

## THREE WAYS OF LOOKING AT A CANTO: NAVIGATING CANTO CVIII

Kristin Grogan

COMMINUIT

there is frost on the rock's face  
nurse of industry (25 Edward III)

BRUM

(CVIII/784)

Thus begins Canto CVIII, the penultimate installment of *Thrones*. Pound opens the canto with a phrase from the Roman author Ennius. But the line stops short, and Ennius is momentarily forgotten, only to be picked up three lines later. The split term, “COMMINUIT / ... BRUM” flanks two divergent lines. We know that the emphatically capitalized Latin words make up a single unit because their typography and their language bind them together. The words are extracted from Ennius’ line “*saxo cere comminuit brum*”, which means ‘he broke apart his head with a rock’: *comminuit*, from *comminuo*, means to divide into small parts, to break, crumble, crush, or split. The first of the interposing lines, “there is frost on the rock’s face”, brings us back to the title of *Section: Rock-Drill* and to the idea of dividing elements. The second, “nurse of industry (25 Edward III)” feels like a departure from the previous line, and launches us into the major thematic concern of the canto: English legal history. While the declaration of the second line is a full semantic unit, the third line is seemingly incomplete. If, in the second line, we are asked to puzzle over what significance the frost on a rock’s face might hold, in the third, we are left wondering about what is being named as the “nurse of industry”, and impelled to chase up the reference “25 Edward III.” Each line prompts us to do different work, and the relation between them is not immediately clear. Then suddenly we return once more to Ennius, for with “BRUM” Pound closes the bracket that he opened at the beginning of the canto.

Carroll F. Terrell's gloss of the canto's opening tells us that a passage in the first book of *The Aeneid* ("circum dea fudit", meaning "the goddess closely embraced") is glossed in Servius' commentary as an example of the ancient figure tmesis.<sup>1</sup> Tmesis (from Greek *temnein*, to cut) involves separating the parts of a compound word, and interposing a new term within the split word. In the quote from *The Aeneid*, the word *circumfudit*, from *circumfundere*, to surround, is divided so that its component parts envelop the noun *dea*, goddess; in Ennius' phrase, the word *cerebrum*, head, is split. In Canto CVIII, Pound omits the first half of Ennius' lines, *saxo cere*, and leaves us only with *comminuit* and with the suffix *brum*. *Brum*, no longer connected to *cere*, seems to become the object of *comminuit*, so that while the verb *comminuit* is still in use in the sequence, *brum* is mentioned only as a fragment; only a portion of the brain that is shattered in *saxo cere comminuit brum* is present here. The already divided head has been split into an even smaller piece, as Canto CVIII breaks Ennius' tmesis once again, doubly shattering the line. Terrell's gloss provides an explanation of a rhetorical figure, a location where Pound first encountered that figure, and a brief anecdotal account of why the lines were important to other poets.<sup>2</sup> But we will do well to think about why Pound used this figure so emphatically in these opening lines and what it might mean for the rest of the canto. It is easy to see how a figure that carves up and reformulates words into new forms might resonate with Pound's poetics in *Thrones*. To Massimo Bacigalupo, *The Cantos'* final volume is a space in which "the manic passion for the word celebrates its final, luxuriant, and microscopic feast."<sup>3</sup> "Microscopic" is certainly an apt word: as in the opening lines, which splinter an already

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, Terrell's gloss of the canto's opening is muddy, and could easily be misinterpreted as suggesting that the phrase comes originally from *The Aeneid*. He glosses "COMMINUIT" as "A phrase from Bk I, 412, of *The Aeneid*, which is glossed thus..." Only later in the gloss does Terrell mention Ennius at all, telling us that Pound admired Ennius as a forerunner of e e cummings. *Saxo cere comminuit brum* is a well-known line, and Pound could have encountered it in any number of places. C.F. Terrell, *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (Orono, Maine, 1984), p. 703.

<sup>2</sup> Terrell, *Companion*, p. 704. James Laughlin would go on to reference the canto by entitling a poem from the 1950s 'Saxo Cere', whose opening lines read 'Comminuit brum a rainy day'.

<sup>3</sup> M.S. Bacigalupo, *The Forméd Trace: The Later Poetry of Ezra Pound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 335.

broken line, matter in *Thrones* is reduced into smaller and smaller pieces, resembling a feast of words for their own sake. Often, the poem's units are cleaved apart and joined together with other pieces in surprising ways—or, indeed, not joined at all, but placed alongside one another with the gaps between them left unbridged.

