

SO SLOW: CANTO CVI

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I: AND WAS HER DAUGHTER LIKE THAT;

So late in *The Cantos*, how does this line begin again, configuring a new relation between past and present? Canto CVI is the fifteenth and final canto to begin with that humble conjunction, suggesting sequence. Canto I makes “And” the inaugural movement of Pound’s long poem, but there and in Canto X the sequence it suggests is past; this is parataxis for narrative: “And then went down to the ship”.¹ In the Malatesta Cantos the anaphora of “And”, beginning line after line, accumulates items and events in the sequence of inventory and chronicle (XI/48). But these instances also subsume myth and history in the narrative of *The Cantos*, whose own sequence involves the iteration of this distinctive opening. (Even before *The Cantos*, and as early as 1908, Pound had begun lyric poems with “And”).² In turn, Canto XII indicates a present, making the poem’s sequence explicit: “And we sit here / under the wall / Arena romana” (XII/53). We sit with the poem, as if under the arena wall, to watch the spectacle of Sigismundo and Kung and Baldy Bacon, and that spectacle is also the poem, which tells their tales. Narrative and narration converge.

Pound’s opening “And” thus shuttles between past and present, and between the world beyond the poem and the world of the poem itself. An opening “And” may emphasise either term of these oppositions, or both. Sometimes allusion or connotation complicates this logic, as when Pound satirizes biblical parataxis: “And thou shalt not, Firenze 1766, and thou shalt not” (XLIV/223; cf. XXIII/133). Sometimes the rhetorical cast of “And” is informal, a way to launch the new canto without ostentation, to begin as if without beginning.

¹ Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (New York: New Directions, 1996), pp. 1, 42. Subsequent references will cite canto and page numbers parenthetically.

² Ezra Pound, *Collected Early Poems of Ezra Pound*, ed. Michael John King (New York: New Directions, 1976), pp. 63, 67, 82. Hereafter abbreviated *CEP*.

This is especially striking when surrounding cantos reach for heightened registers. After Canto XLVII's mythopoeic evocation of natural fertility, the poem gets back to business: "And if the money be rented / Who shd pay rent on that money?" (XLVIII/240). Canto XLVI succeeds the Usura Canto by breaking the fourth wall, turning to the reader directly with a *this* that indicates both the previous canto and *The Cantos* thus far: "And if you will say that this tale teaches... / a lesson" (XLVI/231). And Canto CVI? The sequence its "And" suggests is present, a new reflection. Rather than telling a tale, the poem is thinking.

But the question this "And" introduces thinks about the past: "was", "that". This is a new configuration of the poem's temporality. The *that* which ends the line may indicate a past beyond the poem or the poem's own past, but it does not directly refer to the last lines of the last canto: the question does not compare the daughter to Cavalcanti or Villon (CV/771). Instead, "that" raises the possibility of some previous conception or representation, whether of the daughter herself or of some other person or thing. Pivoting on a firm conception or familiar representation, the question may speculate about an unknown daughter. Or, pivoting on a known daughter, the question may doubt the conception or representation. Perhaps the question compares "her daughter" to another's daughter, though probably not one of the unnamed daughters mentioned in *A Draft of XXX Cantos* (XXVIII/134-5). Perhaps it alludes to Pound's own daughter, even to her appearance in *Rock-Drill* (1955): "that the child / walk in peace in her basilica" (XCIII/648). But the "that" need not designate a daughter. In contrast, the antecedent of the phrase "like that" in earlier cantos is usually clear: "and the Pope's manners were so like Mr Joyce's, / got that way in the Vatican, weren't like that before" (XXXVIII/187; cf. XVI/71, XLVI/231). The smooth sequence of continuous thought suggested by "And" is thus undone by "that", in whose ambiguity poem and world converge. The smooth sequence is suspended, too, by the semi-colon which denies the question completion, promising further thought. The first line is an act of memory for which text is also a past experience: the experience of many texts, but especially this text. The line's attitude of recollection and reflection invokes the whole poem's past: every possible antecedent to "that", every torque applied to *and*. This commentary attends to that attitude, to the way Canto CVI configures its own history, the past and present of *The Cantos*.

(It takes time to trace this poetry’s vectors of retrospection and anticipation, movements given in rhythms of allusion and alliteration, as well as of syntax and grammar, and so this commentary will have time only for the canto’s opening lines. Pound’s canto places us *in media res*, without establishing a stable framework for interpretation, and so this commentary begins without offering the customary critical history. When we have some provisional sense of the poem’s rhythms, then there will be time to reflect on the kinds of criticism it calls for.)

2: BLACK AS DEMETER’S GOWN,

Does this not solve the problem? No, the black of Demeter’s gown cannot account completely for “like that” because the pronoun suggests the past, some other conception or representation: not *this*. Pound’s syntax and his lineation are precise, even in their parsing of unfinished, probing thought. The canto does not begin by asking “was her daughter black as Demeter’s gown?”, nor even “was her daughter like this: black as Demeter’s gown?” Though assonance pairs “that” and “Black”, the quality to which the pronoun refers need not be that colour; the further detail may instead describe the daughter, as if to say, “the daughter who was black as Demeter’s gown”. But because the second line reworks the first’s comparison across “like” with a comparison across “as”, “Demeter’s gown” seems as deictic as “that”: the second line remembers, and it remembers both experience and text.

