

“IN THE INTELLECT POSSIBLE”: REVISIONISM AND AESOPIAN LANGUAGE IN CANTO C

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Writing of “this uncaptivating canto”, Massimo Bacigalupo notes both that its lines “appear to rule out the very possibility of communication” and that they resort to “code” as a response to Pound’s hostile environment.¹ This paradoxical account – the lines both refuse and encode communication – highlights an interpretative crux in the poem. Recent research seeks to understand these cantos by focusing on Pound’s affiliations with the far right in postwar America. Much of this work is in essays and books by Alec Marsh and Archie Henderson, including Henderson’s re-annotation of Pound’s letters to Olivia Rossetti Agresti (“I Cease Not to Yowl” *Reannotated*), and Marsh’s recent study *John Kasper and Ezra Pound: Saving the Republic*.² Like Bacigalupo, Marsh suggests that parts of the late cantos are written in code.³ As a result, it would make sense for annotation to be directed towards the contemporary political coordinates, radical and orthodox, of Pound’s investigation into “good government”, as well as towards the textual sources of his poem. But if Pound’s involvement in the history that was formerly a more distant prospect demands renewed attention to his life and contacts, his explicit allusion to Aesopian language in Canto C asks us to consider the formal conditions of this poetic communication.

¹ Massimo Bacigalupo, *The Forméd Trace: The Later Poetry of Ezra Pound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 388, 387.

² Archie Henderson, “I Cease Not to Yowl” *Reannotated: New Notes on the Pound/Agresti Correspondence*, 3rd ed. (Houston, Texas: Clearspace, 2012). Alec Marsh, *John Kasper and Ezra Pound: Saving the Republic* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). See also Alec Marsh, “Politics”, in Ira B. Nadel, ed., *Ezra Pound in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 96-105.

³ “Politics”, 102.

As an apparent invitation to “decode” its obscurities, this allusion undermines the secrecy which prudence would dictate is required for *The Cantos*’s projected smuggling of contraband historical information.

Marsh and Henderson have brought to light scores of valuable correspondences between the cantos and contemporary political events, significantly enlarging our idea of Pound’s world in the 1950s. They are exemplary in that their readings never lapse into a belated self-righteousness: Pound’s extreme right-wing politics is their starting point, not a conclusion which is triumphantly (and redundantly) demonstrated. The debt this essay owes to their work will be obvious. In what follows I will expand on that work to argue that Pound’s reading practices materially altered his approach to allusion, and that his engagement with texts shifted from archival research to contemporary and recent political insider accounts: memoirs, table talk and revisionist histories. Consequently, however, questions will be raised about the sufficiency of reading the Washington Cantos solely as a window on Pound’s politics.⁴ For since Pound now sees himself as a figure in the behind-the-scenes histories he has been reading and writing about, his practice of concealment is part method, part performance. As the mummified *display* of encryption becomes an important formal feature, the poem’s efficiency as encoded commentary on contemporary affairs decreases: to decipher the “code” reveals an important picture, but a partial one.

AESOPIAN LANGUAGE

Canto C’s reference to “Aesopian language” gives its readers one reason for assuming that the poem’s opacities owe less to Pound’s project of prosodic innovation than to deliberate concealment and misdirection for political purposes:

And Lenin: “Aesopian language (under censorship)
where I wrote ‘Japan’ you may read ‘Russia’”
(C/733)⁵

⁴ By “Washington Cantos” I mean the cantos collected in *Section: Rock-Drill* and *Thrones*, irrespective of the actual place of composition of any particular canto.

⁵ Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (New York: New Directions, 1996), 733. Further references given parenthetically in the text.

The source of these lines is V. I. Lenin's polemic *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, written in 1916 while exiled in Zurich. In a preface looking back on the text after the February 1917 revolution, Lenin writes:

This pamphlet was written with an eye to the tsarist censorship. Hence, I was not only forced to confine myself strictly to an exclusively theoretical, specifically economic analysis of facts, but to formulate the few necessary observations on politics with extreme caution, by hints, in an allegorical language—in that accursed Aesopian language—to which tsarism compelled all revolutionaries to have recourse whenever they took up the pen to write a “legal” work. [...] The careful reader will easily substitute Russia for Japan, and Finland, Poland, Courland, the Ukraine, Khiva, Bokhara, Estonia or other regions peopled by non-Great Russians, for Korea.⁶

Like *Imperialism*, *Thrones* was written “with an eye to ... censorship”, but they otherwise have very different aims and methods. Where Lenin's sources are economists and historians employed in the mainstream of public life, Pound's are frequently esoteric, and his deployment of them highly selective and prejudicial. *Imperialism* works by the accumulation and analysis of contemporary economic data; *Thrones* by oblique allusion to texts with which Pound is happy to take liberties if it helps his argument. Most significantly, Pound's Aesopian language does not adhere consistently to the logic of substitution Lenin outlines in his preface, as we shall see.⁷ In any

⁶ V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, in *Collected Works* vol. 22 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1964), 185-304: 187-8. Archie Henderson notes that “[i]n April 1945, Pound reread *Imperialism* and tried to persuade Fascist cultural directors Fernando Mezzasoma and Nino Sammartano to add it to a series on economics and money”. Henderson, *Reannotated*, 518.

⁷ Pound's admiration for *Imperialism* was sincere, with reservations. In an article written in 1936 for the *British-Italian Bulletin*, he says “Lenin's book on ‘Imperialism’ ought to be part of a great many educations, but it does NOT register the final phase of a rotted usury system”. Ezra Pound, “Man v. Merchandise: Fascism in Action” (*British-Italian Bulletin* II. 24 [13 June 1936] 3), in *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose: Contributions to Periodicals*, ed. Lea

case, Canto C's two lines signal (perhaps too loudly) a development in Pound's compositional approach: if public life remains a concern of his poetry, it must now be presented in such a way as to evade the scrutiny of censors, real or imagined.⁸

As a practice and a descriptor of a literary style, "Aesopian language" was a tenacious fact of Russian literary and political life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁹ Definitions vary in proportion to the breadth of its use, but Ilya Kutik's description of it as "writing designed to appear orthodox to the censor but betray itself to a readership in the know" is accurate, if vague.¹⁰ Following Kutik, to define it exhaustively in the case of any one writer would require an equally exhaustive account of the orthodoxy it must mimic and the supposed heterodoxy of its target readership. This task is especially difficult in the case of Pound, a writer whose ideas about what is orthodox and what is not are governed, in the postwar years, by an idiosyncratic collection of political, historical and economic concepts.¹¹ Given the haphazard transmission of Pound's text from manuscript to publication, moreover, any comprehensive attempt at a typology of his Aesopian language (if such could even be said to describe his practice) would be as ad hoc and capricious as *The Cantos's* textual history. Even to consider it as a systematic methodology may be mistaken: as one critic notes, "Aesopian language is not a system but rather 'a skill', in speaking as well as in listening [...] 'the initiated' are expected to be skilful enough to understand that it has to be interpreted in some other sense".¹² (On

Baechler, A. Walton Litz, and James Longenbach (New York and London, 1991) (hereafter *EPPP*) VII 61-62: 62.

⁸ A. David Moody notes that Pound "was acutely aware that 'anything he wrote or sent out of St Elizabeths is inspected by ignorant interns', so that even in his letters he would have been conscious of their gaze upon him". *Ezra Pound: Poet*, vol. 3, *The Tragic Years 1939-1972* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 234.

⁹ See Emil A. Draitser, *Techniques of Satire: The Case of Saltykov-Ščedrin* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1994), 22-3.

¹⁰ Ilya Kutik, *Writing as Exorcism: The Personal Codes of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2004), xi.

¹¹ Though it is one of the most important contributions of Henderson's and Marsh's work to have emphasised the degree to which Pound's extreme political views are in keeping with a narrow, but persistent tradition of far right politics in the U.S.

¹² Irina Sandomirskaja, "Aesopian language: The politics and poetics of naming the unnameable", in Petre Petrov and Lara Ryazanova-Clarke, eds.,

the other hand, Lev Loseff describes it as the “*systematic* alteration of the text occasioned by the introduction of hints and circumlocutions”).¹³

Despite the apparent amorphousness of Aesopian language, a few points deserve emphasising. First, as Loseff notes (quoting K. I. Chukovsky), Aesopian language is impossible “outside a social context”. Specifically, censorship must be operating – or must be perceived to be operating – in the environment in which texts are produced. Second, the reader must be aware of this censorship and of the necessity of evading it, along with the methods by which this evasion can be practiced. Quoting Chukovsky again: “The whole business lay precisely in the *schooling*, the education, of the reader and in the protracted and unbroken influence on him of revolutionary ideas concealed by legal forms of discourse”.¹⁴ This enables us to recognise the importance to *Thrones* of Pound’s postwar “Ezuniversy”: a community that is both aware of Pound’s position in the recent course of history (as he sees it) and is trained to recognise the relevance of recondite texts to the contemporary situation.¹⁵ Third, ambivalence, as Lesoff observes, is a prerequisite of Aesopian language.¹⁶ It must be readable as a text in its own right by readers who are not positioned to recognise the presence of, let alone decipher, the submerged allusions (perhaps, in the case of the Washington Cantos, as historical research directed toward an understanding of “good government” in general). Lesoff proposes a vocabulary of “screen” and “marker”: the former is “bent on concealing the Aesopian text”, while the latter “draws attention to that same Aesopian text”.¹⁷ Sometimes, he observes, the two designate the same textual feature. In the Washington Cantos, as we shall see, it is similarly not always possible to distinguish clearly between “screens” and “markers”.

