

‘THE CLEAREST MIND EVER IN ENGLAND’: POUND’S LATE PARADISAL IN CANTO CVII

Miranda Hickman

Ezra Pound’s three “Coke Cantos,” CVII-CIX, featuring the work—and, importantly, “mind”—of the famous Elizabethan jurist Sir Edward Coke (1552-1634), arrive at the end of *Thrones*, the late episode of the *Cantos* addressing sources of “good government.” The Coke Cantos in fact constitute a kind of last word of the *Cantos* before the notable dispersal of the last section, “Drafts and Fragments”: with Amy Mitchell, I read the Coke Cantos, composed shortly before Pound’s departure from Saint Elizabeths in 1958, as registering the last sustained gesture of Pound’s *magnum opus* (Mitchell 179). The first of these Cantos, Canto CVII, reprises many of Pound’s former allegiances, convictions, and points of admiration—and then invests these with new significance through Pound’s engagement with Coke’s career and his major work, the *Institutes of the Laws of England*.

Coke, whom Canto CVII hails as “the clearest mind ever in England” (CVII/778), thus forms the cynosure of these late Cantos. Pound had reckoned with Coke before this, during work on the Adams Cantos in the late 1930s, in which he addresses John Adams’ considerable esteem for both Coke and the principles of English common law accented in Coke’s work. By the 1950s, Pound may have favoured the jurist in part because of Coke’s observations in the *Third Institutes* about “misprision of treason” from English common law—a principle according to which someone who knowingly failed to report treason to the authorities was himself guilty of serious treason (*Third Institutes*, Cap. 3). Pound often cited this claim in defense of his own conduct during the Second World War, suggesting that his Radio Rome broadcasts had exposed the treasonous conduct of U.S. President Roosevelt (Stock 452): at Pound’s prompting, in 1959, excerpts from the *Institutes* on this point appeared in William Cookson’s journal *Agenda*. Yet the fact that

Pound in the late 1950s was also encouraging many correspondents to read Catherine Drinker Bowen's biography of Coke, *The Lion and the Throne* (Wilhelm 328)—the recent book through which Pound was gathering a richly detailed portrait of the jurist—suggests a wider engagement at this point with what Edward Coke represented. As Pound composed the Coke Cantos, paramount for him was Coke's famous commentary on that historic charter of England, *Magna Carta*.

As Pound sought to guide the *Cantos* toward conclusion, he reached to Coke to underscore what he had called in Canto LXIV the “law[s]” that are the “subject's birthright” (LXIV/356), which Coke emphasizes through his work on *Magna Carta*. In the earlier Adams Cantos, Pound had stressed this dimension of Coke's commentary when noting John Adams's admiration of Coke. Harking back to this in Canto CVII, Pound stresses the subject rhyme between Adams and Coke: if Coke is lauded in CVII as the “clearest mind ever in England,” this pointedly echoes praise for Adams in Canto LXII as “the clearest head in the Congress” (LXII/350). Thus Canto CVII, together with the Coke Cantos more generally, chime with the Adams Cantos, which themselves register the importance of Coke's work on English common law. In Canto LXVI, Pound represents Adams as recognizing through his engagement with Coke that “the common law of England” is the “BIRTHRIGHT of every man here/ and at home” (LXVI/384). In Pound's portrait of him, Adams emphasizes

that parliament

hath no authority
to impose internal taxes upon us.
Common Law. 1st Inst. 142
Coke, to the 3rd Inst. Law is the subject's birthright
(LXVI/356)

The Adams Cantos appeal to Coke as a major authority on these tenets of common law protecting the individual's rights from encroachment by a monarch or other branches of government. The Coke Cantos once again sound these central points, which for Pound register principles of just government integral to the foundation of the United States—principles from which, as Pound sees it, the U.S. of his day has unfortunately lapsed.

Thus surprisingly, during the late 1950s—a period during which Pound’s degree of continued investment in Mussolini’s Italy is notably ambiguous—the Coke Cantos *strongly* advocate what Canto 67 calls an “empire of laws not men” (LXVII/391), a phrase suggesting the rule of law. Featured in CVII is an idea of “good government” whose forms of justice derive from laws—in particular, the kind of common law articulated through *Magna Carta*—rather than from one strongman figure. Threaded through the earlier Adams Cantos, such principles of common law are noted as a major resource for the legal work of John Adams, who featured a similar phrase in the Massachusetts Constitution: “a government of laws and not of men.” Given Canto CVII’s emphasis on *Magna Carta*, as well its gestures toward John Adams, the commitment to a “government of laws and not of men” in fact reads as the conceptual spine of the Canto. In the context of the post-war decade, this line of endorsement reads as an attemptedly liberal gesture from Pound—a rejoinder to his reputation at this point for both a longstanding veneration for Mussolini and Fascism more broadly. Moreover, signals in the Cantos of this section (such as 105 and 108) suggest that this gesture coexists with a Poundian inclination at this juncture to reclaim Mussolini for liberal thought.