Canto XCVIII three times remembers the lost Italian custom in which mourning women, believing them to be cut from Demeter’s gown, wore “black shawls in the Piazza, / *more Sabello*, for Demeter” (XCVIII/704; cf. XCVIII/705, 706). Canto CII localises that custom and makes it Pound’s own memory: “Black shawls still worn for Demeter / in Venice, / in my time, / my young time” (CII/748). But no “gown” appears in *The Cantos* before or after Canto CVI. The term does not suggest, as it had in Pound’s early poems, the society ladies of Fifth Avenue (*CEP* 170), the tawdry modernity of a “tea-rose tea-gown”, or the “well-gowned” pretension of the drawing room.³ It suggests antiquity and grandeur, and it eschews personal memory: not the shawls Pound once saw Venetian women wear, but

³ Ezra Pound, *Personæ: The Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound*, ed. Lea Baechler and A. Walton Litz, rev. edn (New York: New Directions, 1990), pp. 186, 193. Hereafter abbreviated *P*.

the myth itself. Separate pasts thus converge in the present of this second line: the time of the myth of Demeter, which may be distinct from the time of the unidentified daughter, and the time of former conceptions or representations of that myth (as for instance those lines from Cantos XCVIII and CII), which may be distinct from the conception or representation recalled by “that”. In this way, though the second line may restate a firm or familiar thought, and so seem to clarify things, it represents new thinking.

Those other cantos emphasise the shawls’ mourning black, a customary correspondence of colour and emotion. Were we to read *as* as a qualitative conjunction, this would be true of Canto CVI, too: “Black in the manner Demeter’s gown is black”. But a quantitative *as* seems more likely, more idiomatic; this abstracts the colour and makes it an intensity, as in the unpublished poem Pound wrote during the Great War: “a year / Black as the *dies irae*” (*P*254).⁴ So, too, *The Pisan Cantos* remember the dark night of the soul described by St John of the Cross, and question its degree of darkness: “was it blacker? Νύξ animae?” (LXXIV/458). Demeter’s gown marks the blackest of blacks, representing what Pound in Pisa calls “the bottom” (LXXIV/458). But unlike gowns, neither years nor hymns nor mystical experiences may literally be black. When Pound spies “an infant, green as new grass” (LXXXIII/552) and sticking its head out of a wasp nest, the infant wasp is only figuratively green. On the other hand, the Day of Wrath might literally be a dark day, and when Pound cites John Adams’s recollection of a Frenchman, “his face white as a sheet of paper” (LXV/372), the gentleman’s face seems literally white—or perhaps it is only like white, paler than usual? In Canto CVI the adjective “Black” has no secure noun, no simple equivalent to “face” or “infant”, and its abstraction extends from the literal to the figurative, from colour to countenance or character or mood. The undecidable figuration gathers together a large set of materials and forms: all those converging pasts. In an attempt to order those materials and forms, the question of intensity answers the unfinished thought marked by the first line’s semi-colon, and compels this thought beyond the second line’s concluding comma. It gives the line its momentum.

⁴ Cf. XLVIII/237: “Forked shadow falls dark on the terrace / More black than the floating martin”.

3: EYES, HAIR?

Though the indentation of Pound's third line suggests that it completes the second, the line break registers difference, as though the thought turns in a new direction. The third line separates "eyes" and "hair" from "gown"; declines to regulate their sequence with the expected conjunction: "gown, eyes, and hair"; and so loosens the hold the last line's genitive has over these new nouns. Whose eyes, whose hair? We know that in the first Homeric Hymn to Demeter the goddess is ἡύκομον (1), or lovely-haired, and ξανθῆ (302), yellow or fair, golden as the corn.⁵ Hades, not Demeter, is κυανοχαῖτα (347), dark-haired. In Pisa Pound watches the moon, "pale as the dawn cloud" and "thin as Demeter's hair" (LXXIV/450-51), and the implication of those paired comparisons is as much colour as he ever gives that goddess. In his other poetry, Pound never writes of black eyes, only that Formianus' young lady friend has "eyes that are not black" (*P* 117). Other eyes are dead or suave (XXX/148, LXXIV/445), of stone or of turquoise (XXXIX/195, CX/798). So are the eyes and hair of Canto CVI, instead, the daughter's? That would align the new nouns with "Black" rather than "gown" in a syntactic doubling back: "Black as Demeter's gown? Black eyes, hair?" The nouns thereby give specific content to the adjective's abstraction. The second line also doubles back and begins again when—should we choose to read it this way—it describes the daughter, rather than elaborating on "that". And in that case this third line also leaves unclarified the question that pronoun poses. The problem of an unspecified or uncertain past therefore hovers ghostly over the whole canto.

Moreover, the way the canto's syntax doubles back differs from the way the canto works back over the past, the field of its questions. The words "hair" and "eyes" return to "gown", "Black", "that", and "daughter", but whatever the Greek myth and its texts prescribe, we do not know whose eyes or hair, or what they were like, or why, or why we need to know. There is no warrant within *The Cantos*, or even within Pound's poetry more broadly, for deciding. No memory can resolve the question which the third line concludes and, in so doing, extends and transforms. The past will not meet the present. This is why the third line comprises two nouns without further

⁵ Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homericica*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (London: William Heinemann, 1914), pp. 288, 310. Cf. *Iliad* 5.500: "ξανθῆ Δημήτηρ".

qualification or conjunction. Because there is no firm past on which to fasten, the canto thinks forward haltingly, a term at a time.