Canto CVIII is the second part of the triptych that ends *Thrones*, comprised of three cantos that deal predominantly with English legal history. Bacigalupo points out that the penultimate canto is “the most reified and disintegrated” of the three, and argues that it is “little but a set of notes.”<sup>4</sup> The canto's historical material is taken mostly from just two sources: the English jurist Edward Coke's series of legal treatises, *The Second Part of the Institutes of the Lawes of England*, one of the foundational texts of common law, and Catherine Drinker Bowen's biography of Coke, *The Lion and the Throne* (1957). Yet to think of Canto CVIII as a cohesive ‘English history’ canto is misleading. For Canto CVIII contains a range of other concerns, and one way of navigating our way through this ‘disintegrated’ late canto might be to follow the terms, ideas, and themes, which, like Pound's opening lines from Ennius, are broken open, interrupted by other ideas, and then picked up again. The beginnings of three distinct concerns can already be identified within the poem's opening lines. For one thing, in Pound's self-conscious use of tmesis in the canto's introduction, he draws attention to the poem's own poetic craft and formal strategies, and he will continue do so in various ways throughout the canto. At the same time, Canto CVIII contains a thinly veiled fascist agenda, and we can feel its first stirrings in the statute of Edward III, which is echoed in the fifth line (“‘alla’ at Verona”), a reference to Mussolini's theory of property. The Duce continues to occupy an important position in this late canto, and his presence is there from the very beginning. Finally, the canto is concerned with fertility and the feminine, and these are often interwoven with its economics. This is first suggested by the “nurse” of the third line and is returned to soon after in the lyrical lines detailing “the kindness / infinite / of her hands” (CVIII/784). This commentary thus traces three possible paths through the canto, as Pound breaks apart his materials and leaves his reader to join the dots.

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<sup>4</sup> Bacigalupo, *The Forméd Trace*, p. 452.

## I.

In Ennius's "*saxo cere comminuit brum*", the form and content mirror one another: as the line is shattered, so too is *cerebrum*, the head. Canto CVIII's second line, "there is frost on the rock's face", introduces a new form of iconicity. The precise imagery of the line is matched with its striking formal concision, as Pound imposes a complete, distinct image between his fragments from Ennius. Is this rock the same as that of *Section: Rock-Drill*—Epstein's rock, the rock of Wyndham Lewis's review of Pound's letters?<sup>5</sup> Here Pound has exchanged his drill for frost, trading the mechanical for the natural. Do they serve the same purpose—does the frost weather the rock, splitting it as the drill does? In a letter, Hugh Kenner wrote that Pound likened the tmesis of the opening lines to the frost cracking the rock.<sup>6</sup> Pound seems to be making another relation between a rhetorical figure and an image, between the frost that splits the rock and the figure tmesis, but whereas in Ennius the rock is the tool that splits open the skull and the word *cerebrum*, in Pound's lines the rock itself is divided. If we accept that the frost on the rock is an imagistic representation of one of Pound's formal strategies, then the first path we can trace through Canto CVIII is its understanding of its own aesthetic techniques and, extending on this, its awareness of the poet's task.

The image of the frost is contained, not pursued beyond the boundaries of the line. The canto quickly abandons that imagery and takes up its central project. With the next line, "nurse of industry" (from a speech given by the seventeenth-century diplomat and politician Dudley Digges in a House of Commons debate in 1628) and the parenthetical reference "25 Edward III" (a statute concerning property and loans, quoted by Coke in the same Commons session) Pound returns us to English history.<sup>7</sup> But even

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<sup>5</sup> Wyndham Lewis entitled his review of D.D. Paige's *Letters of Ezra Pound* (1951) 'Rock Drill', taking his title from Jacob Epstein's Vorticist masterpiece *Rock Drill* (1913-1915). See *Pound/Lewis*, ed. T. Materer (New York: New Directions, 1985), xi.

<sup>6</sup> Terrell tells us: "HK [letter, 14 Oct. 1981] says of splitting the word: 'EP likens this to the frost splitting the rock itself.'" *Companion*, p. 703.

<sup>7</sup> Digges' (1583-1639) speech was a response to resistance to forced loans. Digges proclaimed: "The subject hath a true property in his goods and possessions; which doth preserve as sacred *Meum* and *Teum*, the nurse of industry, the Mother of Courage; and without which there can be no justice, of which *Meum* and *Tuum* is the proper object": *Biographia Britannica, or, the*

this central project is soon paused. Seven lines down, in the centre of the page, two Chinese characters and their transliteration command our attention and disrupt the poem’s English lines, marking a break with what has come and what will follow:

本

pen yeh

業

(CVIII/784)