The guiding idea of *Thrones*, drawn from Dante’s *Paradiso*, is not only that of “good government,” but as Pound noted in a 1960 interview, that of “*the spirits of the people* who have been responsible for good government” (Hall 58, italics mine). Coke is powerfully affirmed here as one such guiding “spirit” - recognized as disseminating vital information from the cultural archive about just government by setting into circulation once again in his day the principles of *Magna Carta*. Thus what Pound celebrates in CVII is not only the content of what Coke—a “scholler” with command of Latin—relays of the ancient codes and values underwriting English common law: as suggested by the arrangement of material in CVII, Pound also highlights the cultural work by which Coke (in a move recalling modernist recuperations) revived attention to these fundamental codes in his Elizabethan moment. Drawing upon his considerable learning, the jurist restored attention to *Magna Carta* at an early seventeenth-century juncture when, as Coke and many others saw it, the principles basic to English common law stood in danger of violation under the Stuart monarchs, James I and Charles I, with their absolutist tendencies (Vincent 92).

As the Coke Cantos exhibit fragments from Coke's *Institutes*, Poundian curation intersperses these examples with those from other sources on governance Pound favours - such as the *Sacred Edict* by long Ching, who compiled his father's commentary on Confucianism for eighteenth-century China. By linking the *Institutes* with the *Sacred Edict* (paired at the end of Canto CVIII), Pound implicitly acclaims Coke for reviving (and "making new") a document and ideas foundational to a culture—at a moment of crisis when the culture needed to remember them. Pound thus credits Coke with a crucial intervention enacted through active cultural recovery. Such an intervention both clearly inspires the work of Canto CVII (which itself seeks to remind latter-day readers of *Magna Carta*) and, more generally, points to a fundamental vector of Pound's own modernist work.

Yet how effectively does Pound explicate the legal tenets of *Magna Carta* featured through Coke's work? In fact, he doesn't explicate: the deeply difficult idiom of the Coke Cantos, and *Thrones* more broadly, allows readers little access. Peter Nicholls remarks on the critical conundrums presented by *Thrones*' radically compressed language, noting its capacity to deflect even intrepid Poundians. Wilhelm suggests that in the Coke Cantos in particular, we are in the thick of "arid legal talk" that makes these Cantos "unapproachable" (*Tragic Years*, 328), and Davie deplors their "wretched writing" (105). To account for these effects—what can feel like elliptical references born of haste—Nicholls wonders about Pound's "impatience" at this late juncture to achieve an "ending" for the *Cantos* (235). For Nicholls, what matters most for Pound at this stage are large-scale ideas which he offered particulars index metonymically, such that Pound no longer takes pains to arrange his "luminous details" suggesting them: instead he simply offers a scattering of conceptual shards, perhaps seeds, to evoke a major cultural achievement such as *Magna Carta*. Nicholls also wonders about Pound's late-career habit of "self-censorship," born in part out of conditions in which he felt himself on the cultural fringe, under watch by various authorities: does this incline Pound to "encode" his messages so that only a small select group, those who are with him and wish to follow up, can decipher them? From his early fascination with the *trobar clus* of the troubadours onward, Pound had shown interest in such codes.

What I would add to these questions about Pound's late idiom is how to account for Pound's increasing habit of drawing from his

source material not only with apparent haste, but also frequently in the same sequence given in sources - such as Coke's *Institutes* and Bowen's *The Lion and the Throne*: more on this below. Moreover, what I'd add to suggestions about Pound's elliptical idiom in *Thrones* is influenced by awareness that, as he wrote these late Cantos, Pound was captured by the example of the civilization of the Na-khi, a people of southwest China, as documented by the work of Joseph Rock (Wilhelm, *Later Cantos*, 170). In light of shamanic practices Pound's reading on the Na-khi had brought him to consider, I'd venture that what Pound presents here is gathered in a talismanic spirit: these findings are is not meant to be read painstakingly - they are assembled, like herbs for medicine, to ward off forces of cultural amnesia and degeneration in the name of healing and justice.

Pound writes *Thrones* in the late 1950s, and the Coke Cantos likely in 1957-8, during his last years at St. Elizabeths. At this point, the wreckage of the war years and the post-Pisan period have not allowed him to complete the *Cantos* with the "orderly Dantescan rising" (LXXIV/463) for which he had hoped—given the shattering of the dream of Mussolini's Italy on which his initial plan for the poem's ending had relied (Casillo 98): as Casillo suggests, Pound had read Mussolini's Italy as a locus of exemplary government, and even as a counterpart to Dante's paradiso, with which to conclude the *Cantos* - and now he had to change course. Yet through the ways these Cantos elevate the work of Edward Coke, they clearly do suggest a strenuous effort to "write Paradise."