4: DIS' BRIDE, QUEEN OVER PHLEGETHON,

Does this solve the problem? No, though Dis' bride was Demeter's daughter, in a manner of speaking. Though the question the canto has posed did not ask for a name, the act of naming does seem to order its accumulating references and suggestions. Prosody might even seem to solve the puzzle of whose eyes and hair: the twin stresses of "Dis' bride" repeat the rhythm of "eyes, hair", and perhaps of "like that" too; and the assonance on /aɪ/ binds the three phrases more tightly. This, despite Virgil's reference to Proserpine's "flavum [...] crinem", or yellow hair.⁶ Yet the fourth line names without naming: Proserpine or Persephone appears without appearing, in the guises of bride and queen only. And Pound's melopoeia does not confirm identifications; it clusters associations: /d/ binds "Dis" to both "Demeter" and "daughter", much as /b/ binds "bride" to that ambiguous "Black". The line also clusters mythologies, shifting from the Greek Demeter (not Ceres, as at XLVII/236 and LXXXI/537) to the Roman Dis (neither Hades nor Pluto).⁷ The line ends with the Latin transliteration of φλεγέθων, the Greek participle for scorching or burning up, with which the Romans named a river in the underworld. (In Greek the river's proper name was Πυριφλεγέθων, blazing like fire.) The fourth line therefore divides what had seemed the single time of myth into distinct periods and traditions, and does so without the irreverence that animates the syntheses of *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1917): "Persephone and Dis, Dis, have mercy upon her" (P 218).

But that early allusion to Judaeo-Christian supplication, conflating the Lord and Dis as gods, reminds us that the Latin *Dis* first meant godhead or deity in general, and only subsequently came to designate the god of the underworld. In this way, the bride of Canto CVI recalls "the god's bride", Danaë, who early in *The Cantos* lay "waiting the golden rain" (IV/16). Perhaps she also recalls the "nupta" or bride whose song concludes Canto XXXIX: "His rod hath made god in my belly [...] Cantat sic nupta" (XXXIX/196).

⁶ Virgil, *Aeneid* 4.698, in *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (London: William Heinemann, 1930), p. 442.

⁷ For an earlier appearance of Ceres, see "Canzon: The Yearly Slain" (*CEP* 133).

Does *bride* imply sex in Canto CVI too, and does it imply consensual sex rather than rape?⁸ Or, not least since the reason for Demeter's mourning black is her daughter's forcible abduction, does an irony separate the present expression from the past event and its previous representations: "Dis caught her up" (XXI/100)?⁹

The particular names and terms Pound chooses define the bride's and queen's appearance, and configure again the past and present of the poem and of the world. Had Pound named her "Koré" (III/11, XVII/78), "KOPH" (LXXIV/462), "Kόρη" (LXXVI/477, LXXIX/510, LXXIX/512), or "Kore" (LXXXIII/553), it might, since κόρη means daughter, have confirmed the identity of "her daughter". Since κόρη also means girl, it would have emphasised the youth, frequently nubile or amorous, that characterises so many other figures in Pound's poetry, from Propertius' girls to the expectant nupta: "A girl's arms have nested the fire" (XXXIX/196).¹⁰ Had Pound named her Pluto's bride, it would have suggested wealth (πλούτος) or strength: "Pluto the strong" (I/4). Had he named her Hades' bride, the proper noun would have encompassed both the god and the underworld he rules—but "Hades" makes no appearance in Pound's poetry. Perhaps Virgil's "dominam Ditis" (*Aeneid* 6.397) echoes in "Dis' bride", though the senses of *domina* range from bride or wife to queen or lady or mistress, while Pound's line distinguishes and juxtaposes youthful bride and mature queen, or suggests a sequence of cause and effect. In marrying the god she came to rule his realm. The poem continues to think a term or item at a time.

⁸ Cf. "Zeus' clever rapes" in *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (P222).

⁹ Cf. the relatively indirect description of the rape of Tyro by Poseidon at II/6, and the exploits of Austors de Maensac, who "went down to Tierci / and took off the girl there that was just married to Bernart" (XXIII/109).

¹⁰ Cf. V/17: "Hymenæus 'brings the girl to her man'"; and, in *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, "My genius is no more than a girl" (P213; cf. P208, 212, 220, 222, 223). Girls often figure in Pound's mythopoesis; see "A Girl", "The Spring", and "Heather" (P 58-9, 88, 112); XXXIX/193: "Girls leery with Circe's tisane"; and LXXXVIII/595: "Religion? with no dancing girls at the altar?". *Rock-Drill* extends Pound's account of mystical and mythical experience to "the Lorraine girl", Joan of Arc (XCI/637, XCIII/650). But in "Shop Girl" and "The Tea Shop" Pound also writes, with some ambivalence, of the modern working girl (P 116, 120). Cf. the anecdote of the "very sad case of a girl in the East of London" (XXXV/173-4).

But when Virgil's Charon refers to Proserpine as *dominam Ditis*, he is addressing Aeneas and the Cumaean Sibyl from his boat on the river Styx, not Phlegethon. As a synecdoche for the underworld, the Styx would have suggested the deadly or hateful (στρυγέω, to hate); Acheron woe (ἄχος, pain or distress); Cocytus lamentation (κωκῶω, to howl or weep); and Lethe forgetfulness (λήθη, forgetfulness). In *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, Acheron and Styx figure the otherworld as such (P214, 224), but in Pisa, in the rubble of a global war, the image of a rushing river's torrential flames—"rapidus flammis [...] torrentibus amnis" (*Aeneid* 6.550)—makes good sense: "Out of Phlegethon!" (LXXV/470). In an early canto, Pound plays on the contrast of Phlegethon's fire and the otherworld's "long soft grass": "Fire gleam under smoke of the mountain, / Even there by meadows of Phlegethon" (XXV/118).