The noun *pen* 本 means a root, stem, foundation, or source, while *yeh* 業 refers to an occupation or profession; together, the words signify a root enterprise, or a basic task. At first glance the ideogram would seem to be antithetical to the tmesis of the opening lines and to the frost that splits the rock. Whereas tmesis is a technique of cutting, Pound’s attraction to the ideogram was largely to do with its drawing together of particulars. It is as if, after a passage in which words and ideas are divided and destabilized, the poem needs to return to an unshakable, stable unit, and to do so paradoxically by departing from the English line. *Pen yeh* is a compound term, and in earlier cantos its component parts had been included as single units. In Canto CVII, Pound includes *pen* 本 on its own, without the accompanying *yeh* 業 and tells us in the next line that “the root is that charter” (CVII/777), referring to that great foundational document of the rule of law, Magna Carta. Canto CVIII rehabilitates the full term, *pen yeh*: not just the root, but the root task. *Pen yeh* appears first in Canto XCVIII and is glossed in Greek by Pound as τέχνη, meaning craftsmanship, skill, or art. In Canto XCIX Pound would describe *pen yeh* as “a developed skill from persistence” (XCIX/718), and would use the term to think of one’s proper calling or true skill. Pound conceives of *pen yeh* in Canto XCIX as something that must be acquired, describing a need to “Build pen yeh / the family profession / It will bring luck out of the air.” (XCIX/717) *Pen yeh* must be attained over time, and as a “family

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*lives of the most eminent persons who have flourished in Great Britain and Ireland, from the earliest ages, down to the present time*, vol. 3, 1747, accessed online at < <https://archive.org/details/biographiabritan03adam> >

profession” it might be developed over generations. Already in the 1930s Pound was aware that certain skills must be cultivated. He wrote to Louis Zukofsky that “La scul[p]ture n’est pas pour les jeunes hommes. Simply there is so much that can come ONLY with time. So much that only fits the particular and unforeseen case. Skill that is not reducible to precept.”<sup>8</sup> This skill is not only to write poetry, but also to build up a certain authority to do so, and with specific ends in mind. In Canto CVII Pound had designated himself a restorer of debased curricula, and quotes Coke’s call for “a literacy in these auncient authors / to understand auncient statute” (CVII/778). After a lifetime of practicing this craft Pound has gained the authority to speak on law, economics, and history.<sup>9</sup> If Magna Carta is the foundation, then the task of Canto CVIII will be to create from this root, to make something from the long neglected foundational text.

*Pen yeh*, a seemingly stable and sacred term, is also an intrusion: just as Canto CVIII makes a start at its exploration of English legal history, it is interrupted by the ideogram, by a reminder of its task. This task is not one that can be achieved easily or sustained cohesively. Indeed, from the moment the first ancient statute is mentioned (25 Edward III) it is soon interrupted by the fragment “BRUM”. Pound flits between the pages of Coke’s *Institutes*, moving, for example, from Coke’s outline of the monarch’s lack of power to send subjects to Ireland without their consent (“nor against his will into Ireland”), through tariffs imposed on wool and cloth (“not cloth from out of the Realm”), to a list of English rivers suffering from overfishing (“Owse, Wherfe, Nid, Derwent, / Swale, yore & Tine”), shifting from one statute to the next from line to line (CVIII/784). Each line is a drastically abbreviated version of a complex historical issue, and from line to line there is little continuity between the issues besides stemming from the same source text. Even as Pound insists upon the importance of the foundational texts, he also does violence to them, breaking them apart, and changing their form into smaller,

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<sup>8</sup> E. Pound, letter to Louis Zukofsky, 25 December 1930, *Pound/Zukofsky: Selected Letters of Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky*, ed. B. Ahearn (New York: New Directions, 1987), p. 85.

<sup>9</sup> See P. Makin, ‘Ideogram, “Right Naming”, and the Authoritarian Streak’, in *Ezra Pound and China*, ed. Z. Qian (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 2003, p. 134.

sharper pieces. To read the late cantos is always to encounter, and be forced to navigate, those forms of textual violence.

Still the canto insists that these statutes be read and remembered, that these sacred texts not be forgotten. Another such text is the Charter of Confirmation, adopted in the 25<sup>th</sup> year of Edward I's reign in 1297, which reissued and reconfirmed Magna Carta. The Charter was to be published throughout the Kingdom and read aloud to the people, "read per an, deux foits / twice a year" (CVIII/786). This idea of a stable, regular encounter with a foundational text is pursued again on the next page:

Articul: a son people  
CESTASCAVOIR

& that they be read 4 times the year

Sheng Yu

Michael, Xmas, Easter, Saint John

(CVIII/787)

"CETASCAVOIR", ("that is to say"), is the opening of the first chapter of the Charter of Confirmation of Edward I, which was directed "a son people," a phrase which binds the king together with his subjects, linking the monarch with the masses. The document must be read four times a year, at the four different religious festivals listed. The document itself thus amounts to a quasi-religious text; its repetition is determined by, and also participates in, the yearly rituals of the four festivals. Here, Pound makes a direct comparison between the Charter and another "root text", the *Sheng Yu* or *Sacred Edict*. Throughout *Thrones* and especially in Cantos XCVIII and XCIX, Pound draws upon *The Sacred Edict* (*Sheng Yu* 聖諭), the list of sixteen maxims compiled by the Kangxi Emperor in 1670. In order to popularize Confucian principles among average citizens, it was dictated that the maxims be posted publicly in every town and that the inhabitants of each village in the Empire gather to hear it read aloud twice every month. Here, the canto's emphasis on repetition—twice a year, four times a year—marks the ritual temporality of the year, the ideally stable repeated distribution of a document.