Pound in fact frames his first evocations of Coke in CVII with references to the *Paradiso*, and in particular with a line invoking Dante: "so that Dante's view is quite natural" (CVII/776). This is one of the lines encapsulating Coke's significance as Canto CVII opens; near the end of Canto CVII, Pound reiterates it verbatim for reinforcement (CVII/782). This statement recalls the "so that" with which Canto I ends and which opens Canto 17. *Inter alia*, in the *Cantos*, "so that" suggests the alternative—distinctively Poundian—causality Pound seeks to trace through his long poem: it prompts questions about what follows from what, in the Poundian view, among the events of history. The implication here is that the discovery of Coke is included in this dimension of the Poundian effort to locate important causes and sources amid the welter of the past. Moreover, if the "so that" points back to Canto XVII, which overtly features paradisaic visions (in CVII linked to Dante), this suggests that Canto CVII presents sources of the paradisaic as well.

Much as Dante held up Sigier de Brabant, thirteenth-century French philosopher and theologian, as a source of enlightenment (in Dante's *Paradiso*, Sigier is called a "light"), so Pound presents Coke at the last in the *Cantos* as such a light, meriting a place in his own version of Dante's "heaven of the sun" ("Tenth, paradiso, nel sole," CVII/776). Strengthening this idea is that Pound invokes Dante in the last line of the Coke *Cantos* and thus of *Thrones* (suggesting a kind of "last word"): "You in the dinghy (piccioletta) astern there!" (CVII/794). Again, as the *Cantos* draw to a close, such allusions to Dante signal an effort to discern a locus of the paradisaical, even if such paradise is recognized post-Pisa as broken and scattered ("spezzato," LXXIV/458).

Taken together, all this suggests that the body of law that Coke conjured through his study of the English Charters forms an important, if unexpected, site of the paradisaical—to which Pound, at the eleventh hour of his *Cantos*, wants readers to attend. The Charters, along with Coke's perspective on them, are marked by Pound as a source of "certainty/ mother and nurse of repose" (CVII/776: importantly, this is Coke's phrasing). This is because, in the Poundian reading, *Magna Carta* forms what CVII hails as a "PIVOT" (CVII/779)—i.e. a touchstone for just governance: here is a turn on the familiar Poundian idea of the "unwobbling pivot," drawn from his Confucian work.

Accordingly, as signaled through a Chinese character displayed in CVII, "pen" (CVII/777)—meaning "root" or "source," which in the context of CVII likens the principles of *Magna Carta* to those of Confucius—Pound reads the *Magna Carta* as the "root" of good government ("the root is that charter," 777). And the "certainty" provided by *Magna Carta*, I would suggest, constitutes for Pound at this point a wellspring for what Kuberski calls "a paradise of centralized and stable metaphysical meaning" (qtd. Mitchell 184). As indicated both phrasing in Canto CVII and what Pound chose to reprint in a pamphlet in the Square Dollar Series presenting excerpts from Coke's *Institutes (Coke on Magna Carta)*, Pound was especially caught by an idea in Coke's Proem to the *Second Institutes*. Here Coke suggests that glosses on *Magna Carta* improve upon other sources of commentary through their degree of "certainty":

Upon the text of the civil law, there be so many glosses
and interpretations, and again upon those many
commentaries, and all these written by doctors of equall

degree and authority, and therein so many diversities of opinions, as they do rather increase than resolve doubts, and incertainties, and the professors of that noble science say, that it is like a sea full of waves. The difference then between those glosses and commentaries, and this which we publish, is, that their glosses and commentaries are written by doctors, which be advocates, and so in a manner private interpretations; and our expositions or commentaries upon Magna Carta, and on the statutes, are the resolutions of judges in courts of justice in judicial courses of proceeding ... and therefore being collected together, shall (as we conceive) produce certainty, the mother and nurse of repose and quietnesse, and are not like the waves of the sea (qtd. Mitchell 247).

In Canto CVII, notably, Pound recapitulates this:

that is certainty
 mother and nurse of repose
 (CVII/776)

At this point in the *Cantos*, Pound seeks paradisaic “quietnesse” through such “certainty.” In Canto CIX, he again echoes Coke’s phrasing, reinforcing its importance to these Cantos: “certainty engenders repose” (CIX/792). Strikingly, as if responding to the “waves of the sea” noted in Coke’s Proem, one of the framing gestures Pound will later introduce in Canto CVII suggests that in Pound’s reading, Coke’s ideas are aligned with an important “wave pattern.”

As Cookson notes, in Pound’s view, “Coke, in his fight against King James, is an heroic figure” (217). Again, Coke is known for using his erudition to revive awareness of *Magna Carta* during an early seventeenth-century period of conflict between Parliament and the Stuart kings James I and Charles I, who sought to override *Magna Carta*’s power to curtail the power of kings and uphold the rights of individual subjects. Pound celebrates Coke’s ability (with a “literacy” in “auncient authors,” and thus the ability “to undertand auncient statute” [CVII/778]) to redeploy the Magna Carta publicly at a time when reigning kings were violating the principles basic to English “heritage” (in Canto CVII, “our heritage”). In CVII, Pound also highlights other ways in which Coke waged valiant battle with lines

of thought dominant in his environment—for instance, against those who favoured burning heretics (CVII/781). Yet crucial in Canto CVII, and in this last-ditch section of the Cantos more generally, is that through engagement with Coke’s work, Pound in fact affirms a form of “heroism” markedly different from those celebrated by earlier Cantos.