If the fourth line's sequence of cause and effect implies an act of memory, thinking through the old story again, the line also remembers and replays Pound's old accustomed tunes, from twin stresses beginning or ending a line—"Set keel" (I/3), "Fire gleam", "eyes, hair"—to falling and triple rhythms: "forth on the godly sea" (I/3), "meadows of Phlegethon", "Queen over Phlegethon". The rhythm and the half rhyme also bind "Queen over Phlegethon" to "Black as Demeter's gown", though like the long vowel of "sea" the diphthong of "gown" is more strongly stressed than the short vowel of "-on". The present line thus sounds both the poem's recent and its distant past. In fact, the fourth line's hemistichs invert the second and third lines' rhythmic sequence; the canto doubles back prosodically. The assonance on /aɪ/ begins and ends the tune of "eyes, hair? / Dis' bride", and the fourth line forms a chiasmus of roles and proper names. Like the shuttling between mythologies and etymologies, this separates the canto's sequence or narration from a sequence of question and answer, a narrative of cause and effect, an old story's plot, or the chronicle of civilisations. The effect is not to solve problems, confirm identities, or constellate discrete particulars, but to establish a stream of thinking whose currents flow at different speeds and even in different directions.

5: GIRLS FAINT AS MIST ABOUT HER?

We now know that this second sentence has no verb, and we know that it is a question, but what is it asking? If the fourth line promised to identify "her daughter", the fifth line promises to clarify "that". As in the second and third lines, Pound's lineation puts his

syntax under considerable pressure. Possibly this question asks, “did Dis’ bride, Queen over Phlegethon, have girls faint as mist about her?” A speculative and indented line, then, to follow the secure and flush line. But the verbless sentence and Pound’s customary asyndeton suggest instead three parallel speculations. It would make sense to wonder, were “her daughter” distinct from Demeter’s daughter, whether the one was like the other: a bride, queen, and mistress of misty girls. Were “her daughter” and Demeter’s daughter the same person—and that is probably the stronger suggestion—it might still make sense to wonder whether she had girls faint as mist about her, but not to query her identity as bride or queen. The three descriptions offered by this second sentence could not then clarify “that”. They would instead describe the daughter directly, as if to ask, “was Dis’ bride, Queen over Phlegethon, girls faint as mist about her, like that?” But without that clarification, without another “like that”, the three parallel speculations may doubt the very terms they offer, and so doubt even the bride’s and queen’s existence. As the poem gropes for memories, neither names nor their objects are secure.

The fifth line thus reveals two conflicting modes or levels of interrogation. First, it continues the canto’s logic of comparison, in which the roles of bride, queen, and mistress may be firm and familiar qualities. Second, it undercuts the basis of such comparisons, the existence of an object or objects for recollection and reflection, and those roles therefore remain speculative. This second, more radical doubt threatens memory as such, and that is why this sentence withholds the past tense. The bride, queen, and mistress does not appear here in the security of the past; no past text or past experience could ease this doubt. The poem’s present subsumes all pasts.

This is also why, having yet appeared only as bride and queen, she appears in this fifth line as little more than an absence at the centre, a minimal presence surrounded by misty girls: not the subject of the phrase, only a preposition’s object: a mere pronoun, “her”. Why ask about these girls, and why care whether they are faint or bright, clear, solid? In *Pisa*, mist suggests the afterlife or otherworld: “Mt Taishan is faint as the wraith of my first friend [...] mist glaze over mountain” (LXXVII/485), “Sligo in heaven’ murmured uncle William / when the mist finally settled down on Tigullio” (LXXVII/493). But the image in *Canto CVI* also summons decadent glammers and glimmers, an effect Pound liked in his young

time. “Slender as mist-wrought maids and hamadryads” (*CEP* 88), he wrote in 1909. Another poem from that year likens a lady’s green mantle to “a mist wherethrough her white form fought” (*P*29). Mist is insubstantial, and mist veils. It is a good garb for goddesses: “with the veil of faint cloud before her / Κύθηρα δεινὰ” (LXXX/531). But the young Pound could also laugh at such mythological or mediaeval effects, apostrophising nicotine as his “mist-enwreathéd queen” (*CEP* 50). Is the bride and queen of Canto CVI enwreathed in mist too, or encircled by mist-faint girls?

Because the syntax of the fifth line allows both those possibilities, its image is difficult to see. Possibly the girls are faint as *the* mist that enwreathes her, so that, able to see now or to remember that mist with clarity, the poem seeks to remember or imagine the girls. Perhaps instead the girls are faint as *a* mist enwreathing her, so that the poem imagines a mist in order to describe the girls. But the girls themselves may be imagined, as if to say, not *those* girls, but *some* girls. Doubting the existence of the bride and queen, the question may also merely speculate about her retinue. Insubstantial, the girls about her are themselves her veil of faint cloud. When Anchises slept with Aphrodite, he “laid hold of her flanks of air” (LXXVI/476). When Canto CVI asks for Dis’ bride and the Queen over Phlegethon it clutches empty air, like Odysseus embracing Anticlea. She fades in the shift from “bride” and “Queen” to “girls” and “her”, and fades further in an image that ties memory to vision. Condensed to that blurred image, narrative figures narration, for the image figures the poem’s thinking. The question asks for clarity, to remember well and think securely, but in the act of asking the fifth line answers with obscurity and doubt. *Homage to Sextus Propertius* playfully arrays a muse and her retinue, relishing their flimsiness: “A young Muse with young loves clustered about her” (*P*205). Canto CVI gives that preposition an epistemological shade, so that the line represents faint girls and failing thoughts “about her”.

6: THE STRENGTH OF MEN IS IN GRAIN.