But this emphasis on the stable distribution of the root texts and their ritual repetition is at odds with the canto's own fractures, its inability to pursue any one Charter at great length, and its non-linear arrangement of historical events. Canto CVIII constructs its

own timeline of textual production and distribution. Recorded in the right margins of the canto are the dates of the success of Edward Coke's Petition of Right (1628); the year in which the Edict of Expulsion was passed by Edward I (1290); the dates of Edward's accession to the throne and of the adoption of his Confirmation Charter twenty-five years thereafter (1272, 1297); as well dates that span years and record the period of time in which the Charters were worked on and perfected (1216-72; 1272-1407); not to mention the seven years in which Coke's work was blocked from distribution by King Charles I (1634–1641). We are left to navigate atomized moments of history arranged in a fractured chronology, as if our own experience of the fractured late canto can never match the idealized repetition of these root texts.

Still the poet's *pen yeh* is not forgotten. It resurfaces much later in the canto. A passage towards its end reminds us of the canto's central aim, and gestures towards both the possibility of a conclusion and to a project still to come:

Coke, Iong Ching  
    responsabili  
par cretance del ewe which is  
    french for floodwater.  
Who for bridges  
    reparando

(CVIII/790)

Coke is matched with the Yongzheng Emperor, (Iong Ching in Pound's spelling) the son of the Kangxi Emperor who published commentaries on his father's maxims, *The Sacred Edict*. The Yongzheng Emperor had been invoked earlier in *Thrones* as a Confucian hero, enlightened, like Pythagoras and Dante, by "the silk cords of the sunlight" (XCVIII/713).<sup>10</sup> Here the contributor and redistributor of the *Sheng Yu* is matched with the author of the *Institutes*, perhaps joined by their shared sense of "responsabili", responsibility. "Responsabili" also belongs to the next line. This responsibility is for "cretance del ewe", which Pound glosses as "french for floodwater." This line comes from the section entitled 'Of Bridges' in Coke's *Institutes* that details the delay in repairing

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<sup>10</sup> See F. Lan, *Ezra Pound and Confucianism: Remaking Humanism in the Face of Modernity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 168.

decayed bridges due to “encrease of waters.”<sup>11</sup> Taking responsibility for the rising floodwaters involves “reparando”, repairing the bridges. If we started the canto with divisions, with twice fractured skulls and rocks weathered by frost, by the end we arrive at bridges. The poem returns to a task or responsibility, but one that has been delayed, due to ever-rising waters, put off by a threatening accumulation of material. As the poem itself accumulates, amassing ever-greater amounts of material and threatening to swell beyond control, responsibility must be taken, a bridge must be built, and the task must be completed. These late lines are thus also a new beginning, a new configuration of the poet’s assignment. Pound would repeat the lines “who for bridges / reparando” at the end of Canto CIX, on the last page of *Thrones*. But the volume ends in an unstable Dantescan boat (a mere dinghy!) rather than on a sturdy bridge, adrift on a sea of its own fragments.

With its ending imminent, the poem returns to its root task, seeking to reevaluate its role and to confirm its acquired authority—even if this authority can only exist in fragments, and even if this task will never be completed. Yet is this altogether surprising? After all, on the first page of the canto we were told that the confirmation of Edward Coke’s Petition of Right, which reconfirmed Magna Carta and the necessity of *habeas corpus*, took place only at the very end of the day, “in June and toward twilight” (CVIII/784). It is as if the poem is eager to remind us that its task is not yet completed, that great things can occur at the last minute, and that it too will continue to offer us valuable verses until the very end.

## II.

Within the canto’s opening lines we encounter the first stirrings of another concern: the remaining traces of a fascist agenda that will resurface at various moments in Canto CVIII. The canto’s third line refers to Edward III’s statute concerning property and loans, which is rhymed with the fifth line, “alla at Verona”, a whittled-down excerpt from the *Programma di Verona* of Benito Mussolini. On September 23, 1943, Mussolini proclaimed the establishment of the Republic of Salò. Pound borrows lines from this program, and one line in particular reoccurs repeatedly throughout *The Cantos*. We had

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<sup>11</sup> E. Coke, ‘Of Bridges’, 701. *The Second Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England*, E. and R. Brooke, 1797, accessed online at <<https://archive.org/details/secondpartinsti01cokegoog>>.

encountered Mussolini's *Programma* earlier on in *The Pisan Cantos*, in Canto LXXVIII:

“alla terra abbandonata”  
followed him Metastasio;  
“alla” non “della” in il Programma di Verona  
the old hand as stylist still holding its cunning  
and the water flowing away from that side of the lake  
is silent as never at Sirmio  
under the arches  
Foresteria, Salò, Gardone  
to dream the Republic.