Especially given its conspicuous reference to the “Templum” of Sigismundo Malatesta, Canto CVII signals a pointed turn back, in a spirit of reconsideration, to the Malatesta Cantos (VIII-XI)—so as to demote a form of heroism formerly privileged in the Poundian imagination. With Canto CVII, Pound talks back to the example of Sigismundo, that towering figure of the early Cantos, investment in whose ventures enabled the *Cantos* to coalesce after Pound’s initial period of uncertainty about the project (Rainey 4)—and work on whom prepared the way for Pound’s admiration of Mussolini. This constitutes a notable turnabout as Pound re-forms his thought and allegiances after the Second World War. Rather than spotlight a larger-than-life heroic figure à la Malatesta, Canto CVII features someone who, although a “fighter” (Pound draws “Milite” from the title page of the *Institutes*), and although known for bucking dominant powers of his day, asserted resistance by way of scholarship. In other words, celebrated through engagement with Coke is not heroic individual able to rise above the crowd and the law, but rather someone whose form of heroism derives from principled embeddedness in his culture’s heritage—in matters of intellect, conscience, and law. In the 1960 interview with Donald Hall, Pound famously noted that “The thrones in the *Cantos* are an attempt to move out from egoism” (Hall 58). Both Pound’s emphasis in Cantos CVII-CIX on English common law, and his selection of Coke’s work specifically as a channel through which to emphasize such laws, suggest this effort to “move out” from the “egoism” associated with the splendidly lawless Renaissance warrior-heroes venerated in Pound’s early pantheon.

In keeping with the new heroism on display in Canto CVII is the featured form of “good government”—again, a “government of laws and not of men.” For Pound to shower readers with clauses from *Magna Carta* at this late point in the *Cantos* is to underscore everything in English legal tradition which holds in check the right of kings. Again, written in the 1950s from St. Elizabeths, the Coke Cantos thus read as responsive to the question of the extent to which the strongman figure, associated with Mussolini, still compels the

Poundian imagination as admirable. Through several moves in conjunction— the emphasis on *Magna Carta*, the striking choice of Edward Coke as mediating commentator, and the pushback gesture vis-a-vis Malatesta—in Canto CVII Pound replies that just government derives not from “one man” (XVII/77) who supersedes the law, but rather from a body of law developed over time and practice, through locally developed principles of fairness and justice, designed to protect the rights of the individual from infringements by royal or other governmental powers.

This is not to say that Pound rejects Mussolini altogether: in fact, Cantos 95, 105, and 108 all offer fleeting cues suggesting Pound’s continuing investment in “Muss.” Yet what Pound finds to admire in his memory of Mussolini is evidently no longer what is elevated in 1935 in *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*— i.e. the ability expeditiously to surmount precedent and law in order to meet immediate needs. That Pound alludes favourably to Mussolini in the Coke Cantos, in fact, suggests that Pound seeks to align Mussolini’s achievements with what he now takes as exemplary: the ability to inform current procedure and forms of government with ancient principles of law.

This effort is strongly suggested by gestures in Canto CVII uniting these exemplars from English legal history with thought linked to Italy. Given the sustained meditation on both *Magna Carta* and on a figure of Elizabethan England dedicated to restoring the Charter to wide public awareness, it is as though, at the end of his career, Pound relents in his disaffection with England (dating from the years following the First World War) and returns with renewed appreciation to England and the concept of the “English national chemical” (*Selected Prose*, 123) advanced through his early work on Anglo-Saxon and “The Seafarer.” At this point, I would suggest, *Magna Carta* represents for Pound this “national chemical”— the essence of Englishness. Canto CVII opens with the statement, “The azalea is grown while we sleep” (CVII/776), harking back to a phrase in Canto XXIII: “And the rose grown while I slept” (XXIII/108). In his work on Coke’s presence in the *Cantos*, David Gordon suggests that the invocation of “the azalea” is “the English azalea.”¹

¹ As Gordon notes, this is “*azalea procumbens ior Indica* which originated in China” (249). Curiously, Joseph Rock’s work on the Na Khi people, which Pound was consulting during the composition of the late Cantos, presented

In view of what follows in Canto CVII, the opening image of the azalea thus reads as figuring the body of English common law as a growing plant (the metaphor of the organic plant for laws will pervade Canto CVII). This suggests that Poundian mind has for a long time been neglectfully “asleep” to this growing plant: for many decades after the 1920 “farewell to London” of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, Pound has been in the throes of disenchantment with the British context, and principally concerned with developments in Italy. Terrell also notes that the earlier reference in Canto XXIII with which this gesture resonates (“while I slept”) might point to the delirium of Niccolo d’Este, crazed by grief, featured in Canto XX: as CVII opens, Pound may indicate a recognition of a kind of delirium through which he himself has passed, from which he is now waking. Yet Canto CVII’s first words also signal a strenuous wish to reconcile Pound’s longstanding investment in things Italian with this now once again accented interest in English customs and practice: The azalea is grown while we sleep In Selinunt’,

in Akragas

Coke. Inst. 2..