After two questions and a blank line, the sixth line performs a volte-face. Not faintness but strength; not insubstantial mist but tangible grain; not daughters and goddesses, not brides and queens and girls, but men; not the otherworld, but this world, or all the world; not the distant past or the recent past, but an eternal present; not probing thinking, but a definitive thought; not doubt, but certainty. The poem seems to steady itself with secure judgement or

fact. Rather than answering the canto's questions directly, the sixth line meets them with the countervailing force of strong statement. Its assurance meets their anxiety.

This new strength is masculine, since, following those first five lines, "men" is not a simple synonym for "the human race" (LXVII/391). In an early poem Pound urges modern poets to "dream great deeds, strong men, / Hearts hot, thoughts mighty" (CEP 96). Does Canto CVI therefore figure loss or death as female and life or growth as male? Pound's early personae are often strong men, yet sometimes oddly weak: "Frail Cino" is the "strongest of his tribe" (P 7), and Piere Vidal's hot love is "strong until / It faints in taking and in giving all" (P 29).¹¹ In the first canto, moreover, Pound associates strength with both death and life: Proserpine's bridegroom is "Pluto the strong", but Tiresias is "strong with the blood" of the sheep Odysseus has sacrificed (I/4).¹² As in these early works, the meaning of strength in Canto CVI ranges from bodily vigour to force of character or intelligence, but this strength is also, newly, collective. Cino and Tiresias are exceptional; Demeter and her daughter are gods and individuals, whose story determines the cycles of nature and the lives of ordinary mortals; even the plural girls encircle their single mistress, subordinate to her. "The strength of men", in contrast, is a mutual vigour that binds and sustains all equally. The statement's universality thus contradicts the particularity of its materials and values, from myth and masculinity to money.

For, of course, despite all the ways in which the sixth line opposes the first five, it meets Demeter and Persephone with the grain whose harvest their myth explains: "[κα]ρπὸν [...] φερέσβιον ἀνθρώποισιν", the fruit that gives life to humankind.¹³ Pound does make that myth explicitly sexual: "bel seno Δημήτηρ copulatrix / thy furrow" (LXXVII/490). He also makes grain a libation and a sacrament: "grain for the *manes*" (LII/259), "Luigi, *gobbo*, makes his communion with wheat grain" (XCVII/699). Finally, grain's significance is political and economic: "With usury [...] the peasant

¹¹ Cf. Pound's Abelard, who "dared the body" and "donned / Its frail strong-seeming" (CEP 159).

¹² Cf. the image of the nymph Phaethusa "With colour in the vein, / Strong as with the blood-drink" (XXI/100).

¹³ Hesiod, First Hymn to Demeter, l. 469, in *The Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, p. 322.

does not eat his own grain" (LI/250; cf. XLV/229). Thanks to Mussolini's vigour, Italy's dead land now gives life: "Waited 2000 years, ate grain from the marshes" (XLI/202). The Chinese History Cantos are liberally sown with references to grain, and there and throughout *The Cantos* the management of grain measures good government. But the sixth line of Canto CVI transfigures those particular materials and values as a universal truth, much as it exchanges a real collective for mythic individuals.

Again, the poem's present subsumes its own pasts and the world's histories. The present tense then sets this moment's thought—different both from the preceding lines and from Pound's other references to strength, men, and grain—under the aspect of eternity. The strength of men was in grain in Confucius's China and is in grain in Eisenhower's America. Pound's curt syntax secures this abstraction, suggesting not the description of contingent circumstances but a peculiar form of fundamental definition. In comparison, to say "Barley is the marrow of men" (CII/749) is to offer a relatively straightforward metaphor. But to say "Harmony is in the proportion of branches" (XCIX/728) is to make the proportion of branches exemplify harmony as such. Natural proportion is not merely a metaphor for social order, and whether or not a particular society or state has emulated or achieved that harmony is a separate question. Indeed, when nearby statements address social problems they affirm ideals rather than disclosing truths: "The father's word is compassion" (XCIX/728). The same peculiar verbal form means that, in Canto CVI, the strength of men does not simply come from eating grain as essential nourishment or managing grain as common resource. Nor does it *lie in* grain as potential, nor *is* it grain, metaphorically. The strength of men *is in* grain, as nourishment, sacrament, and symbol.

In this abstraction, the politics and the economics fade from view. The sexuality implicit in mist-faint girls and "bride" remains in the harvest reaped from sowing implicitly male seed. And the myth remains, too, but as an undercurrent, flowing from Demeter to her fruit. The canto seems thus to steady itself with an ideogram, so that a stable conceptual relation or identity contains the energies generated by syntax, grammar, image, diction, and name. The ideogram, rather than judgement or fact, seems to gather the poem's pasts and the world's histories under the aspect of eternity. Yet those troubled energies include the strength of this sixth line, for even in establishing that ideogram the statement betrays the poem's probing

thinking and unsettled memory. Its force depends upon the particular judgements and facts, from across *The Cantos*, which it abstracts, and upon the various verbal forms which it adapts and resists.