(LXXVIII/498)

The first line translates to “to the abandoned earth.” Pound emphatically repeats the word “alla” two lines down, reminding us that Mussolini used “alla” (to) not “della” (of). Here, Mussolini is considering a right *to* property not a right *of* property, emphasizing use, rather than ownership. This focus on the word stresses Pound's belief in the extraordinary precision with which Mussolini used language. Pound finds in The Duce a model of clarity and precision, “the old hand as stylist still holding its cunning.” The “old hand” of Canto LXXVIII has been subtracted in Canto CVIII, but its presence can still be felt in the canto's meditation on its own craft. Before the passage can arrive at the dream of the Salò Republic, it must move through the paradisaic imagery of the silent waters of Lake Garda. If the paradise of the Republic is to be built at all, it must be built by the hands of the writer, by the stylist who uses language with the greatest possible care, right down to the level of the preposition.

References to the *Programma* also appear in Canto LXXXVI, already in a much more reduced version: ““Alla non della”, in the Verona statement” (LXXXVI/584), immediately following the ideogram *hsin*, 信 “trust.” The ideogram is preceded by a passage describing how England was “sold down the river” by Benjamin Disraeli (to whom we will soon return) and ends by asking “All, that has been, is at it should have been, / but what will they trust in / 信 now?” (LXXXVI/584). The next line, ““Alla’ non ‘della”” contrasts Disraeli's deception with Mussolini's accuracy and transparency. The poem seems to answer its own question: after Disraeli's deceit, now they will trust—indeed, are instructed to trust—in the leader's

verbal acuity and his theory of property. By the time of Canto CVIII, Pound has reduced the reference to the *Programma* even further. Here, there is no mention of the “statement” or the “Programma” (simply of “Verona”), and none is made of the Republic. Like in the canto’s opening lines, where “*brum*” becomes a word-fragment with the loss of “*cere*”, so too does “*alla*” change when it loses its alternative (“*della*”) and its context: in Canto CVIII, “*alla*” is no longer part of an alternative, but, with the breaking of the line, becomes the only option.

The dream of the Republic has not quite been given up, and Pound’s fascist politics will resurface again. In the early stages of the canto, Pound refers to a range of material from Coke’s *Institutes*. After a list of English rivers that were protected by the crown from overfishing, comes a passage in which Pound fixes his attention on an episode of English history that resonates with his own convictions:

Post Festum Sancti Hilarii  
 mults des mals et disherisons  
 18 E. I a. d. 1290  
 ne curge de S. Edward  
 prochainement  
 and his father H. 3 before him  
 ne quis injuriam  
 salvum conductum  
 18 die Jul. II, 18 E. I  
 die decimoctavo  
 was 15 000 score.  
 Divers had banished  
 but the usuries, no King before him.  
 Holl fol 285  
 Wals hypod  
 Florilegius Dunstable  
 Angliae exeuntibus,  
 (CVIII/785)

This passage is a compressed review of a statute passed in 1290 by Edward I that was known as the “Edict of Expulsion.” It defined the limits of usury and expelled thousands of Jews, leaving very few remaining in England for almost three hundred years thereafter. A contemporary observer of the Edict, John Ross, wrote that during

Edward's reign English Jews were "condemned to wander the earth and to be cut off."<sup>12</sup> Terrell translates "Post Festum Sancti Hilarii / mults des mals et disherisons" as meaning "After the feast of St. Hilary many evils and disinheritings", and writes that Edward's act repaired previous laws as a result of which legal heirs lost property because of usury. But we should be wary of Terrell's gloss of the passage, which, following David Gordon's account of the statute, suggests that the passage focuses on Edward I's attempts to remedy injustice and to protect the Jews of England, and implies that the "mals" against which Pound is railing are the previously unjust laws against usury. Terrell quotes Gordon: "As Coke points out, many [Kings] had decisively banished the Jews and discriminated against them racially but Edward I saw the injustice of this and merely made a law against usury."<sup>13</sup> Pound tells us the number of Jews who left the country totaled "15 000 three score." The sixteenth-century historian John Stow reminds us that the expulsion was profitable for the crown, as "the number of Jews now expelled was 15 060 persons whose houses being sold the King made a mighty masse of money."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the Jewish citizens of England did not simply leave, they were "banished", as the canto clearly informs us. Bacigalupo has reconstructed the original passage, and tells us that in its original form it read "Divers [kings] had banished [the jews, and yet they returned], but the[ir] usuries, no King before him."<sup>15</sup> While Terrell, following Gordon, translates "salvum conductum" as "safe conduct", any resistant Jew would be threatened with execution.<sup>16</sup> Although Pound was likely aware of this fact, and clearly underscores that the Jews were "banished," he chose instead to end the passage with the far more neutral "Angliae exeuntibus," "to those leaving England"—which does not quite cover the passage's real motivations, nor can it erase troubling echoes of twentieth-

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<sup>12</sup> Ross, *Annales Lincolniae*, cited in R. Mundill; For a detailed account, see R.R. Mundill, *England's Jewish Solution: Experiment and Expulsion, 1262-1290* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> D. Gordon, 'Edward Coke: The Azalia is Grown', *Paideuma*, quoted by Terrell in *Companion*, p. 706.