The Vernaculars of Communism: Language, ideology and power in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), 63-88: 65.

¹³ Lev Loseff, *On the Beneficence of Censorship: Aesopian Language in Modern Russian Literature* (Munich: Otto Sagner, 1984), 6. My emphasis.

¹⁴ Loseff, *On the Beneficence of Censorship*, 16, 17.

¹⁵ One focal point for this community was the Make It New Bookshop in Greenwich Village, owned by John Kasper, and “dedicated to Pound’s curriculum”. See Marsh, “Politics”, 101, and *Saving the Republic*, 37-43.

¹⁶ Lev Loseff, *On the Beneficence of Censorship*, 36.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

The case for analysing Pound's Aesopian language worsens when we consider that he elsewhere used the term with an opportunistic arbitrariness that undermines any deep-rooted link between word and will. In his "Sworn Statement", signed at the Office of the Counter Intelligence Corps, Genoa, May 7 1945, Pound claimed: "I have at all times opposed certain 'gray' zones of the Fascist opportunism by defining Fascism in a way to make it fit my own views. This sort of thing has been called 'Esopian language' by so eminent a political force as the late Lenin".¹⁸ Given Pound's enthusiastic support of the Fascist cause before and during the war,¹⁹ and his ongoing lament for its failure in subsequent private and public utterances, this is a remarkably disingenuous statement. A war-time communication to Adriano Ungaro, Pound's contact at the Ministry of Popular Culture in Rome, shows him taking exactly the opposite viewpoint. Pound is proposing a new set of terms to refer to Jewish hegemony: "Haw haw has about worn out 'international jewish finance'. I think my 'NOMAD CAPITAL' is better. and that several speakers might adopt it [...] we should know what we mean when we spea[k] together".²⁰ This suggests that if Pound *was* using Aesopian language during the war, it certainly wasn't to dupe the Fascist authorities, as he implies in his Genoa statement. But, in its recognition that racist euphemisms have a shelf-life, and that their efficacy requires a group of like-minded participants, it also shows a tolerable understanding of the conditions of Aesopian language; perhaps parts of *Thrones* can and ought to be read as such.

The most obvious form of Aesopian language in *Thrones* is the strategic omission of a named subject, or the substitution initials with ellipses for full names; see, for example, the omission of Roosevelt's name at the head of Canto C (and, elsewhere, the pronominal "HE talks" [LXXXVI/585, 588]); or the designation of Sumner Welles as "S... W..." (C/733).²¹ These instances could reasonably be said to have been instigated by an authorial need to evade censorship. But the practice of concealment is especially intriguing when it denounces concealment itself:

¹⁸ Omar Pound and Robert Spoo, eds., *Ezra and Dorothy Pound: Letters in Captivity 1945-1946* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 67.

¹⁹ Matthew Feldman, *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-45* (Palgrave Pivot, 2013).

²⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, 119.

²¹ See also Pound's allusion to Bronson Cutting as "B... C....g" (LXXXVI/588).

rewrote it in a piece for the same journal);²⁶ radio was not “almost a new medium”; and Pound made it clear that Lenin’s “new medium” is “a sort of expression”, not a new technology.²⁷ In a later letter to the journal *Morada* (1930) Pound wrote of his “note on Lenin’s use of language”, thus clarifying that it was language rather than radio technology that was at stake in his *Exile* piece.²⁸ Yet he doesn’t specify what precisely was new about Lenin’s writing. Similarly, in Canto C, Pound’s parataxis merely asserts a causal connection between Aesopian language and Lenin’s illocutionary utterances: the felicity of Lenin’s performative speech is illustrated in Canto C by the fact that “small bank accounts are now guaranteed” (C/733).²⁹

Pound’s Aesopian language therefore cannot solely be read as a process of encryption: it also has a theatrical component insofar as it mimics the strategies of mystification it excoriates, as if to demonstrate their malignant effects even on those (like Pound) who are alert to them. There is an almost hysterical air to Pound’s pantomime of censorship, as if he can’t help drawing attention to his transgressive speech in spite of all counsels to the contrary. But his mention of Aesopian language in Canto C has another function, insofar as it brings in to the poem’s range of reference the rhetorical strategies of far right political groupings at the time of the poem’s composition. Aesopian language itself becomes a “marker” for affiliation with a far right that views itself as under constant threat of enslavement.

²⁶ Ezra Pound, “Data” (*Exile* 4, Autumn 1928 104-17), *EPPPV* 59-62: 62.

²⁷ Richard Sieburth, “From Rossetti to Radio: Pound’s Opera *Cavalcanti*”, in *Ezra Pound and Referentiality*, ed. Hélène Aji (Paris: Presses Paris Sorbonne, 2003), 149-60: 149.

²⁸ *EPPPV* 200-1: 200.

²⁹ Lenin’s responsibility for this is only hinted at in the final canto, but in a notebook (for more on which see below) Pound makes the debt clear: “small bank accounts / guaranteed . . . Thanks to Lenin” (6). Cf. a 1951 letter to Olivia Agresti: “All the grimy little bugwashee in the U.S. now benefit by Lenin’s decree on banks guaranteed accounts up to given ‘small’ figure”. Ezra Pound, “*I Cease Not to Yowl!*”: *Ezra Pound’s Letters to Olivia Rossetti Agresti*, eds. Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos and Leon Surette (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 81. See also: “Never inside the country to raise the standard of living / but always abroad to increase the profits of usurers, / dixit Lenin” (LXXIV/449).

UNCONDITIONAL HATRED

Aesopian language haunted the American right-wing imagination in the 1940s and 1950s, with (as Henderson shows) scandalised revelations of the duplicitous nature of Communist speech cropping up in books and articles.³⁰ Yet Henderson cites a journalist who accuses the 1954 right-wing in turn of employing their own kind of Aesopian language to legitimise their “new look”:

As a patriotic publicist, you will denounce the menace, not of Jews and “international Jewry” as such, but of the international Communist conspiracy and its agents and sympathizers in high places, most of whom you discover to be Jews, whose original Jewish names, where they have been changed, you restore parenthetically for the instruction of the unwary.³¹

The “slavish” quality of Aesopian language chimed with a sense of victimization that surfaces repeatedly in radical right discourse, often prone to reverse the accusations and adopt the strategies of the marginal groups it despises.³² The threat posed by Communism, the United Nations, and the Federal Reserve was (and still is) frequently figured in terms of enslavement.³³ If, as the ex-Communist Louis

³⁰ See Henderson, *Reannotated*, 517-20. Henderson cites a trial of fifteen communists in California in 1952, where “the prosecution cited Lenin’s acknowledgment of the use of deceptive ‘Aesopian language’ in which Russia itself was referred to as ‘Japan’ and Finland as ‘Korea’, to circumvent the anti-Communist measures of the time” (519-20).

³¹ James Rorty, “The Native Anti-Semite’s ‘New Look’: His Present ‘Line’ and his Prospects”, *Commentary* XVIII.5 (November 1954). <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-native-anti-semite-new-lookhis-present-line-and-his-prospects/>.

³² See, for example, former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke’s assertion that “the ‘greatest’ Holocaust was ‘perpetrated on Christians by Jews’” (quoted in Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 14), or Sarah Palin’s use of the term “blood libel” to describe allegations that her violent rhetoric criticizing Gabrielle Giffords resulted in Giffords’s being shot on January 8, 2011; see Arthur Goldwag, *The New Hate: A History of Fear and Loathing on the Populist Right* (New York: Pantheon, 2012), 275-7.