7: NINE DECREES, 8TH ESSAY, THE KUAN

The momentum which compelled a sequence of questions and clarifications now compels the juxtaposition of strong statement and straight presentation. The seventh line lacks even the sixth's present-tense verb and full stop. Though "gown, / eyes, hair" and "bride, Queen [...] her" share its tripartite form, this line delivers the sequence of the citation: it indicates the nine decrees to be found in the eighth essay of "the Kuan" or Guanzi, a collection of writings named after and sometimes attributed to Guan Zhong, a statesman and economist who lived during the Spring and Autumn period. On the right the canto glosses this citation with the collection's full title and a transliteration: 管子, "Kuan [...] Tzu". The name 管 (Guan or "Kuan") means control, and that is the sense in which, earlier in *Thrones*, Pound laments the lack of "chao⁴ kuan³ / care for control" (XCIX/723).¹⁴ The appellation 子 ("Tzu") means master. The canto thus juxtaposes the chancellor's proper name and title, the collection's full title, an English shorthand for that title ("the Kuan"), and the meanings of 管 and 子. In comparable fashion, the proper name "Phlegethon" recalls the Greek present participle and "Dis" the Latin noun. Pound's ideogram sees this world's male master meet the queen of the otherworld. In the Chinese History Cantos Pound commends the ideal that lies "Between KUNG and ELEUSIS" (LII/258; cf. LIII/272); the ideogram which opens Canto CVI develops or extends that ideal, positioning it between the goddesses of the Eleusinian rites and one of Confucius's key forerunners.

But whereas "bride", "Queen", and "her" veil Persephone, the seventh line and the gloss identify Master Guan and the Guanzi, and reveal their significance. Here the play of names supports Pound's late poetics of citation, and the canto shows no anxious reaching after faint memories or facts: it indicates text and meaning with confidence. The form of the gloss seems to support this, standing

¹⁴ A page later Pound refers to "kuan¹ ch'ang² in office" (XCIX/724), and in *Rock-Drill* he glosses 瘵 as "kouan", but "kuan¹" means a mandarin and 瘵 distress.

apart from the probing progress of the canto proper. (When Pound was recorded performing the poem in 1967, he omitted the gloss.)¹⁵ Rather than an eddy in the flow of thought, the gloss appears to oppose flow as such, less poetry than apparatus. Or, in this poetics the vertical flow of Chinese characters cuts across the horizontal flow of lines of Roman type. Yet a sequence of velar stops (voiced /g/ and voiceless /k/) binds “grain” and “decrees” to “管 Kuan”, and a sequence of alveolar nasals (/n/) binds “管 Kuan” to “men”, “grain”, and “NINE”. So, too, syntax may join “grain” to “管 Kuan”, so that the strength of men is also in grain control, and syntax may join “the Kuan” to “子 Tzu”, stepped down from the seventh line as if to pause and then label the text a master. Alternatively, the whole gloss may join the citation: “the Kuan, that is to say, the Kuan Tzu”. But the size of the Chinese characters, so much larger than the roman type, serves to set them apart, a marginal annotation. Together with the play of names, the spatial array’s resistance to temporal flow seems thus to support the stable ideogram. If the strength of men is in grain, to govern men well means to control or manage that grain, as the Guanzi explains.¹⁶ Good government, strong statements, and straight citations represent forms of mastery.

But why not present the masterly decrees themselves? There is a shift, here, from the sixth line’s statement of a universal truth to the verbal forms cited by the seventh line: the decree and the essay.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ezra Pound, “Canto CVI”, recorded in Spoleto, summer 1967: https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Pound/Spoleto-1967/Pound-Ezra_07_Canto-CVI_Spoleto_1967.mp3 [accessed 9 August 2014].

¹⁶ See Guan Zhong, *Economic Dialogues in Ancient China: Selections from the Kuan-Tzu, a Book Written Probably Three Centuries Before Christ*, trans. T’an Po-fu and Wen Kung-wen (Adam K. W. Wen), ed. Lewis [A.] Maverick (Carbondale: Lewis A. Maverick, 1954), pp. 38, 70, 95. The eighth essay never mentions grain, however, so the seventh line does not provide a reference for the sixth.

¹⁷ The translation of the Guanzi which Pound read uses the term *regulation*, not *decree*. *Regulation* has its own connotations and a distinct history in *The Cantos*: “and the greatest is charity / to be found among those who have not observed / regulations” (LXXIV/454). A footnote to the translation then calls these regulations “edicts”, and explains that they were issued by Duke Huan of Qi, who made Guan Zhong his prime minister, to the other major rulers of the Spring and Autumn period. See Guan, *Economic Dialogues in Ancient China*, pp. 58-9.

Like an edict, a decree expresses political authority; it is a public pronouncement with the force of law: “So SIUEN decreed she shd/ be honoured as First Queen / of OU-TSONG” (LV/291). And precisely because its claim to universality arises in and from a historical situation, a decree may be disobeyed, critiqued, or satirized, as in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920): “We see τὸ καλόν / Decreed in the market place” (P 187). But the seventh line of Canto CVI accepts the nine decrees. Or rather, it presents the fact of their being decrees, not the particular judgements they state, values they endorse, or practices they impose. It meets the sixth line’s eternal verity with practical force. The seventh line presents authority.

For this same reason, the canto numbers the decrees and capitalises the numeral. Just as the size of Chinese characters can measure emphasis—“LING² 靈 / Our dynasty came in because of a great sensibility” (LXXXV/563)—so, too, Pound sometimes capitalises to emphasise quantity: “FIVE million youths without jobs / FOUR million adult illiterates” (XLVI/235). Sometimes he capitalises to bestow significance on an arbitrary number, as if it were natural and just: “the FIVE grains, said Chin Nong, that are / wheat, rice, millet, *gros blé* and chick peas” (LIII/262). In Canto CVI, it is as if the number of decrees determined their authority, as if nine decrees necessarily held more sway than, say, ten commandments.¹⁸ Yet the seventh line frames the authority of the decree as such with that other verbal form, the essay. When Consort Wang, the favourite concubine of Emperor Wuzong of Tang (“OU-TSONG”), committed suicide upon his death, and when his successor, Emperor Xuānzong (“SIUEN”), decreed that she should be honoured for her loyalty, he did not do so in an essay. Essays test ideas and arguments, seeking to persuade rather than impose. When Leopold II wanted to reform Tuscany’s finances in the late eighteenth century, his advisors turned to “Mr Locke’s / essay on interest” (L/246), first published in 1696 but still stimulating.¹⁹ An essay which records decrees disseminates them for subsequent reflection and study.