<sup>14</sup> J. Stow, quoted in Mundill, *England's Jewish Solution*, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Bacigalupo, *The Forméd Trace*, p. 452.

<sup>16</sup> I owe this information to Peter Nicholls' authoritative reading of the passage: P. Nicholls, 'Bravura or Bravado?', in *Modernism and Masculinity*, eds. N. Lusty and J. Murphet (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 246-247.

century events. We might contrast “Angliae exeuntibus” with the canto’s refrain “Angliae amor”, for the love of the English. These lines of banishment are the dark flipside of that expression of adoration.

Pound’s next line brings us right back to Fascist Italy, which, after all, had been present from the very beginning of the canto. After “Angliae exeuntibus,” comes the line “and Uncle Carlo.” “Angliae exeuntibus,” ends on a comma, indicating that it is not quite a finished thought, and the following conjunction “and” forces us to see the two as related phenomena rather than discrete historical moments. “Uncle Carlo” is Carlo Delcroix, one of the heroes of Italian fascism. Delcroix, who was blinded in the First World War and was subsequently appointed director of the Association of War Wounded and Invalids, had previously been invoked as a supporter of Pound’s whole aesthetic project.<sup>17</sup> Pound had celebrated “Uncle Carlo” in his *Guide to Kulchur*, writing that “Mussolini has told his people that poetry is a necessity *to the state*, and Carlo Delcroix is convinced that poets ought to ‘occupy themselves with these matters’, namely credit, the nature of money, monetary issue, etc.”<sup>18</sup> Delcroix is aligned with Mussolini as a friend of the arts, and Pound would conclude that these two men are the reason that Rome is superior to London and Washington. Delcroix had also appeared earlier in *The Cantos*, often in the avuncular guise of the mutilated old warrior who outlived Mussolini, the ultimate survivor, and as a supporter of Pound’s aesthetic project. In Canto LXXXVIII, mention of Delcroix is followed with a quote from Pound’s translation of the *Analects* of Confucius, “Get the meaning across and then quit” (LXXXVIII/601). In Canto CVIII Delcroix returns again in an avuncular guise, immediately after a passage detailing an objectionable episode in English history more than six hundred years before his birth. Delcroix is both a model of endurance, and a choric background voice singing in support of the economically and politically minded poet. Here he returns as another figure who affirms and justifies Pound’s particular *pen yeh*, resurfacing in order to rationalize Pound’s lengthy passage on the Edict of Expulsion. At the same time, the intrusion of the great fascist hero returns us to the

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<sup>17</sup> Nicholls tells us that Delcroix and Pound knew one another, and that upon returning to Italy in 1959, not long after the publication of *Thrones*, Pound sought Delcroix out. Nicholls, ‘Bravura or Bravado?’, p. 254.

<sup>18</sup> E. Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York, New Directions, 1970), p. 249.

dream of the Republic, and uncovers the veiled motivations of the passage for what they really are.

If Uncle Carlo, Coke, Edward I, and The Duce are all in Pound's catalog of heroes, his list of villains is no less replete. Later in the canto, Pound's English history suddenly moves forward in time to the nineteenth century. The line "Cap. VI bitched by Disraeli" (CVIII/786) is just one such instance of a villain coming to the fore. Disraeli had appeared in Canto LXXXVI as the antithesis of Mussolini's clarity of language. Canto CVIII recalls that earlier passage:

England not yet sold for the Suez—  
That would have been 20 years later,  
    or was it '74?  
At any rate, sold down the river,  
    passed over Parliament,  
    "whatever else he believed in,  
it was not representative government"  
    Nor visible responsibilities.  
(LXXXVI/584)

Bacigalupo identifies Disraeli as one possible source for "the jew" from Canto CVII ("Flaccus' translator wore the crown / The jew and the buggar dragged it down").<sup>19</sup> Despite his uncertainty on the facts and dates ("or was it '74?"), Pound is convinced that England was "sold down the river" by the Prime Minister Disraeli, who collaborated with Lionel Rothschild in order to purchase shares in the Suez canal in a bid to outmaneuver French competitors in the region, and without obtaining express permission from Parliament. In Pound's opinion, Disraeli disregarded the protocols of government and his own responsibilities, and England was "bitched" by its leader who disdained "Cap. VI", the chapter of the Charter of Confirmation that affirms that the use of public funds require the approval of Parliament. The above passage from Canto LXXXVI comes right before Pound's quotation of Mussolini's *Programma di Verona*, which I quoted earlier. Canto CVIII repeats much of the same material of LXXXVI. In both cantos, Pound counterposes the establishment of the Salò Republic, built on the principles of clear language, with England's betrayal by Disraeli.