³³ Henderson quotes John Kasper on “the ancient Jewish desire to enslave the Gentiles and fantasies to rule the world” (*Reannotated*, 828). See also the campaign materials used by Admiral John Crommelin, which complained

Budenz put it in his memoir, Aesopian language is “the slave language resorted to by Aesop to permit him to comment on his masters without being successfully pinned down as disrespectful”, the perceived “masters” of the world now were an increasingly powerful Jewish world government.³⁴ That such a government existed was not a matter for debate for Pound:

The existence of a secret and IRRESPONSIBLE government does not worry him. It has been there at least since 1863 and he takes it as a matter of course. It gets worse daily and hourly. All the means of intercommunication pass into the hands of the secret and largely Semitic control.³⁵

Aesopian language thus turned the tables resentfully upon the figures thought to be responsible for the unelected world government. One of these figures is Sir William Wiseman:

Wiseman to Isaacs, Aug 18, 1918
 “try to shift power to the Executive”
 i.e. out of Congress.
 (C/733)

that “‘Communist-Jewish Conspirators’ [...] were attempting to use the power of the United Nations to create ‘a slave-like world population of copper-colored human mongrels’”. Clive Webb, *Rabble Rousers: The American Far Right in the Civil Rights Era* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 103-4. See also Eustace Mullins: “The World Order has no religious, political or economic program except World Slavery”. *The World Order: Our Secret Rulers* 2nd ed. (Staunton, VA: Ezra Pound Institute of Civilization, 1992), 86.

³⁴ Quoted in Henderson, *Reannotated*, 519. See also Pound’s letter to Agresti, written some time after 1 July 1949: “Drive here is to create a slave state WITHOUT educating the overseers”. *I Cease Not to Yowl*, 32; and letter from Pound to Max Wykes-Joyce, dated March 18, 1952: “NOTE dope as political instrument / communist/ ALZO psychiatry lower than dope AIMED at paralyzing the will of all aryan/ and preparing them for slavery”. Quoted in Ellen Cardona, “Pound’s Anti-Semitism at St. Elizabeths: 1945-1958”, *Flashpoint* 9 (Spring 2007). <http://www.flashpointmag.com/card.htm>. I am grateful to Archie Henderson for drawing my attention to these letters.

³⁵ “Violence” (June 15, 1942), in Leonard Doob, ed., *Ezra Pound Speaking* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 172.

Pound uses the formal features of the telegram: the sender and recipient are identified only by last name, the date is abbreviated, and (again) the subject of the verb is deleted. The impression is of a communication intercepted, or a conversation overheard. A notebook of Pound's, dated August 1951 contains a draft of a good deal of Canto C, including an expanded version of these lines.³⁶ It shows that Pound took them from the *Intimate Papers* of U.S. diplomat and presidential advisor Edward M. House. It also reveals that the date of the cable is misprinted in the published canto (which explains why Terrell, who does not mention House's memoirs as a source, was unable to find a telegram dated August 18, 1918).³⁷ The notebook draft reads:

“will try (cod-face) will try / to get Congress to give /
powers to a executive / to control american / raw material
exports.” / Wiseman to Isaacs / Aug 16, 1918³⁸

“Cod-face” is Pound's nickname for Woodrow Wilson.³⁹ William Wiseman was the head of British intelligence in the U.S., and an intimate of Wilson and House. Noel Stock describes how Pound first heard Wiseman's name on his 1939 trip to the United States, the same trip during which he met Senator Wheeler:

It turned out that Wiseman was an Englishman who had been head of British Intelligence in the Western hemisphere; more recently he had joined the New York banking firm of Kuhn, Loeb & Company, one of the giants of “international finance”. Here then was evidence,

³⁶ Ezra Pound Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, YCAL MSS 43, Box 118 f. 4940, hereafter YCAL MSS 43. I am grateful to Michael Kindellan for drawing my attention to the existence of this notebook, and for his comments on an early draft of this essay.

³⁷ Carroll F. Terrell, *A Companion to The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 645.

³⁸ YCAL MSS 43, 28. See Edward House, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, ed. Charles Seymour, 4 vols. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1926-8), IV, 63: “For your own private information, I may tell you that the President will try to get Congress to give powers to the Executive to control American raw-material exports for a period of years after peace”.

³⁹ See Henderson, *Reannotated*, 207.

according to Pound's way of thinking, of a sinister link between the highest powers in England and the usurers in New York ⁴⁰

... and therefore of a link between a nexus of international money interests and America's entrance into the war at the behest of the British. In one of his radio speeches, Pound had said:

The U.S. had a chance to maintain her prestige and unique position by staying NEUTRAL. Neutral while other powers exhausted themselves. And she DID not. [...] And WILL you, after Japan is thru with you, take on Russia? In order to maintain the banking monopoly? With Mr. Willie Wiseman, late of the British secret service, ensconced in Kuhn, Loeb and Co., to direct you and rule you?⁴¹

House's memoirs show Wiseman to have been a crucial mediator between the British and U.S. governments during and after World War One.⁴² Wiseman was present when Wilson visited House on August 15, and witnessed their discussions about the future League of Nations. The League has since become a favourite target among the far right, who see in it and its successor, the United Nations, an attempt to legitimise a world government under the auspices of peace.⁴³ That a figure with such intimate ties to the fate of nations

⁴⁰ Noel Stock, *The Life of Ezra Pound* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 366.

⁴¹ "Zion" (April 20th 1943). *Ezra Pound Speaking*, 285.

⁴² Lord Northcliffe wrote to Winston Churchill about Wiseman on July 27 1917: "He is the only person, English or American, who has access to Wilson and House at all times. He had an hour and a half with Wilson last week and a day with House. The Administration is entirely run by these two men. Wilson's power is absolute and House is a wise assistant". House, *Intimate Papers*, III, 87.

⁴³ See John F. McManus (current president of the John Birch Society), *The Insiders*: "The House plan called for the United States to give up its sovereignty to the League of Nations at the close of World War I. But when the U. S. Senate refused to ratify America's entry into the League, [...] House and his friends then formed the Council on Foreign Relations, whose purpose right from its inception was to destroy the freedom and independence of the United States and lead our nation into a world government". http://www.reformed-theology.org/jbs/books/insiders/part_1.htm.

should end up with a high position in a large bank would only have strengthened Pound's suspicion of international finance.⁴⁴ And while, like Lenin in *Imperialism*, Pound is right to draw attention to this influence, unlike Lenin, Pound attempts to prove its existence not through economic analysis but through speculation on the inscrutable motivations of individuals selected for their proximity to political events.

Lenin had made a point of using data from the works of economists who were emphatically not sympathetic to his politics: orthodoxy was not to be resentfully shunned, but to be used against its proponents.⁴⁵ For Pound, by contrast, no account that had received widespread, public credence can be trusted, and many of his historical insights are vitiated by this blunt approach to historiographical amendment. His extreme form of revisionism had precedents in texts he had been reading during and after the war.⁴⁶ However, in denying the validity of *all* orthodoxy, the play of proximity and difference on which Aesopian language relies is dulled.

It was in the service of this historical revisionism that Pound turned to a more contemporary set of sources for his poem. As well as the many notes taken from House's *Intimate Papers*, Pound's notebook and his letters to Agresti show that the poet's zeal for archival research was now turning to the twentieth century. In a letter to Agresti, Pound wrote: "This merely to say hv/ read Col/ House's 'Intimate Papers' [...] AND if any lesson re/ Lhouse and other memoirs it is that a VERY little truth takes a lot of beating".⁴⁷ The argument of *The Cantos* was now being driven to a large degree by anecdote received first- or second-hand from insiders –

⁴⁴ Kuhn, Loeb & Co. was "the leading German American investment banking firm in the United States – and second overall only to J. P. Morgan and Company – in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries". Priscilla Roberts, "Kuhn, Loeb & Co.", in Melvyn Dubofsky, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Business, Labor and Economic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 423-4: 423-4.

⁴⁵ "[T]he main purpose of the book was, and remains, to present, on the basis of the summarised returns of irrefutable bourgeois statistics, and the admissions of bourgeois scholars of all countries, a *composite picture* of the world capitalist system [...] on the eve of the first world imperialist war". Lenin, *Imperialism*, 189.

⁴⁶ See Henderson, *Reannotated*, xi-xii.

⁴⁷ Pound, "I Cease Not to Yowl", 80.

politicians, diplomats, high-ranking army officers. Memoirs, revisionist histories, and collections of table talk (notably Adolf Hitler's)⁴⁸ were gleaned for traces of "truth", which might inhere in a throwaway comment, a perceived economic allegiance, or the merest glimpse of a hidden hand.

One work of revisionist historiography that had a substantial impact on Pound was Russell Grenfell's *Unconditional Hatred: German War Guilt and the Future of Europe*, first published in 1953.⁴⁹ Russell Grenfell was a British naval officer who wrote several books on British naval strategy. He also happened to be a member of the Constitutional Research Association, a loose grouping whose interest in constitutional research, as historian Richard Griffiths notes, was a front for pro-Nazi meetings during and after the war.⁵⁰ Many of their members could be traced back to pre-war and wartime fascist groups, including Mosley's British Union of Fascists.