(CVII/776)

The canto’s opening words indicate a decided, even strained, effort to unite sites and work associated with Italy with the traditions of England on which Canto CVII focuses. Immediately, there is a reference to “Selinunt,” or Sicily. Given the way they echo of an earlier line from Canto XXIII about the “rose,” Gordon detects in these opening words an allusion to the poetry of Sicilian poet Cuillo d’Alcamo. Directly after this, the Canto continues to focus on Sicily through invocation of “Selinunt” and “Akragas,” or Agrigento, capital of the Sicilian province of the same name. According to Canto CVII, the azalea is thus “grown” in Sicily: this suggests that, in the Poundian reading, the “azalea” of English law has been importantly nurtured by the environment of Sicily, and as the Canto later signals, in particular of King Frederick II of Sicily, whose

Pound with a conspicuously extensive index entry on “rhododenron,” the family to which the azalea belongs: Rock’s fieldnotes attest to the lavish abundance of the rhododenron in southwest China. Perhaps the “azalea” strikes Pound as what enters England of a form of fertility Pound discerns in the civilization of the Na Khi.

cultural contributions Pound admired. (Frederick is later invoked in Canto CVII as “Puer Apulius”—i.e. *puer Apuliae*, the boy of Apulia (CVII/777), a name gained because of his origins as an orphan.) In this Canto, if Pound emphasizes the English Charters as the “root” of just government, this suggests that the “azalea” of English common law, as documented by *Magna Carta* and kindred charters, is in turn “rooted” in Sicily during the Frederick II, whose enlightened legislative abilities and influence as patron of the arts Pound celebrated. Later moments in Canto CVII likewise read *Magna Carta* as informed by the spirit of Sicily - not only by the wisdom of Frederick himself, but also by the ethos of his court, which for Pound importantly promulgated a Hellenic spirit like that of the Provençal troubadours.

This is the climate conjured through repeated references to Ciullo d’Alcamo, whose poem, “Fresca Rosa Aulentissima” Pound quotes directly after emphasizing the vital “heritage” of *Magna Carta* destroyed by villains such as James I (who “bitched our heritage,” CVII/777). Early in his career, Pound featured this poem in *The Spirit of Romance* through D.G. Rossetti’s translation. CVII’s allusions to the poem imply that the azalea of English common law is nourished into summertime fertility (as quoted from d’Alcamo’s poem, “ver l’estate”) by what the “rose” of d’Alcamo represents for Pound—a cultural flowering sustained by the Hellenic culture fostered by Frederick’s reign. (Donald Davie notes that d’Alcamo’s poem was actually composed at least twenty years before Frederick II assumed the throne [103], but here Pound insists on placing d’Alcamo and Frederick together, as he does in Cantos XCVIII and CIII: Pound wants to unite the “flowering” he associates with d’Alcamo’s early poetry with the cultural “flowering” he links with Frederick II.) Pound is forever in search of vortices—vital cultural centers that transmit “the light from Eleusis”: Frederick’s realm is asserted as such. As Davie notes, in *The Spirit of Romance*, Pound invokes d’Alcamo to suggest that the early Italian poetry continuing what the troubadours had begun sprang first from Sicily rather than Tuscany: in the Poundian imagination, Sicily thus represents an important site of origin.

Davie reads these strands of Canto CVII with a skeptical eye: although he grants that Coke relies on Bracton, a rough contemporary of Frederick II, he maintains that Pound forces these connections (104), drawing on conspicuously “frail” historical links among Frederick II of Sicily, Coke, and English monarchs at the

time of *Magna Carta*'s first dissemination. If so, again, this suggests the strength of Pound's urgent wish to create a convergence between the English and Italian. Pound's insistent references to d'Alcamo and Frederick mark an effort to preserve, perhaps salvage, something of his decades-long investment in Italy, chiefly through Mussolini, which this Canto suggests he will reevaluate, but not abandon altogether. If Pound late in the Cantos return to the heritage of England, he will ensure that this heritage, as he reads it, depends upon Italian sources.

Yet notably, Pound emphasizes a geographical and cultural area associated with Italy that has not hitherto been much in his purview: Sicily, not Romagna, the latter of which has dominated his imagination since Malatesta, and that has remained at the forefront through the years of allegiance to Mussolini. As suggested by the distribution of lines on page 778, the sites featured here are markedly not those on the east coast of Italy that nourished Pound's ardor in the 1920s for Malatesta and for Mussolini in the 1930s. This displacement signals a change of mind and heart. Here, Pound even explicitly pushes away from Romagna to Sicily ("Segesta"):

they had not Magna Charta
in ver l'estate, Queen of Akragas
resistent,
Templum aedificavit
Segesta
(CVII/778)

Thus the attention of this Canto, after circling again through the culture which "had" "Magna Charta" (not France but England) and the Sicilian roots thereof, suddenly invokes a phrase used in the Malatesta Cantos to elevate the cultural achievement of Malatesta ("He, Sigismundo, *templum aedificavit*" [VIII/32]), who built his Tempio in Rimini in Romagna. This phrase recurs subsequently in the *Cantos* just before CVII, appearing with variations in Cantos LXXXIX (616), XC and CIII, as though its attendant concept has again surfaced in Pound's imagination. Through its reprise in CVII, and exact repetition of the Latin phrase from Canto VIII, Pound revisits and reevaluates what the "Templum"—or "Tempio Malatestiano"—represents in his imagination: after the cataclysm of the war, Mussolini's demise, and the shattering of Pound's former life and thought, what now qualifies as such a cultural apex?