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<sup>19</sup> Bacigalupo, *The Forméd Trace*, p. 451.

Moreover, if Carlo Delcroix is one of the reasons for Italy's preeminence, Disraeli is partially to blame for London's inferiority. Tim Redman points out that Pound's pamphlet *L'America, e le Cause della Guerra Presente*, printed in 1944, features references to Disraeli and the claim that London and Washington are "united in their hebrewization."<sup>20</sup> Pound's Disraeli is part of a Jewish conspiracy, which sold English national interests and was at the root of the American civil war. Disraeli is representative of the disintegration of a civilization; he is a letdown in English history after what Pound sees as the great achievements earlier leaders. Disraeli is only mentioned by name once. But we hear echoes of his misdeeds when, much later in the canto, Pound adopts Coke's stipulations that sales must occur "dies solaris", in the light of day; "sale must be in place overt / not in a backe-room" (CVIII/789). Disraeli's deception is positioned against Coke's transparency in matters of sale and the accuracy and clarity of Mussolini's *Programma*.

Bacigalupo was not alone in arguing that the late cantos resemble "a set of notes". Early critics of the poems often made similar judgments: in a review of *Rock-Drill* in 1956, Randall Jarrell declared the volume to be made up of "indiscriminate notes."<sup>21</sup> Reviewing *Thrones* in 1960, John Wain argued that *The Cantos* could barely be called a poem at all, because "a good deal of the Cantos, as one leafs through them page by page, consists of notebook jottings and other material which bears no relationship to verse."<sup>22</sup> Do we accept that the late cantos are primarily notebook jottings, and abandon all hope of seeing in the late poems any coherent ordering principle (and try to find some satisfaction and joy in doing so)? Or do we argue against that critical commonplace, and suggest that either they are indeed notes, but with some motivating factor behind them? Or, do we take that a step further, and respond by arguing that the late poems are something altogether more ordered and logical than notes?

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<sup>20</sup> T. Redman, *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 246.

<sup>21</sup> Randall Jarrell, 'on the extraordinary misuse of extraordinary powers', from 'Five Poets', *Yale Review* (September 1956) xlvi, 103. Reprinted in *Ezra Pound: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Eric Homberger (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 438.

<sup>22</sup> John Wain, "The Shadow of an Epic," *Spectator* 11 March 1960 cciv, 360 (*Critical Heritage*, 454).

One consequence of the note-like form of the late cantos is that their argument is rarely obvious or insistent in the way that it might have been in earlier cantos: it can briefly intrude and then retreat once more, always present enough to be meaningful but never entirely conspicuous. At times this agenda becomes more obvious—there are no subtleties in the suggestion that English law was “bitched by Disraeli”, there will be no misinterpreting the line—at others we are left to do more work to uncover Pound’s motivations for including certain references, certain statutes, certain laws. Pound’s histories are never hermetically sealed: they are pulled apart and pushed against other historical moments in order to resonate with one another, and we are left to map the links between them, to mull over how Carlo Delcroix might have some relation to Edward I. For to call the late poems ‘indiscriminate notes’ implies a random selection or an undiscerning eye, and thus affords an abdication—or absolution—of responsibility. But those notes have been chosen, their placement deliberate, and to think of them as anything other than purposeful risks letting the poet off the hook too easily. For the reader, it is through puzzling over precisely the imposed fissures and new relations that make the poems note-like, that an argument and a politics can begin to be felt.

## III.

To follow a final path through Canto CVIII, we must return to its beginning once more. This third concern has to do with fertility and the feminine. We hear the first whisperings of this in the quote from Dudley Digges, spoken in a House of Commons session, about the “nurse of industry.” A nurse, of course, may be any gender, but Digges personified *Meum and Tuum*, the “nurse of industry”, as “the Mother of Courage.”<sup>23</sup> The line contains the first hint of a caring, maternal figure to occur in the canto, and there will be others. Another such figure appears soon after, in the lyrical lines that come directly after the ideogrammic break of *pen yeh*:

Enrolled in the ball of fire  
as brightness  
clear emerald  
for the kindness,

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<sup>23</sup>Digges, *Biographia Britannica*, <  
<https://archive.org/details/biographiabritan03adam> >

infinite,  
of her hands  
(CVIII/784)

Early in the canto we encountered “frost on the rock’s face”: here, the temperature has changed. We have shifted from frost to a ball of fire, from a weathered rock to the soft embrace of infinitely kind, warm hands. Nicholls has noted that *Thrones* is characterized by “erratic fluctuations in emotional tone.”<sup>24</sup> The canto’s opening contains a succession of such fluctuations, and the sudden arrival of these lines is one of the starkest shifts. The lines register a formal break within the opening of the canto, as it moves from the first disjointed, fragmented lines, through the stability of the ideogram, and finally to these lyrical lines. Reasonably even in form, the lines arrange themselves in two sets, like disjointed tercets. In each set, the first line is longer, while the second and third lines have three syllables (with the exception of “clear emerald”, in which ‘emerald’ can form either a trochee and a dactyl depending on pronunciation), with one strongly stressed beat although the placement of the stress varies. Pound would repeat the staggered tercet form soon after in the set of lines “Statutum Tallagio / Lambarde on Valla / ‘all monopolies’” (CVIII/784). Once again, a lengthy first line is followed by two even lines of five syllables each, here with an alliterative /l/ threading the lines together.