Unconditional Hatred's central assertion is that the guilt attributed to Germany as initiator and chief war criminal of World War Two is unjustified and, moreover, that this false charge of bellicosity has a history stretching back into the nineteenth century. In its challenge to conventional assumptions over the cause of the war, Grenfell's book bears some superficial similarities to a much more respectable study, A. J. P. Taylor's *The Origins of the Second World War*, though it substitutes Germanophile evangelism for historical analysis. If Grenfell takes care to avoid pro-Nazi statements, he finds the occasional provocation irresistible, such as his description of the bombing of Dresden as "this holocaust among German civilians" (where it is the choice of word, rather than the sentiment itself, which is provocative), and his characterisation of Hitler's actions as an "attempt to unify Europe".⁵¹ Most of the book

⁴⁸ Ibid., 125-6.

⁴⁹ There is no settled definition of revisionist history, a phrase which has been used to describe the work of writers as different as A. J. P. Taylor and David Irving. While the more extreme instances of right-wing propaganda clearly don't merit the term, some other texts occupy a grey area. See Henderson, *Reannotated*, 695-6.

⁵⁰ Richard Griffiths, "Anti-Fascism and the Postwar British Establishment", in Nigel Copsey and Andrzej Olechnowicz, eds., *Varieties of Anti-Fascism: Britain in the Inter-War Period* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 247-264: 250-2.

⁵¹ Russell Grenfell, *Unconditional Hatred: German War Guilt and the Future of Europe* (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1958), 193, 235.

is concerned with tracing the history of anti-German sentiment in the foreign policies of France and Britain. A reading of Germany's war record in the 19th century applauds Otto von Bismarck's attempt to create a unified Germany; especially to be praised is Bismarck's refusal to humiliate his enemies in the three short wars against Denmark, France and Austria.⁵² As Grenfell puts it: "Between 1870 and 1914, a matter of 44 years, the Germans engaged in no war with another Power, while Britain, Russia, Italy, Turkey, the Balkan States, the United States and Spain were all involved".⁵³

Grenfell imputes this period of calm to Germany's peaceful national temperament, and argues that in the wars of the twentieth century Germany was equally restrained; in neither of the world wars could Germany fairly be described as the aggressor. By contrast, the Allies' role in the Second World War was, according to Grenfell, viciously punitive; Churchill and Roosevelt's plan for "unconditional surrender" was not only violent (better described as "unconditional hatred") but hypocritical: "German aggression (if aggression it was) was succeeded and surpassed by Russian aggression".⁵⁴ Germany's desire to retake the Polish corridor is no more "wicked" than France's to retake Alsace Lorraine between 1870 and 1918; and it was in any case France and Britain who had declared war on Germany.⁵⁵ Citing *Back Door to War* (1952), a revisionist history by Nazi sympathiser Charles Tansill (who also happened to be Senator Wheeler's friend), Grenfell suggests that it was Roosevelt who persuaded Churchill to declare war.⁵⁶ Writing of the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials, Grenfell argues that "there cannot be too quick an amnesty for the so-called German war criminals",⁵⁷ a sentiment Pound agreed with:⁵⁸ this may have been an additional motivation for Pound's comment that "'not a trial but a measure' committed Danton" (C/733). Indeed, though Grenfell is not mentioned in Canto C, there is little doubt that much of the

⁵² *Ibid.*, 46-7.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 138. See Henderson, *Reannotated*, 859, on Tansill's tribute to Hitler.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁵⁸ See letter from Agresti to Pound, 29 September 1951, where she says she agrees with his ideas about "amnesty". Pound, *"I Cease Not to Yowl"*, 77.

canto springs from the same furious need to amend the official historical record that lies behind *Unconditional Hatred*.⁵⁹

In Grenfell's, as in Pound's case, the justifiable criticisms of the Allies' punitive measures are undermined by his need to absolve the Axis powers of all guilt. Like Grenfell, in Canto C Pound seeks to restore a hidden history of German pacifism, and throws in a few potshots at the French for good measure. Some of the sources Canto C uses to construct its revisionist history are not mentioned in Terrell, and are perhaps worth noting. First, as we have seen, Colonel House's *Intimate Papers* form the source of Pound's anecdote about Wiseman. Second, Pound's deprecation of French fiscal policy is taken (as the notebook shows) from *The Story of France*, by Thomas E. Watson (1856-1922), a Populist politician with anti-Semitic leanings.⁶⁰ Watson is the source for a number of lines in the canto:

No french public debt before Francis
(at 8½ to the hundred)⁶¹
(C/733)

After Mazarin over 400 million,
I think four hundred and thirty⁶²
(C/733)

⁵⁹ Grenfell is mentioned elsewhere in *The Cantos*: "The total dirt that was Roosevelt, / and the farce that was Churchill / (vide Grenfell re/ phoney war)" (LXXXVII/590); "Grenfell's death was (like some others) / suspiciously sudden" (XCIII/647). For Pound's conspiracy theory about Grenfell's death, see Alec Marsh, "Counterfeit Kulchur", *European Journal of English Studies* 12:3 (2008), 261-76: 270-1.

⁶⁰ YCAL MSS 43; verso of 27 notes: "Story of France / T. Watson". See Henderson, *Reannotated*, 209-11, for more on Pound's aversion to taxes, and a useful overview of the same aversion in Watson and in the 1950s far right.

⁶¹ Thomas E. Watson, *The Story of France*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1899), I, 363-4: "Prior to the reign of Francis, there had been no such thing as a public debt. In 1522 he borrowed 200,000 livres, worth by our present standard one million dollars, at eight and a half per cent, and thus originated the public debt of France".

⁶² *Ibid.*, 510-11: "Mazarin, who was perhaps the most supple, most avaricious, and most unscrupulous politician France ever had, remained master of the government until his death, March 8, 1661. His little savings amounted to 100,000,000 francs, and the legacy he left to France was a public debt of 430,000,000 francs".

Gave up to England (1708)

The monopoly
Of the slave trade,

at this time Gibraltar⁶³
(C/734)

and the old bitch de Medicis died in miseria⁶⁴
(C/734)

'29, John Law obit⁶⁵
(C/734)

In 1766 was beheaded, in the charming small town of Abbeville,
Young Labarre, for reading Arouet de Voltaire,
where the stream runs close between houses.⁶⁶
(C/734)

Given what we already know of Pound's politics, the contemporary relevance of his citations from Watson are clear: enslavement via debt; the losses to the public of a war waged for private reasons (Louis XIV's War of the Spanish Succession); and the fear with which figures of authority view subversive writers. Perhaps most

⁶³ Ibid., 551: "By the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht France lost Newfoundland and the Hudson Bay country, which were ceded to England. She also gave up to England the monopoly of the slave trade [...] By this Treaty of Utrecht, England gained from Spain Gibraltar and Minorca, acquisitions of vast importance".

⁶⁴ Ibid., 496: "There, in a garret, deserted by all save one servant, and partly dependent upon charity for food and shelter, this daughter of the Duke of Florence, this widow of one king and mother of another, died like any other poor old cast-off, weather-beaten, heavy-hearted daughter of Eve".

⁶⁵ Ibid., 626: "The bank passed out of existence, to be succeeded nearly a century later by the present Bank of France. Law fled before the storm, and settled in Venice, where he died, poor and broken-hearted, in 1729".

⁶⁶ Ibid., 665-6: "in the city of Abbeville a crucifix was mutilated by some person unknown, and several boys were arrested on suspicion. It was shown at the trial that one of them, named La Barre, had been guilty of some profane songs, some irreverent words, and had studied the philosophical dictionary of Voltaire; he was therefore condemned at Abbeville to have his tongue cut out, his head cut off, his body burnt, his ashes scattered to the winds".

appealed to the patriotism of his American listeners. Unlike the Axis powers, he said, their war is not in the spirit of America's founding fathers, "of Adams and Jefferson, of Van Buren and Lincoln". Instead, "every German knows that he fights for Bismarck, for the work of Bismarck, every Italian knows that he fights for the work of Cavour, of Crispi, and Ricasoli".⁷⁰ Grenfell's implicit connection of Bismarck and Hitler as European unifiers shows that this theme was not unique to Pound.

Pound is less than faithful to his sources when it suits him. Where he quotes Count Usedom (which isn't, as Terrell asserts, an "Ironic epithet created for Bismarck",⁷¹ but the name of one of Bismarck's ministers) telling Chlodwig that Bismarck is a "fanatic for peace", Pound interpolates a line not in the memoirs: "like all Germans". With Pound's enjambement, Chlodwig's words come across as a sly wink to Pound's disciples: the Germans are fanatics, all right, but (wait for it) fanatics for peace. In its clumsy détournement of *bien-pensant* orthodoxy it recalls Pound's defence of Hitler as being "furious from perception" (XC/626; CIV/761). Pound's repeated praise, throughout these cantos, of Edward VIII is meant to reinforce this association of Germany and peace: "To Windsor we owe three years PEACE" (C/736). That Windsor was forced to abdicate only proves beyond doubt that he was disturbing the plans of high finance.⁷²

The coexistence of violent, nationalist prejudice with an avowed desire for "peace" between nation states is a recurrent theme of radical right polemics before, during and after the war. Richard Hofstadter, writing in 1954, uses Adorno's term "pseudo-conservative" to denote a trend in American politics whereby destabilising violence sits uncomfortably with a professed desire for stability. Hofstadter's description of a typical pseudo-conservative reads as a character study of the postwar Pound:

He believes himself to be living in a world in which he is spied upon, plotted against, betrayed, and very likely destined for total ruin. He feels that his liberties have been

⁷⁰ "The British Imperium" (June 14, 1942). *Ezra Pound Speaking*, 169.