¹⁸ Certain spiritual or mystical associations may also attach themselves to the number nine, as in Pound’s evocation of the celestial hierarchy: “Nine knowledges about / 止 chih³ [...] The 8th being natural science, 9th moral [...] Agassiz with the fixed stars, Kung to the crystalline” (XCIII/645).

¹⁹ Cf. XCVI/678: “that bit from the Eparch’s edict / which was still there for Kemal in our time”.

So the nine decrees contained in the eighth essay of the Guanzi do not have immediate and public force; they memorialise that force for the future. A decree in an essay inscribes a temporal difference, an historical break. Though the previous canto briefly refers to Lewis Maverick (CV/770), who edited the translation of the Guanzi which Pound read, the straight presentation of Canto CVI places the decrees in a text and in an historical situation beyond the poem. The ideogram descends, then, from truth to history, or to the thought of history, the thought of an authority. That is to say, the seventh line protests too much; it represents a need for authority, a present lack. Though its form is so different from the canto's opening questions, this line also betrays a present doubt, responding to the poem's recent past and reaching for a distant past beyond the poem.

8: SO SLOW IS THE ROSE TO OPEN

Resisting the urge to blossom into conclusion or solution prematurely, a commentary on Canto CVI could move more slowly than this commentary has moved. But should commentaries move slowly, and should roses open slowly? Eager to apprehend a blown rose, the eighth line may lament slow growth. Yet "Slowness is beauty", as Pound remembers Lawrence Binyon having said long ago (LXXXVII/592). Can slowness be too slow? The value we attribute to slowness in Canto CVI will depend in part upon the force of "So", whether measuring a remarkable quantity ("so very slow") or comparing two quantities ("just so slow"). It will depend in part, too, upon what we understand "the rose" to mean. To name each of that phrase's potential referents would be another slow process. To name but two, this line might lament the inordinately slow growth of the rose of *The Cantos* as a whole, and in particular the slow emergence of the poem's pattern or order or coherence. This is one way in which the line configures anew the poem's past and its present. Or instead the line might, after another blank line, recommend the slow progress of the canto's first seven lines, with their tentative movements and abrupt juxtapositions; the canto's refusal to cohere immediately could exemplify a necessary slowness, a form of beauty. But then the comparison would make the canto's movement a model for the growth of some other rose—the coherence of the cosmos, say, or of society—and why would we wish to wait for that?

For good reason, the criticism of poetry is not always very good at waiting. Criticism is "one of many devices we have for gathering

up time and making a narrative artefact of it”, and “even to explicate slowness is of course to speed it up; to save one the necessity in future of going through it all again, so intolerably slowly”.²⁰ Swift readings of Canto CVI—or of *Thrones*, or of *The Cantos*—often seek correspondences and identities, in a move which the theory of the ideogram seems to support. Whatever the differences between roses, cherries, iron rust, and flamingos, what matters is their common quality: red.²¹ Whatever the differing implications of *Persephone*, *Proserpine*, and *Kόρη*, what matters is the myth behind the names, seemingly single, stable, and secure. So it makes sense to identify “her daughter” with the “Persephone” who is named a page later (CVI/773), and never to worry about those first words again: “her daughter” merely means “Kore/Persephone”.²² When “Persephone” then appears beside “Circe”, and though the two “are unlike as Enna and Nyssa, sea and glen, pine and juniper”, “both names serve (on good mythological evidence) as approximate definitions of the one goddess of vegetation”.²³ According to a comparable logic, the canto’s statement of a universal truth is identical to that of the ancient text it subsequently cites: “The strength of men is in grain” is “quoted from the *Kuan Tzu*”—quoted, not borrowed or adapted or paraphrased.²⁴ And yet in the translation Pound read, the Guanzi states that “the strength of men lies in the grain (which nourishes them)”.²⁵ A universal truth or common idea transcends particular formulations. To see the rose

²⁰ Steven Connor, “Slow Going”, *Yearbook of English Studies* 30 (2000): 153-65 (pp. 153, 156).

²¹ Ezra Pound, *An ABC of Reading* (1934; New York: New Directions, 2010), p. 22.

²² Carroll F. Terrell, *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 689.

²³ Massimo Bacigalupo, *The Forméd Trace: The Later Poetry of Ezra Pound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 436.

²⁴ William Cookson, *A Guide to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: Persea Books, 1985), p. 147. Despite quoting the text of the Guanzi, Wendy Stallard Flory also calls the sixth line a “quotation”, in *The American Ezra Pound* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 180. Bacigalupo calls the line a “borrowing”, but a “borrowing from the ‘decrees’ and ‘essays’ of the *Kuan-tzu*” (*The Forméd Trace*, p. 427). Yet the line is borrowed from the third essay, not the “decrees” or regulations of the eighth.

