire, dans la forme: thème, contrethème, rencontre, développement, finale. Et à la subdivision: roman père-et-fils ...<sup>21</sup>

Pound might have used a dictionary to advantage here, since he has confused 'finale' with 'coda' and uses the word 'contrethème,' which is more appropriate to fugue than to sonata. The order of his terms, too, is perhaps more suitable to Joyce's novel than to musical realities. At the time when

Pound was setting down his first cantos, then, his idea of musical analogies with poetry took a very general form of expression, and he does not seem to have arrived at any comparison between his techniques of juxtaposition and fugal counterpoint.

Pound did use the term 'counterpoint,' however, in one other way which may be considered appropriate not to poetic structure but to melopoia:

One might call it a "sort of" counterpoint; if one can conceive a counterpoint which plays not against a sound newly struck, but against the residuum and residua of sounds which hang in the auditory memory.

In the two cases, Arabian music and Provencal verse, where there was no musical "harmony" and no counterpoint in Bach's sense of the word, this elaboration of echo has attained great complexity, and can give great delight to ears which are either "trained" to it or which have a natural aptitude for perceiving it.<sup>22</sup>

Pound concedes that his analogy is inexact:

I am inclined to think that the horizontal merits faded from music, and from the rhythm of poetry, with the gradual separation of the two arts. A man thinking with mathematical fractions is not impelled toward such variety of *raga* [sc. *tala*] as a man working with the necessary inequalities of words. But the verbal rhythm is monolinear. It can form contrapunto only against its own echo, or against a developed expectancy.<sup>23</sup>

This conception of a monolinear rhythm which hangs in the auditory memory may be extended to the Poundian juxtaposition recognized as a consecutive rather than a simultaneous pattern, but it refers first of all to the mono-linear 'contrapunto' of word sounds, for which Pound habitually produces the example of Arnaut Daniel's rhyme technique. One goes to Arnaut, he says, 'for a sort of contrapunto of line terminations, rhyme in its most developed arrangement.'<sup>24</sup> The intellectual contrivances of Arnaut's stanzaic structures may well seem on a level with Bach's counterpoint, but the analogy here concerns melopoia, rhyme sounds and word sounds in general resonating in the ear. 'The term harmony,' Pound says (and he would have to include counterpoint as well),

is misapplied in poetry; it refers to simultaneous sounds of different pitch. There is, however, in the best verse a sort of residue of sound which remains in the ear of the hearer and acts more or less as an organ-base [sic].<sup>25</sup>

Hugh Kenner, in his recent study *The Pound Era*, expands on Pound's comparisons between rhyme and counterpoint. Pound's juxtapositions, he says, his so-called ideogrammatic technique, is a system of 'subject-rhyme' and therefore a counterpoint: 'There are subject rhymes, two sensibilities may rhyme, there are culture rhymes.'<sup>26</sup> True enough. But

push an analogy too far and it collapses. Worse, it may act as a smoke-screen to conceal what is on the page. Nevertheless, critics cannot be blamed for introducing these analogies, nor can Pound, even if exhaustive pursuit must prove futile. These comparisons are so attractive, so needed, because they help explain phenomena in Pound's poetry which are new and strange, which must be brought closer to the familiar. Having served their purpose, however, they should be discarded. Pound is even now charged sometimes with a lack of originality, but the truth is he has invented techniques which have not got names.

## NOTES

- 1 See for example *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions 1952) 49
- 2 *The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941*, ed. D.D. Paige (New York: Harcourt 1950) 321. Letter dated February 1939
- 3 *Ibid.* 293
- 4 *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T.S. Eliot (London: Faber 1954) 27
- 5 *Pound/Joyce: The Letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce*, ed. Forrest Read (New York: New Directions 1967) 102
- 6 See for example D.G. Bridson, 'An Interview with Ezra Pound,' *New Directions in Prose and Poetry* 17 (1961) 172
- 7 'Harmony,' for example, meant to Pound simply 'chords that can be struck simultaneously,' with little reference to tonality. See *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony* (Chicago: Pascal Covici 1927) 12-13; full discussion may be found in my doctoral dissertation, 'Ezra Pound and Music' (Toronto 1974), ch. 2.
- 8 *Literary Essays* 434
- 9 'Vorticism,' *New Age* 16 (14 January 1915) 277
- 10 *Antheil*, 11; 'Muzik, as Mistaught,' *Townsmen* 1 (July 1938) 8
- 11 'Vortex,' *Blast* 1 (June 1914) 153-4
- 12 *Antheil* 44
- 13 *A Vision* (New York: Macmillan 1956) 4-5
- 14 *Letters* 293. Blackmur was the editor of *Hound & Horn*, which had printed Dudley Fitts's 'Music Fit for the Odes,' 4 (Winter 1931) 278-89.
- 15 *Letters* 210
- 16 *Ibid.* 294
- 17 *The Barb of Time* (New York: Oxford 1966) 11
- 18 Rev. of Jean Cocteau, *Poésies 1917-1920*, *Dial* 70 (January 1920) 110
- 19 *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (Hessle: Marvell Press 1960) 125
- 20 *Ibid.* 137-8
- 21 *Pound/Joyce* 205
- 22 *Antheil* 123-4
- 23 *Ibid.* 47
- 24 'The Island of Paris: A Letter,' *Dial* 69 (December 1920) 636
- 25 *Literary Essays* 6-7
- 26 *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1971) 92

## Coming to Terms *Puck of Pook's Hill, Re and the Shape of Kipli*

For more than a generation critical studies or ended with the admonition that sur- come to terms with his work. Coming to imply that with the demise of the British Kipling's writing has been neutralised. us as long ago as 1939 that time had a views, although this may have been a p Jonah Raskin's *The Mythology of Impe* pleading and polemics, shows that Kipl to a new generation's ideological sparks.

There is another sense in which we c: Kipling. Whatever our political respons might reasonably expect that, almost f consensus would have been reached ab but this has not happened either. There misleading trends in Kipling criticism. ( selective canon from the whole mass of dency for critics of Kipling to write in cc and often with the assumption that op polarised - inevitably, at least, for every

A selective canon might seem a pra author whose complete works run to what marks the selectors is not the desir able form but an act of faith that if onl applied 'the good Kipling' in the form unalloyed purity will emerge from th Kipling,' has recently been adopted as Gilbert in which half a dozen of Kipli claim that they are the six best, but to sit in which the good Kipling is to be foun pieces of Kipling criticism build their ca: Wilson's 'The Kipling that Nobody' R essay to his *Choice of Kipling's Verse*, in Kipling's great 'verse' from his indifferen: tion can be found as early as Andrew I