⁷¹ Terrell, *Companion*, 647.

⁷² This theme recurs throughout the Washington Cantos: "And to young Windsor we owe three years' peace" (LXXXIX, 621); "three years peace, they had to get rid of him" (CVI, 775); "afraid he will balk and not sign mobilization, / got, said Monro, to get rid of him / (Eddie)" (CIX, 793).

arbitrarily and outrageously invaded. He hates the very thought of Franklin D. Roosevelt. He is disturbed deeply by American participation in the United Nations, which he can see only as a sinister organization.⁷³

Pound's focus on historical instances of national self-determination was not new. While the poet found constitutional research a convenient channel through which to vocalise opinions on current events which might otherwise incriminate him, it was also a continuation of a long-standing argument, one with an (at times) respectable tradition.⁷⁴ Pound's sense of betrayal was originally constitutional: the "great betrayal" meant first the National Bank Act of 1863, second the establishment of the Federal Reserve in 1913.⁷⁵ But in the 1950s the sense of a personal betrayal inflected the historical research, making a distinction between the personal and the historical difficult to discern.

CONSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

Canto C implicitly inscribes Pound in a history of anti-tyrannical individuals who felt duty bound to disclose damaging insider knowledge, and who often were punished for it without due process. The lines on the unlawful imprisonment of Danton and John Skelton, and the dark suggestion that an attempt had been made on the life of Sumner Welles, echo other passages in *Thrones* which hint at attempts to silence similar heroic individuals, with whom Pound undoubtedly felt a kinship.⁷⁶ Possession of knowledge usually restricted to "insiders" was the prerequisite for self-government, and transmission of this knowledge – especially via

⁷³ Richard Hofstadter, "The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt – 1954", in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 41-65: 45-6.

⁷⁴ For the right's concept of the "Great Betrayal", see David Brion Davis, ed., *The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the Present* (London: Cornell University Press, 1971), 264. For an account of the ideology of American populism from which Pound emerged, see Alec Marsh, *Money and Modernity: Pound, Williams, and the Spirit of Jefferson* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998).

⁷⁵ See Pound, "I Cease Not to Yowl", 80, and Henderson, *Reannotated*, 219.

⁷⁶ See "Sumner Welles" (May 11, 1943). *Ezra Pound Speaking*, 304-5.

radio – was therefore a democratic act.⁷⁷ In a statement recorded by the BBC's D. G. Bridson on 9 December 1956, Pound outlined the "Four Steps" that "had brought him into conflict with the American authorities". The fourth step, he says, was speaking to Senator Burton K. Wheeler in 1939 about Pound's negative experiences with government bureaucracy:

And Senator Wheeler's comment was: "Well – what d'you expect? He has packed the Supreme Court, so they will declare anything he does constitutional".

This, Pound says, provided the impetus for his taking to the radio in Rome:

When the Senator is unable to prevent breaches of the Constitution [...] the duty, as I see it, falls back onto the individual citizen. And that is why, after two years of wangling, when I got hold of a microphone in Rome, I used it.⁷⁸

Wheeler's comment must have held great importance for Pound: not only did he recite it from memory in his "Four Steps" recording,⁷⁹ but it exists – along with a great deal of other lines that would end up in Canto C – in the notebook dated August 1951. This is almost seven years before the date inscribed at the canto's base ("1 Jan '58"),⁸⁰ seven years, that is, from the start of Canto C in its final form:

"Has packed the Supreme Court
so they will declare anything he does
constitutional."

⁷⁷ Hence Pound's suggestion that Congress be broadcast. "Of course you COULD put Congress on the air". "Darkness" (July 13, 1942). *Ezra Pound Speaking*, 203.

⁷⁸ Ezra Pound, "Four Steps" (*Southern Review* XIII.4, Autumn 1977, 862-71). *EPPPX*, 186-93: 193.

⁷⁹ "He explained that he had no text of it – the statement was to be made impromptu". Pound, "Four Steps", *EPPPX* 188.

⁸⁰ Canto C was first published in *Yale Literary Magazine*, 126 (Dec. 1958), 45-50.

Senator Wheeler, 1939⁸¹

(C/733)

Roosevelt's "court-packing" Judicial Procedures Reform Bill dates from 1937. After the Supreme Court had nullified several New Deal acts in 1935-6, Roosevelt had proposed a scheme to expand the number of appointees to the Court, allowing him to appoint justices favourable to his New Deal programmes. The bill encountered huge opposition, in which Wheeler played a key role,⁸² but despite the bill's eventual failure, the Court subsequently backed several New Deal acts. This capitulation to the executive has since been conventionally thought of as a "constitutional revolution" – the supposed abandonment of judicial restraint and a Court-sanctioned expansion of the powers of federal government.⁸³ Then, from 1937 to 1943, a series of deaths, resignations and retirements allowed FDR to appoint nine justices to the Court, a figure without precedent since Washington.⁸⁴ It paved the way for the Warren Court and a series of landmark decisions backing progressive causes.

For its opponents this was part of a wider argument. The Supreme Court's relationship to the U.S. Constitution had been a focal point for debates about democracy and freedom since the Court's inception in 1789. Its special role in the process of constitutional interpretation is beyond doubt; but the reach of its legislative powers, the point at which interpretation shades into law making, has been a matter of dispute.⁸⁵ In "Federalist No. 78",

⁸¹ These lines occur in YCAL MSS 43, 13.

⁸² See Barry Cushman, *Rethinking the New Deal Court: The Structure of a Constitutional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 15-19.

⁸³ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Supreme Court Reborn: The Constitutional Revolution in the Age of Roosevelt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 213-36.

⁸⁴ James MacGregor Burns, *Packing the Court: The Rise of Judicial Power and the Coming Crisis of the Supreme Court* (New York: Penguin, 2009), ePub. Chapter 9.

⁸⁵ See Tom Clark, "Constitutional interpretation", in David Schultz, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Supreme Court* (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 102-4. The need for interpretation arises from the deliberately broad concepts and general terminology of the text inherited by justices of the Court. Control over the means of interpretation leads to a degree of power over the legislation of the United States, the magnitude of this power often depending on the political beliefs and priorities of the sitting judges.

Pound's *bête noire* Alexander Hamilton described the Court as the "least dangerous" branch of American government: "It may truly be said to have neither Force nor Will, but merely judgment".⁸⁶ But anti-Federalists like the pseudonymous Brutus noted that the Court has "a right [...] to give a construction to the constitution and every part of it, and there is no power provided in this system to correct their construction or do it away"; worse, the Court has the power to have laws passed by the legislature declared void, and since it is composed of unelected justices, its powers amount (for its critics) to a form of despotism.⁸⁷ The Court's ability to intervene in matters of national legislation has made it the focus of executive attempts to exert control over the appointment of its judges.⁸⁸ As Wheeler put it: "If a President could make both branches of government subservient, [...] totalitarianism could happen here as well as anywhere else".⁸⁹

Pound and Wheeler were certainly not alone in viewing Roosevelt's bill as unconstitutional: the president's plan aroused opposition from across the mainstream political spectrum. Judicial

⁸⁶ Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist, with The Letters of "Brutus"*, ed. Terence Ball (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 378.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 527. Also see Alexander Hamilton's summary of anti-Federalist fears about the potentially despotic power of the Court: "The power of construing the laws, according to the spirit of the constitution, will enable that court to mould them into whatever shape it may think proper; especially as its decisions will not be in any manner subject to the revision or correction of the legislative body. This is as unprecedented as it is dangerous". *Ibid.*, 392. This argument is ongoing: James MacGregor Burns, for example, views the Supreme Court as possessing powers of veto and assent that have "distorted the intricate checks and balances" put in place by the Framers of the Constitution, with the result that the justices of the Supreme Court are "the ultimate and unappealable arbiters of the Constitution". *Packing the Court*, Prologue. Contrast this with Craig R. Ducat, for whom the Court is just one, and by no means the most powerful, branch able to affect legislation. *Constitutional Interpretation*, 9th ed. (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2009), 2.