²⁵ Guan, *Economic Dialogues in Ancient China*, p. 38. The parenthetical phrase is the translators’ clarification.

bloom is thus to connect and combine, to observe the poem's few essential themes or values recur, to discern "the poet's mosaic".²⁶ Difference or doubt represent only a budding rose; they are provisional. So, though the first line's "like that" designates "something indefinite—an absentee referent of which various versions are given in the sequel", in time "we see that the comparison involves the gown of the mother on the one hand [...] and the eyes and hair of the daughter on the other".²⁷ And how else could we proceed, especially when grappling with the bulk and complexity of *Thrones*? Only an impossibly slow reading could "respect the progress of the poem that leaves everything open, fragmented, and discontinuous".²⁸

Pound's best readers recognise the contest, quintessential to *The Cantos*, between its "few paradigmatic plots" and "their local instantiations".²⁹ Especially in *Thrones*, the former seem to dominate the latter. Hugh Kenner once remarked that the volume is concerned with "individual terms, precisions, distinctions, correlations", but correlation seems to trump distinction.³⁰ This poetics of identity suggests a spatial array which, even as it seems to map a hectic temporal flux, controls and explicates the poem's manifold materials: "The montage of fragmented quotations has acquired maximum velocity there, and all the elements are explained by other parts of the poem."³¹ "Persephone" identifies "her daughter", and citing the Guanzi explains the appearance of the Greek myth. If we figure the latter as a "subject rhyme",³² to borrow Pound's term, it seems as bad as rhyming *trees* and *breeze* unthinkingly. It makes no difference whether we first hear of the

²⁶ Bacigalupo, *The Forméd Trace*, p. 423. In reading the late cantos, we thus need to trace "a number of themes, occasionally quite microscopic, that run in and out of them" (Bacigalupo, *The Forméd Trace*, p. 422).

²⁷ Bacigalupo, *The Forméd Trace*, p. 425.

²⁸ Margaret Dickie, "The Cantos: Slow Reading", *ELH* 51.4 (Winter 1984): 819-35 (p. 819).

²⁹ Peter Nicholls, "'2 doits to a boodle': reckoning with *Thrones*", *Textual Practice* 18.2 (2004): 233-49 (p. 236).

³⁰ Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 532.

³¹ Jean-Michel Rabaté, *Language, Sexuality and Ideology in Ezra Pound's Cantos* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 232.

³² Ezra Pound, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (1950; London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 210.

Greek myth and then of the Guanzi, or vice versa. Yet Pound knew very well that rhyming “grimace” with “grace” makes meanings the words would not have were their order reversed (*P* 186). The difficulty, then, lies in reconciling the poetics of identity with the late cantos’ “erratic fluctuations in emotional tone”, their tentative movements and abrupt juxtapositions, the anxiety and the assurance.³³

If Canto CVI continues the late cantos’ “insistent emphasis on mere correspondence or adequation”, its opening ideogram also resists the reduction of particular objects to general concepts, so that in their very juxtaposition two Greek goddesses and a Chinese statesman, like roses and flamingos, express “a kind of remainder”.³⁴ This means that the poetics of identity works at two levels: universals subsume two kinds of particular. On the one hand, the poem’s “welter of ‘luminous details’” arranges “sudden insights from history, philosophy and theology”, not to mention economics and mythology.³⁵ These are truths and facts and values from beyond the poem. On the other hand, there is the poem’s own welter or whirl or rose, the arrangement of its own particular verbal forms: not two Greek goddesses and a Chinese statesman, but the first seven lines of Canto CVI. In this second welter, “the sheer productivity of the signifier” remains in excess of any single, stable signified.³⁶ Pursuing identities beyond the poem, we risk forcing identities within it. The contest between a poetics of “abstraction and merely quantitative identity” and a poetics of “diversity and difference” thus structures both the world beyond the poem and the world of the poem itself.³⁷ Most importantly, it structures the relation between the two, distending the dialectic of universal and particular. Precisely in seeking to correlate such diverse signifieds, *Thrones* necessarily distinguishes its signifiers, even down to the humblest copula. The eighth line’s “is” descends from the eternal present of the sixth line’s “is” to a temporal present, the present of the poem’s narration—or it encompasses the two anew.

³³ Nicholls, “2 boits to a boodle”, p. 243.

³⁴ Nicholls, “2 boits to a boodle”, pp. 240, 242.

³⁵ William Cookson, *A Guide to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: Persea Books, 1985), p. 124.

³⁶ Richard Sieburth, “In Pound We Trust: The Economy of Poetry/The Poetry of Economics”, *Critical Inquiry* 14.1 (Autumn 1987): 142-72 (p. 167).

³⁷ Nicholls, “2 boits to a boodle”, p. 244.

But in attending to the poem's verbal particulars—to all that distinguishes Canto CVI from the cantos before and after it—this commentary has risked transfiguring those particulars into new universals. As if the first line's attitude of recollection and reflection held the key to the following lines or even the whole canto. As if the eighth line, reflecting on the canto or the whole poem, somehow stood outside the poem. Yet even as it reflects upon the opening ideogram, the eighth line also moves the canto into a new strophe, new images, new rhythms, new syntactic and grammatical torques, new reflections on Demeter and Kuan Tzu, new allusions to other mythologies. This commentary stops here, having to stop somewhere, but the poem continues. Nevertheless, there are reasons for giving these lines special privilege. A canto's first line might be said to set the scene or the tone, much as a last line, like "The sky leaded with elm boughs" (CVI/775), might be said to culminate its canto, a resolving cadence. So, too, Pound famously likened the "*forma*, the immortal *concetto*, the concept, the dynamic form" to "the rose pattern driven into the dead iron-filings by the magnet", and that figure also slips between patterns of signifieds and signifiers.³⁸ But those reasons are not sufficient or conclusive. The other difficult critical task now might be to remember that these are nevertheless also only two more lines, and so to descend to the level of each new poetic filing, patiently.

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