What deserves such respect has shifted: now it is “Magna Charta” that is affirmed as such a “Templum.” This rhymes with the way Pound has been inclined to conceptualize major written works as “monuments”: he famously reads the Jefferson-Adams letters, for instance, as a “shrine and a monument,” and as Lawrence Rainey notes, even imagines his own *Cantos* as aspiring to the status of such a “Tempio.”

What else does Pound feature through Coke and his landmark work? As David Ten Eyck notes, Pound also clearly signals a wish to reaffirm the principles underwriting the American Constitution and the legal work of America’s founding figures—especially John Adams, whose esteem for Coke Pound accents. Pound’s notebooks in fact suggest that at some points he intended to close the *Cantos* with Adams: as Ten Eyck puts this, Pound “considered including a return to John Adams and revolutionary America as part of the conclusion to *Thrones*, drafting an extended passage on these subjects in his manuscript notebook for the section, which was ultimately discarded” (138). Yet if he did not end up doing so overtly, Pound *does* actually return to Adams at the last in the *Cantos*—by, through engagements with Coke, following where Adams leads. In Canto LXIII, Adams recalls Jeremiah Gridley urging him: “you must conquer the INSTITUTES” (LXIII/352). In the Coke *Cantos*, Pound takes up this challenge—at least to address seriously, if not “conquer,” the *Institutes*—and by doing so in the last sustained gesture of his *Cantos*, grants this move unusual weight. By way of Coke, at the last Pound again enshrines Adams’ judgment, as well as the founding values of the United States, the English legal traditions from which these derive, and how all these indicate the kind of good government that endures.

This leads to another point about what Pound does with material relating to Coke that he engages—on the one hand, Bowen’s *The Lion and the Throne*, and on the other hand, Coke’s *Second Institutes*. During his work with the Adams *Cantos*, as Ten Eyck notes, Pound draws upon the documents he consults—such as the *Works of John Adams*—as “monuments” in their own right, each functioning as “a still workable dynamo” (*SP* 147). As Ten Eyck observes, Pound increasingly turns to documents of this kind with deference to the way they gather, and archive, crucial bodies of cultural wisdom (56). In fact, rather than emphasize only the lines of thought informing them, Pound more and more defers to the very shape and arrangement of such documents. When engaging the

source documents for *Thrones*, for instance, he often follows the order of elements in the way he develops the *Cantos*: as Gordon notes, “As in the laws of the *Sacred Edict* [of China, which informs *Cantos* XCVII and XCVIII of *Thrones*], the sequence of the charters in Coke’s *Second Institutes* seems to ... furnish the sequence that Pound will use for these three *Cantos*” (Gordon 248). Although Gordon discerns nothing notable in this procedure, this increasingly frequent way of handling source material reads as curious from Pound, whose bent for bold rearrangement of source material forms a signature of the early *Cantos*. This habit indicates that, so as to signal the importance of certain *documents* recovered from the historical library—not just the information they contain—Pound wishes to convey something of their material form through ways in which he excerpts from them. It may also signal that, feeling intellectually and politically marooned at this point in his career, Pound gives over the task of arrangement to other editorial minds he respects.

Accordingly, Pound’s preservation of the material document here suggests esteem not only for the “dynamo” of Coke’s *Institutes*, but also, importantly, for the “mind” creating such a compendium (again, Coke is lauded as “the clearest mind ever in England,” CVII/778). Again, as the Proem to the *Second Institutes* suggests, Coke’s commentary will engender “certainty” as other commentary has not because, rather than asserting itself as a “private interpretation,” it is impersonal—the fruit of many judges’ readings of *Magna Carta* over time. And with this point, the Coke *Cantos* recapitulate (though with a change) Pound’s longstanding elevation of the commentator-amalgamator as hero. As early as 1913, Pound is noting of “[t]he so-called major poets,”

it has been given them to heap together and arrange and harmonize the results of many men’s labour. This very faculty of amalgamation is part of their genius and it is, in a way, a sort of modesty, a sort of unselfishness.. The men from whom Dante borrowed are remembered as much for the fact that he did borrow [from them] as for their own compositions. At the same time he gave of his own, and no mere compiler and classifier of other men’s discoveries is given the name of ‘major poet’ for more than a season. (“The Serious Artist,” *Literary Essays* 48-49)

In this comment, Dante is recognized as one of the “amalgamators” of genius. Pound, I’d suggest, elevates Coke as a comparable “amalgamator” of admirable “unselfishness”—and, through preservation of Coke’s sequence, points to what Coke “gives” of his “own.” The important difference here from Pound’s early work (which emphasizes artistic achievement) is the accent on politics—the fact that Coke compiled information on *Magna Carta*, and staged its comeback, in response to political crisis: at this late juncture, this is the kind of amalgamation-cum-political intervention that Pound especially values.