⁸⁸ Burns defines court packing as "the deliberate effort by the party in power – sometimes across several administrations and over decades – to use the presidential prerogative of appointing justices to ensure domination of the Supreme Court by its own partisans". *Packing the Court*, Prologue.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt & the Isolationists, 1932-45* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 217.

activism – the name given to the tendency of judges to assume the authority to revise, rather than merely interpret the Constitution – had been a conservative bugbear for decades.⁹⁰ That Roosevelt considered it necessary to promote this type of jurisprudence in order to ensure the success of his New Deal only underlined the extent to which the economics Pound disparaged (“By increase of debt? strengthen??” [C/733]) led ineluctably to the erosion of civil liberties.⁹¹ In Canto C, Pound echoes Wheeler’s fear that measures like FDR’s bill can only end in tyranny: “if exceeding and / no one protest, / will lose all of your liberties” (C/733). This is not the only occasion upon which Pound’s politics were in accord with a substantial portion of the U.S. mainstream: his dislike of Roosevelt’s underhand methods to introduce the United States into the Second World War was shared by a substantial and vocal minority.

Yet Pound’s hatred of Roosevelt—to which his postwar correspondence testifies in considerable detail—outstrips in virulence and durability the opposition isolationists and conservatives like Wheeler brought to bear against the president. His fear of the dictatorship that would come of FDR’s bill also sits uneasily with his admiration for Mussolini’s leadership. Though Pound concedes that executive monopoly of political power may be an occasional necessity—“Not that never should” (C/733)—he is here referring to Jefferson rather than Mussolini, and his wording suggests the exceptional, ad hoc character of his concession.⁹² There are, then,

⁹⁰ See Keith Whittington, *Constitutional Interpretation: Textual Meaning, Original Intent, and Judicial Review* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 17.

⁹¹ Cf. Pound’s celebration of these words of C. H. Douglas as a “declaration of independence”: “It must be perfectly obvious to anyone who seriously considers the matter that the State should lend, not borrow in this respect as in others the Capitalist usurps the function of the State”. “Economic Democracy” (*Little Review* VI.11 April 1920, 39-42). *EPPPIX*, 37-9: 38.

⁹² Compare Pound, “Four Steps”, *EPPPX*, 192: “I have never said that the Executive should never exceed his powers. Jefferson did so in the case of the Louisiana Purchase and was justified. I have affirmed that when the Executive exceeds his legal powers, if no one protests you will lose all of your liberties”; “What I was right about was the conservation of individual rights. If, when the executive, or any other branch, exceeds its legitimate powers, no one protests, you will lose all your liberties”. “Ezra Pound: An Interview” [by Donald Hall], *Paris Review*, 28 (Summer/Fall 1962); Pound to Agresti, 27 Feb., 3 Mar. 1955: “NEED to protest when executive exceeds his legal powers/” (quoted in Henderson, *Reannotated*, 596).

contradictions in Pound's attitude to constitutionality, but in a sense they do not matter. The position of the U.S. Constitution in Pound's world is probably not one that would be recognised by historians of law as a valid foundation for constitutional interpretation.⁹³ Rather, it becomes the focal point of a highly-charged rhetoric of denunciation of contemporary progressive politics.⁹⁴ In this the poet connects with far-right groups like the Defenders of the American Constitution and the British Constitutional Research Association.⁹⁵

The U.S. Constitution had been present as a backdrop to Pound's poem since at least the 1920s, but it now arguably came to play a part as a "screen" (in Loseff's sense) in the Washington Cantos' Aesopian language. Pound found a convenient theme in the Constitution, an orthodoxy through which to promulgate heterodox ideas. But again, Pound's immediate circumstances mean that encryption is always more than mere concealment. Taking the first two lines of the canto as an example, it is in keeping with Pound's practice of Aesopian language that he should not name what Bacigalupo calls "the villain of Pound's scheme of things", leaving initiates to infer the subject of the present perfect verb "has packed".⁹⁶ But Aesopian language in this case had the convenient side-effect of fostering an aura of already-begun debate, thereby writing Pound into the history that shaped mid-century politics. Omitting the subject makes Wheeler's testimony (or Pound's

⁹³ Though Marsh argues that "Pound's views during the Civil Rights era are consistent with the 'strict constructionist' interpretation of the US Constitution in which he and more visible opponents of integration believed – that is to say, virtually all Southern Democrats". *Saving the Republic*, xi.

⁹⁴ Ten Eyck argues that Pound, even in the composition of the Adams Cantos, was not eager to delve into the legal niceties involved in the disputes over the constitution. *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 108.

⁹⁵ The Defenders of the American Constitution was founded in 1953 by former Marine Lieutenant General Pedro del Valle. Aggressively isolationist, spurred by the fear of a single-world government that sought to erode America's national sovereignty, they "argued that Russia itself was secretly controlled by a 'one-worldist conspiracy' led by Jewish banking houses headquartered in New York City". See Kevin Coogan, "Defenders of the American Constitution and the League of Empire Loyalists: The First Postwar Anglo-American Revolts Against the 'One-World Order'", 10.

https://wikipooks.com/ISGP/miscellaneous/dutroux_and_nebula/Kevin_Coogan_The_Defenders_of_the_American_Constitution.doc.

⁹⁶ Bacigalupo, *Forméd Trace*, 386.

redaction of it) read like a telegram, something unintended for public consumption. If the second line is permitted two pronouns (“they”, “he”), they don’t add definition to Wheeler’s words; instead they cast vague pronominal shadows that are suggestive both of the secrecy in which Roosevelt’s politics was pursued, and of the unknown hinterland of an overheard conversation. The lines rhyme with the Wiseman cablegram a few lines further, which grandiosely lodges Pound in the same sphere of political movers and shakers.

With the Constitution in play, the complexity of Pound’s emotional responses to contemporary events disturbs the notion of Aesopian language as a code to be deciphered. Pound had always been interested in the history of revolutionary America, including the legal arguments for independence and the fate of the principles of the Founding Fathers in subsequent administrations.⁹⁷ And yet, in turning now to consider a passage from Canto C, we shall see that Marsh is able to demonstrate beyond a doubt that this history was not only co-opted by far right pressure groups in the 1950s but that Pound was willing to exploit his favoured historical narratives to the same ends. Needless to say, the following passage is open to other interpretations, but I will argue that Marsh’s “Aesopian” reading – within limits that I shall discuss afterwards – cannot be ignored:

“That Virginia be sovereign,” said Andy Jackson
“never parted with...”
Oh GAWD!!! that tenth section...
“any portion of...”
DAMN IT.
George Second encouraged,
the tariff of 1816 murdered indigo.
Freemen do not look upward for bounty.
(C/735)

Early readings of *Thrones* emphasised the persistence of certain of Pound’s concerns throughout *The Cantos*. In his “defense” of Canto LXXXVIII (some of the lines of which Canto C repeats), for instance, James Wilhelm notes the timeless, epic quality of the combatants in Pound’s narrative, in which the Bank is the modern-day Geryon or Polyphemus, its opponents Thomas Hart Benton or

⁹⁷ See Ten Eyck, *Adams Cantos*, 14-16.

Andrew Jackson the mythical heroes.⁹⁸ Writing of the passage above, Kimpel and Duncan Eaves merely note that “The tenth section of Article I of the Constitution forbids the states to coin money, and Pound certainly agreed with both Benton and Alexander Del Mar that the power to coin money is essential to sovereignty”.⁹⁹

A more historically focused reading might consider more closely Benton’s *Thirty Years’ View*, from which some of the extracts in this passage are taken. The context is the crisis in the American economy after the 1812 war. With cheap exports from Britain undercutting U.S. manufacturers, the 1816 tariff introduced for the first time protective measures in the form of taxes on foreign imports. For Benton, who in Chapter XXXIV of his book discusses the 1828 tariff (a similarly protectionist bill), this is “the event from which the doctrine of ‘nullification’ takes its origin, and from which a serious division dates between the North and the South”.¹⁰⁰ The reason for this division is twofold: as Benton puts it:

The twenty odd millions annually levied upon imported goods, are deducted out of the price of their cotton, rice and tobacco, either in the diminished price which they receive for these staples in foreign ports, or in the increased price which they pay for the articles they have to consume at home.¹⁰¹

In other words, this tariff will enrich the North and impoverish the South, for two reasons: first, the Southern exporters of these staple parts of the U.S. economy (cotton, rice and tobacco) will potentially be on the receiving end of retributive import taxes put in place by their foreign trading partners; and second, because the South will be forced to pay more for the manufactured goods whose importation, since it is an agricultural society, they depend on.

⁹⁸ See James J. Wilhelm, “The Dragon and the Duel: A Defense of Pound’s Canto 88”, *Twentieth Century Literature* 20.2 (April 1974), 114-25.

⁹⁹ Ben Kimpel and T.C. Duncan Eaves, “American History in *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones*”, *Paideuma* 9.3 (Winter 1980), 417-39: 425.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Hart Benton, *Thirty Years’ View; or, A History of the Working of the American Government for Thirty Years, from 1820 to 1850*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1858), I, 95.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 98-9.

The cause of this is federal legislation: “Such a result is a strange and wonderful phenomenon. It calls upon statesmen to inquire into the cause; and if they inquire upon the theatre of this strange metamorphosis, they will receive one universal answer from all ranks and all ages, that it is federal legislation which has worked this ruin. Under this legislation the exports of the South have been made the basis of the federal revenue”.¹⁰² Benton depicts a parasitic North sucking the wealth from the South:

Virginia, the two Carolinas and Georgia, may be said to defray three fourths of the annual expense of supporting the federal government; and of this great sum annually furnished by them, nothing, or next to nothing, is returned to them in the shape of expenditure. That expenditure flows in an opposite direction; it flows northwardly, in one uniform, uninterrupted and perennial stream; it takes the course of trade and of exchange; and this is the reason why wealth disappears from the South and rises up in the North.¹⁰³

Where does indigo come into this? Benton seemed to think that the most prudent response to the tariff of 1828 was, rather than to oppose it on principle (which privately he did) to attempt to use it to benefit the South by moving to include indigo – formerly a staple of the South’s economy – in the tariff. He cites an act of George II’s which observed the indispensability of indigo “to the success of British manufactures”, and that since the British were dependent on foreign producers for indigo, it would be prudent to encourage its production in Britain’s then colonies by adding a premium to its importation; this “fostering influence” led to the expansion of indigo production in the U.S.¹⁰⁴ After the Revolution, Britain looked elsewhere (to India) for its indigo, and production in the U.S. declined. Now American manufacturers also had to buy indigo from abroad, and Benton thought it was good sense to try to revive its production in the South, which would benefit both the South and (since any stoppage in its export to the U.S. would be damaging to manufacturers) the North:

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

He [Benton] stated his object to be two-fold in proposing this duty, first, to place the American System beyond the reach of its enemies, by procuring a home supply of an article indispensable to its existence; and next, to benefit the South by reviving the cultivation of one of its ancient and valuable staples.¹⁰⁵

The 1816 tariff (in Pound’s paraphrase) “murdered indigo”, by reducing the tariff on imports of indigo, therefore allowing foreign competitors to undercut domestic producers. Benton’s motion was not adopted. Liberty, Benton wrote, is undermined by the implication of politics with government that the tariff embodies. When success depends on the patronage of government, rather than on hard work, the idea of freedom is travestied: “He is not in fact a freeman, who habitually looks to the government for pecuniary bounties”.¹⁰⁶ “Do we not perceive”, he quotes a Mr. McDuffie as saying,

at this very moment, the extraordinary and melancholy spectacle of less than one hundred thousand capitalists, by means of this unhallowed combination, exercising an absolute and despotic control over the opinions of eight millions of free citizens, and the fortunes and destinies of ten millions?¹⁰⁷

We are close here to the concerns of Canto LXXXVIII and Wilhelm’s perennial battle between usury and heroic individualism. What is left out of Wilhelm’s account is the critique of federal interference in local government. The first two lines of this passage are written by John Randolph of Roanoke (not, as Pound says, Andrew Jackson), a Virginian senator who towards the end of his life composed a document in which he opposed Jackson’s denunciation of South Carolina’s nullification act. This document, quoted in full in Martin Van Buren’s *Autobiography*, where Pound would have read it, partly ran:

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 97.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 100.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 101.

That Virginia “is, and of right, ought to be, a free, sovereign and independent state” [...] That Virginia has never parted with the right to recall the authority so delegated, for good and sufficient cause, [...] and to secede from the confederacy whenever she shall find the benefit of union exceeded by its evils.¹⁰⁸

This is of a piece with Pound’s usual concerns. But Marsh has shown that these concerns now dovetail with a contemporary discourse of states’ rights as deployed by the anti-integrationist far right. Here I am particularly indebted to remarks in Marsh’s essay “Politics” and a chapter from his book on the influence of the states’ rights doctrine on *The Cantos*. The states’ rights doctrine essentially asserts that individual states retain final sovereignty over their legislation and economy, and that this ought to override potential interference by central government. For Marsh this theme crops up at various points in the Washington Cantos. John Randolph, he says, was

a firm believer in “the principles of 1798”, as expressed in the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions that interpreted the U.S. Constitution as a voluntary compact, not a binding contract, between states that could be repudiated at the states’ discretion. This position underlies all States’ Rights interpretations of the constitution.¹⁰⁹

For Marsh, the states’ rights theme in the Washington Cantos is not simply a timeless narrative of local self-sufficiency versus external interference by financial interests, nor is Pound’s concern purely historical. Instead, he shows that Pound is indirectly alluding to the revival of states’ rights arguments in 1950s America. In particular, Pound is concerned with the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared the segregation of black and white students in schools to be unconstitutional. The doctrine of states’ rights was used to justify resistance to desegregation:

¹⁰⁸ Martin Van Buren, *The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1920), 424.

¹⁰⁹ Marsh, “Late *Cantos*, ‘Aesopian Language’: States’ Rights, Sumner Welles and John Randolph of Roanoke”.

Pound deploys covertly Randolph's States' Rights creed as both a critique of the Warren Court and the *Brown* decisions of 1954 and 1955 among other cases, and as support for the "massive resistance" then being organized in Virginia to defy federally mandated integration of schools, which would lead, Pound thought, to the destruction of the United States.¹¹⁰

Randolph is, then, an "Aesopian figure for more contemporary States Rights agitators reacting to the Supreme Court's 'encroachments' onto state sovereignty".¹¹¹ Pound's investment in states' rights was well-known, and he happens to have supplied the name for Kasper's Wheat In Bread Party, a forerunner of the National States' Rights Party.¹¹²

Marsh's reading not only sheds valuable light on particular sections of the text, but allows us to find some thematic unity in Canto C, a canto which can appear, in Noel Stock's words, to "exhibit no special character or theme, either individually or in combination".¹¹³ If we extend Marsh's reading, we can connect the aversion to federal interference with the first lines of Canto C: the "constitutional revolution" embodied in FDR's attempt to pack the high bench. Pound had contributed, with John Kasper, to the pamphlet "Virginians on Guard!", brought out by the Seaboard White Citizens' Councils, in July 1956. It contains the slogan "Hang 9 Supreme Court swine", and another speech authored by Kasper claims that "The Supreme Court is enforcing a manner of life that we do not want and will not have".¹¹⁴ It seems reasonable to read Canto C at least in part as a genealogy of this "manner of life", including its recent history in FDR's judicial reform bill and a set of earlier constitutional battles.

But it might also be profitable to supplement the transparency the Aesopian reading offers us with a recognition that Stock's desiderated unity is still out of reach. In 1950 Pound complained to Olivia Agresti: "very difficult to be intelligible in a milieu that hasn't

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Marsh, "Politics", 104. For more on Kasper, see Marsh, *Saving the Republic*.

¹¹³ Noel Stock, *Reading the Cantos* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 67.

¹¹⁴ See Freedom of Information Act Document, FOIA: Kasper, John-HQ-4. https://archive.org/details/foia_Kasper_John-HQ-4.

the FOGGGdamniEST idea of the American Constitution”.¹¹⁵ But Pound’s unintelligibility was not only a product of the ignorance of his milieu. The Constitution plays at least two roles in *Thrones* – as witness to American independence and as filter for a contemporary radical politics – and the overlap between these demands does not conduce to coherence. As a poem Canto C is torn between these functions, each impeding the other. It overestimates the value of constitutional “research” both to Pound’s own case and to the politics he shared with his visitors and correspondents, and simultaneously thwarts the efficacy he found in Lenin’s speech. This sets limits to the certainty with which readers seeking contemporary allusions can ascribe them to apparently innocuous passages in the poem.

For example, it is difficult to ascertain whether, when Pound bemoans the tenth section of Article I of the U.S. Constitution (“Oh GAWD!!! that tenth section . . . / ‘any portion of. . .’ / DAMN IT”), we are listening to the pre-war Douglasite or the postwar exploiter of the states’ rights tradition. Perhaps this is splitting hairs; however, more is at stake in the line “Taney in place of Duane” (C/736). The standard reading here is Terrell’s: Roger B. Taney “stood firmly with Van Buren and Jackson against the financial interests”.¹¹⁶ And yet, given the context outlined above, there is a potentially more scandalous association. Taney was confirmed to the Supreme Court in 1836, and as Chief Justice went on to preside over probably the most repugnant decision in the Court’s history. In *Dred Scott v. Sandford* Taney had infamously ruled “that black persons of African descent were not and never could be citizens of the United States”, and “that each state had the power to decide for itself whether residence in free territory made a slave forever free”.¹¹⁷ If we accept that Pound was alluding to *Dred Scott*, it fits neatly with the hypothesis outlined above, that the Supreme Court and its adventures in states’ rights – particularly as they concern race relations – is a dominant theme of Canto C.¹¹⁸ And yet the reader

¹¹⁵ Pound, “*I Cease Not to Yowl*”, 51.