If Canto CVII provides Pound with opportunity to reevaluate from a changed perspective, and turn from, his early investment in Malatesta and warrior-heroes; as well as again foreground the principles informing the Adams Cantos, it also returns Pound to both his early fascination with Plantaganet England and early ardor for the troubadours. In turn, his re-engagement with both indicates reassessment of the Aestheticism of his early years, which he had developed through reckoning with the troubadours and their cultural climate. If Henry II and Eleanor are invoked in Canto 6 toward understanding the troubadours’ cultural surround, the mature Pound now understands this environment as the seedbed for principles of just governance as well.

In general, these late Cantos represent what Nicholls reads as “consistently shifting attention from the aesthetic to the legal and the economic” (238): certainly, Cantos like XCVII in *Thrones* emphasize money, and through Coke, these late Cantos focus intently on matters of law. Yet several ways in which Pound frames his material in CVII also suggest a desire to connect up his early Aestheticist insights about vital forms of beauty with what the work of Coke has helped him to discover. In fact, CVII signals a wish to recognize a new major source of “beauty.”

Canto CVII suggests this by circling back to a moment invoked very early in the Cantos, a memory from Pound’s 1919 walking tour of medieval Provence—which features a “wave pattern” sighted at Excideuil. In Canto XXIX, Pound captures with this phrase (“wave pattern”) a moment at which both he and T.S. Eliot were transported into a sublime mood (XXIX/145). In Canto CVII, he prefaces the invocation of the “wave pattern” with the phrase “white eglantine”: in part, this points to sweetbriar he saw in France, but it also recalls what Ford Madox Ford famously ridiculed in some of Pound’s early, mannered, pre-Raphaelite work (Kenner 80), which featured lines

like “sprays of eglantine above clear waters” (“Canzon,” *CEP*, 135). Accordingly, especially as it is associated with a site linked to the troubadours, the phrase signals Pound’s early Aestheticism.

In Canto CVII, significantly, this “wave pattern” then appears directly after this canto’s major statement about Coke: “Coke: the clearest mind ever in England”:

Coke: the clearest mind ever in
England vitex, white eglantine
as tenthрил thru grill-work
wave pattern at Excideuil
(CVII/778)

Here, Pound’s juxtapositions implicitly present as a source of beauty both the stabilizing order that Pound associates with English common law and Coke’s clear-minded commentary thereon: i.e. this is beauty as compelling as that which Pound once associated with the “wave pattern at Excideuil.” Thus Canto CVII offers a riposte to Coke’s remark that his commentary provides “certainty” that it is “*not* like the waves of the sea.” In Pound’s late view, such commentary, together with the body of law it registers, *is* indeed akin to the “wave pattern at Excideuil”—for Pound, a figure for enduring beauty born of “pattern,” in turn formed by fundamental natural principles of vitality and growth.

By pointing back to what he once felt as keenly beautiful, Pound thus suggests continued allegiance to forms of beauty, but a crucial shift in his sense of where such powerful beauty resides. His move is familiar in some respects—recalling, for instance, the way Canto XLV thinks about usury: it “rusteth the chisel” (XLV/230). If what Pound takes to be corrupt cultural practices lead to the destruction of a civilization’s art, craft and forms of beauty, then conversely, source-texts like *Magna Carta* and the ideas for which they stand can create conditions of possibility for such beauty. Yet here, the known gesture differs somewhat. In CVII, Pound conspicuously figures such sources of good government through a language of natural increase: the implication is that these sources of good government not only constitute *conditions* giving rise to such natural, fecund beauty, but rather are themselves to be read as sources of beauty. Here, the “azalea” and the “rose” of Cuilio d’Alcamo, planted in our imaginations as the Canto opens, are added to by the Poundian language of “root”: prompted by the

tropes, we imagine a cultural flourishing rooted in these stabilizing Charters and traditions of law, sources of just government; we are also encouraged to imagine the Great Charter itself and the body of common law it documents as an “azalea,” with branches and “tenthрил[s]”—growing and ramifying through the ages.

In fact, in this Canto, Edward Coke himself is associated with such natural increase. On page 780, we encounter

Box hedge, the garden in form
 heliotrope, kalikanthus, basilicum
 (CVII/780)

This hails from a description of the house and gardens in Norwich where Coke attended grammar school: Pound traces an alignment between Coke and the environment of his upbringing. Coke springs from such sources of such flowering and fertility; and he provides such though his own work. Directly after this, the Canto moves to

Larks almost out of season had been
 a full field full at Allegre as 40 rising
 together
 the short tails
 (CVII/780)

Here Pound again reprises a memory from the 1919 walking tour of Provence, but here he also alludes to Bernart de Ventadorn’s poem about lark song, favoured in the early Poundian canon. This suggests that Coke transmits not only of spirit of fertility and beauty, but specifically the “spirit of romance” the early Pound so valued in Provençal verse. The image of larks rising even suggests soaring flight achieved—that is, through the work of Coke. Thus if there is a significant shift in *Thrones* from the aesthetic to the legal, Canto CVII’s strong suggestion is that true beauty resides in the legal truths that form “certainty/ mother and nurse of repose.” This is perhaps Pound’s version of a Keatsian moment of epiphany— that “Beauty is truth, truth beauty.”