¹¹⁶ Terrell, *Companion*, 518.

¹¹⁷ Kenneth Holland, “*Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1857)”, in Schultz, ed., *Encyclopedia*, 132-3: 132.

¹¹⁸ Marsh quotes Benjamin Muse on the way in which the South’s hostile reaction to desegregation betrayed “a remnant of the old feeling, articulated in the *Dred Scott* decision, that Negroes were not exactly people but ‘beings of an inferior order’”. *Saving the Republic*, 88.

(C/736). Taney, Chlodwig, Windsor, perhaps the entire German nation, are to be elevated from the “historic blackout”.¹¹⁹

And yet, despite the poet-wanderer’s ostentatious relinquishing of the veil, Aesopian language seems to be operative here too. Pound’s paradise is a queasy combination of renewal and resentment, *caritas* and persecution. After an invocation of the paradisaical “crystal, / a green yellow flash after sunset”, Pound immediately complains that the “fu²⁵ provide no mental means for running an empire” (C/738). This is a reference to what he elsewhere calls the “taozers”—practitioners of taoism, whom he groups together with Buddhists (“Bhud rot”) for their insufficiently precise understanding of nature and order. Again, the reference is to continual peace, the taoists and Buddhists contrasting with the Confucians who, in Pound’s version of Chinese history, are responsible for any prosperity China has enjoyed. In a letter to John Theobald dated 21 May 1957, Pound writes: “China WITH Kung has, for 2500 years, had no religious wars/ only the three jewish religions instigating the jehads or contriving them”.¹²⁰ That Pound associated “Taozers” with Jews is suggested by comments in his letters to Agresti: “I am not anti-semite, but want to find a candid mode of defining a position in regard to certain diseases of thought [...] Find me {a} nice adjective that will damn Lao-tze along with the other polluters or perverters of the human mind” (17); “LaoTse, acc all versions yet seen, just as slithery as the yids” (20).

Similarly, in the blazing light of a spiritualised medieval Sicily Pound installs “‘De Tribus’ (Federico)” (C/739). *De tribus impostoribus* (“The Three Imposters”) is an imaginary book which has over the centuries been attributed to dozens of authors, including Frederick II. On the face of it, a book that aims to dethrone the Jewish, Christian and Muslim deities is a suitable text for Pound’s pagan paradise. But it carries other connotations for Pound. In a letter to Agresti, dated 20 May 1957, Pound commands his friend to “Note bloke named Niebuhr, said to be a kike, at head of Union Theological seminary/?? needs investigation re/ order given 1600

¹¹⁹ As Henderson notes, Pound’s phrase “historic blackout”, which recurs throughout the Washington Cantos, probably derives from his reading of revisionist historian Harry Elmer Barnes in the 1950s, though Henderson traces the idea back to Pound’s discovery of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in 1943. *Reannotated*, 509-11.

¹²⁰ Quoted Henderson, 848.

years ago, to get into Xtn organizations and ROT 'em". Getting into his stride, he goes on to say that "only the three jew religions (*de trebus impositoribus*) seem eager to start mass murder for sepulchres and other [illegible deletion] theatrical trappings".¹²¹ The are two, confused, implications here: first, that if Christianity and Islam are responsible for violence, that is because they are rotten from the core thanks to their origination in Judaism; and second, that there is a Jewish conspiracy to infiltrate Christianity in order to undermine it, though why this would be necessary, given the first implication, is unclear.

At the end of Canto C, the word "aloof" suggests a certain distance from the crosses burning on the lawns of Supreme Court justices.¹²² It occupies a line of its own, all but the last word in a series of lines which proceed ceremoniously across the page, as if each clause were—in contrast to the smudged language of his enemies—a discrete event in a train of thoughts distinguished by their clarity. It translates "aphistatai", in reference to the *Nous*, or in Peter Liebrechts's words, "the vital force of the universe" in Plotinian philosophy.¹²³ As Liebrechts puts it, explaining lines which occur in Canto C a few lines above: "Love is a 'reality' (*HYPOSTASIS*) 'from an Essence' (*EX OUSIAS*)".¹²⁴ These lines in Canto C lead into the temple motif, which Liebrechts says "becomes a graphic description of the human mind and its relation to the divine" in the context of Pound's Neoplatonic meditation.¹²⁵ And yet, by this stage the Plotinian Love which transcends individual subjectivity is mired in a network of associations generated by an author only too aware of his individual subjectivity. Pound's poem is held together by a fierce insistence on his personal experience and its world-historical relevance, and his medieval choir of Cavalcanti and Villon is now installed in a temple ("hieron") which—as Robert Casillo demonstrated many years ago—owes much of its "ousias" or substance to anti-Semitic, "Aryan" mythology.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Pound, "*I Cease Not to Yowl*", 245, 246.

¹²² For cross-burning as an element of segregationist activity, see March, *Saving the Republic*, 142-3, 202.

¹²³ Peter Liebrechts, *Ezra Pound and Neoplatonism* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), 350.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 349.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 350.

¹²⁶ Robert Casillo, "Ezra Pound, L. A. Waddell, and the Aryan Tradition of 'The Cantos'", *Modern Language Studies* 15.2 (Spring 1985), 65-81.

These lines come after a passage about the Investiture Controversy, quoted from Charles de Rémusat's *Saint Anselme de Cantorbéry*. Rémusat outlines the struggle of Pope Gregory VI and his successors to pull the church out of a vassalage which took the form of an obligation to accept the appointments to ecclesiastical office of secular authorities. "The dispute lasted 56 years," Rémusat writes, "and, they say, resulted in 60 battles and the death of 2 million men".¹²⁷ Though it is not mentioned in Canto C, Rémusat draws a contrast between the controversy and the church of Charlemagne, during whose reign (in Rémusat's words) "L'Église régnait en lui et par lui".¹²⁸ Under Charlemagne, any strict distinction between secular and religious law was blurred; as a result the body politic encompassed spiritual and temporal experience in a way unavailable to states where religion and politics are at odds with one another: "In making himself prince of the Roman faith, he additionally won universality for his monarchy".¹²⁹

Given this intellectual background, perhaps it is unsurprising that Pound's paradise is not the incorruptible sublime his critics often find in its aquatic- and light-imagery. Paradise is a matter of politics, each "compenetrans": like Charlemagne's monarchy, the state ought to be sacred, and the sacred ought to be a matter of good government. At this date, "1 Jan '58", it is not, but—at some unspecified point in the future—the temple will have had its history, and, just as the fight for investiture is part of the history of the Holy Roman Empire, the fight for states' rights (personified in Pound versus the Supreme Court) is part of the ongoing history of whatever model of government will issue from his patchwork of constitutional research. This supremely idealistic vision of politics is best summed up in the line from Cavalcanti's *Donna mi prega* – "come in subjecto" – that appears near the end of the canto:

Cometh from a seen form which being understood
Taketht locus and remaining in the intellect possible

¹²⁷ Charles de Rémusat, *Saint Anselme de Cantorbéry: Tableau de la vie monastique* (Paris: Didier, 1853), 282. My translation.

¹²⁸ Pound frequently praised Charlemagne for his introduction of "just prices". E.g. see *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 47: "Charlemagne fights the monopolists; he decrees a commodity denar, or a grain denar, and the significance escapes six hundred and more economists in a sequence of centuries".

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 278.

Wherein hath he neither weight nor still-standing
(XXXVI/177)

The poem's subject – in both senses of the word – is love, but in this context it could easily also be the state, which in Pound's mind are, perhaps, one and the same. The coming state is "in the intellect possible" – a latent form whose very latency now makes it, like the Salò Republic, "in the mind indestructible" (LXXIV/450): the syntax-rhyme brings the identity between love and government to the fore. But the searching, refining spirit which led Pound to sound out the connotations of Cavalcanti's language through multiple translations and philosophical investigations is not in evidence in Canto C. To paraphrase Pound's Cavalcanti essay: his "nerve-set" is – in Canto C – left open to the polarising signals of a political atmosphere that reeks of paranoia. In place of language as a multifarious repository of "radiant [...] energies", it is now a tool to signal affiliations and antipathies, even if these are sometimes crudely smudged to escape – or draw attention to – censorship.¹³⁰ We are left with an uneven mix of prejudice masked by a religious fervour which, if it was intellectually "aloof" at some point in Pound's development, is now anything but.

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¹³⁰ From Pound's 1934 essay "Cavalcanti", in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968): "Effect of a decent climate where a man leaves his nerve-set open, or allows it to tune in to its ambience" (152); "We appear to have lost the radiant world where one thought cuts through another with clean edge, a world of moving energies" (154).

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