All this reads as Pound’s strong answer to what he has perceived as the “wreckage of Europe” (LXXVI/478) after the Second World War—a period during which his hopes for cultural renewal effected through Mussolini’s Italy have been destroyed. His response features the “azalea” of English common law, figured as

still growing and evolving. The word “sleep” closing the first line of CVII also perhaps suggests that such a bloom is capable of reawakening after a long wasteland’s winter, “feeding a little life with dried tubers.” The azalea also recalls and replies to the question from Canto LXXIX: “will the scrub-oak burst into flower?” (LXXIX/510): the suggestion is that it will, by way of Coke on English law.

Canto CVII’s winding path suggests a hard-won arrival at such a realization through an odyssey of gradual discovery. Again, the Canto conspicuously returns to, and turns about on, several of Pound’s early convictions. Revisiting these from a changed perspective, Pound finds a site of natural growth and increase, vital in both senses, in Coke’s *Institutes*, which in turn compiles and renews—in some ways transplants—*Magna Carta*, the source of good governance and thus cultural fertility. If in the Poundian imagination post-Pisa the “city” is to be “rebuilt” (LXXIV/450), perhaps it can be so through the “Templum” or “monument” of *Magna Carta* and the variety of “mind,” like Coke’s (a “clearer” mind than Pound feels his own, at this point, to be) that can intervene through learned knowledge of cultural “heritage” with material responsive to present crisis.

At this late moment of the *Cantos*, the way Pound frames his glinting shards of the *Institutes*, his broken bundle of mirrors, suggests that Coke’s *magnum opus* now exemplifies the kind of cultural work for which Pound himself has striven—what he wishes the *Cantos* to be. If, as a “man on whom the sun as gone down,” he is radically uncertain that this is what the *Cantos* can ultimately achieve, through Coke he presents an imago gesturing toward the form of paradise that, at this late juncture, matters most. Tellingly, in the garden growing at Coke’s grammar school were “heliotrope, basilicanthus, basilicum” (CVII/780): in the Poundian imagination, “basilicum,” redolent of the Pisan *Cantos* (LXXIV/455; LXXXII/546), points to paradise.

WORKS CITED

- Bowen, Catherine Drinker. *The Lion and the Throne: The Life and Times of Sir Edward Coke*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1956. Print.
- Casillo, Robert. "Fascists of the Final Hour: Pound's Italian Cantos." *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture*. Richard J. Golsan, ed. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992. 98-121. Print.
- Coke, Edward. *The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England*. London: E. and R. Brooke, 1797. Eighteenth-century Collections Online. Range 12017.
- Cookson, William. *A Guide to The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. New York: Anvil Press Poetry, 1985. Print.
- Davie, Donald. "Sicily in the Cantos." *Paideuma* 6.1(Spring 1977): 101-107. Print.
- Gordon, David. "Edward Coke: The Azalea is Grown." *Paideuma* 4. 2& 3 (Fall-Winter 1975): 223-299. Print.
- Hall, Donald. "Ezra Pound." *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*. 2nd Series. Ed. Malcolm Cowley. New York: Viking, 1963. 35-59. Print.
- Kenner, Hugh. *The Pound Era*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971. Print.
- Mitchell, Amy. "Form and Transcendence: Touching the Limits of Poetry in Ezra Pound's *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones*, and Basil Bunting's *Briggflatts*." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 2008. Print.
- Nicholls, Peter. "2 doits to a boodle': reckoning with *Thrones*." *Textual Practice* 18.2 (2004): 233-249. Print.
- Pound, Ezra. *The Cantos*. New York: New Directions, 1996. Print.
- . *Literary Essays*. (LE) Ed. T.S. Eliot. Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1954. Print.
- . *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*. (SP) Ed. William Cookson. New York: New Directions, 1973. Print.
- Rainey, Lawrence. *Ezra Pound and the Monument of Culture: Culture, Text, History and the Malatesta Cantos*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1991. Print.
- Rock, Joseph F. *The Ancient Na-Khi Kingdom of Southwest China*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947. Print.
- Stock, Noel. *The Life of Ezra Pound*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1970. Print.

- Ten Eyck, David. *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*. London: Bloomsbury, 2012. Print.
- Vincent, Nicholas. *Magna Carta*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.
- Wilhelm, James J. *Ezra Pound: The Tragic Years, 1925-1972*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994. Print.
- . *The Later Cantos of Ezra Pound*. New York: Walker, 1977. Print.
- Xie, Ming. *Ezra Pound and the Appropriation of Chinese Poetry: Cathay, Translation, and Imagism*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1999. Print.