But while these lines are more rhythmically constant than other moments in the canto, they too have their difficulties. The fire and the kind feminine hands, which may feel like a moment of respite after the densely historical opening section, cause as much trouble as they do pleasure. We are not told *who* (or, perhaps, *what*) is “enrolled in the ball of fire.” We can assume that the ball of fire is also held in the woman’s hands: the slant rhyme and alliteration between “kindness” (which we know is attributed to the woman) and “brightness” (which is related to the ball of fire) might tie the two together and place them both firmly within the hold of the woman. But who precisely is this woman? The passage identifies a set of hands belonging to “her”, but the woman is a mere pronoun, never identified with any more specificity. Bacigalupo suggests that the hands appear to belong to Leucothea, and are a repetition of the

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<sup>24</sup> P. Nicholls, ‘2 doits to a boodle: Reckoning with *Thrones*’, *Textual Practice*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2004), p. 243.

*philai chéires* from Canto C.<sup>25</sup> Terrell finds another source for the lines, dubbing them “a lyric evocation of the Pomona theme,”<sup>26</sup> although neither Pomona nor Leucothea is ever named explicitly. We have encountered Pomona, the agricultural goddess of fruitful abundance, in Canto LXXIX:

This fruit has a fire within it,  
Pomona, Pomona  
No glass is clearer than are the globes of this flame  
what sea is clearer than the pomegranate body  
Holding the flame?  
Pomona, Pomona,

Lynx, keep watch on this orchard  
That is named Melagrana  
or the pomegranate field  
The sea is not clearer in azure  
Nor the Heliads bringing light  
(LXXIX/510)

The lyric of Canto LXXIX appeals to the lynx—intimately imagined throughout as a woman—for protection. The lynx is asked to “keep watch on this orchard” which is named “Melagrana”, Italian for pomegranate. The canto calls repeatedly to Pomona, creator and provider of the pomegranate field. Pound conjures the form of a mystical, pomegranate, a globe clearer than glass (or does he mean the jewel-bright, translucent seeds?) which contains a fire within it, and which illuminates the fruit, making it clearer than any azure sea. We hear echoes of this in the “ball of fire” of Canto CVIII. The pomegranate is not mentioned by name; the fruit’s red form has been abstracted into a fiery orb. In Canto CVIII, the extended lyrical meditation of the Lynx canto is reduced into only six short lines. Hugh Kenner describes this process of reduction as the stage when “the early *Cantos*’ great blocks” have been “ground into *Thrones*’ luminous particles.”<sup>27</sup> No longer a named goddess, Pomona becomes a luminous element.

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<sup>25</sup> Bacigalupo, *The Forméd Trace*, p. 446.

<sup>26</sup> Terrell, *Companion*, p. 704.

<sup>27</sup> H. Kenner, *The Pound Era* (London, Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 535.



because they renew yearly.”<sup>28</sup> In contrast, the great timber trees listed here cannot be tithed because they take so much time to grow. Coke writes these trees—oake, ash, elm, beech, horsbeche, and hornbeam—fall under the category of *grosse boys*, and reminds us that “of great wood no tithes are claimed.”<sup>29</sup> The great trees should be reserved for uses in building, and for the reparation of houses, mills, cottages, and so on. Whereas the abundant acorns would be legitimate interest, to cut down one of the slow-developing trees would be equal to usury. It will also amount to a crime against art—for hadn’t Pound told us in *The Pisan Cantos* that “slowness is beauty”, using the example of a sequoia tree?

Pound follows the acorn with another example of a valid form of taxation, also taken from the natural world: the one lira paid per lamb born “nel Tirolo”, in the Tyrol. Terrell points out that this was the place where Pound’s daughter was raised, and finds an explanation for the line in Mary de Rachewiltz’s memoir *Discretions*. She explains:

By now I was Tatille’s [Pound’s] partner—or rather, he was my partner in the sheep business. He also sent the money to buy a sheep for himself. I had to send accounts and explain how much it cost to feed a sheep, to house it, to take it to summer pastures, and in taxes: one lira per sheep nel Tirolo.<sup>30</sup>

This is an anecdote of education in which the child is instructed in valid methods of taxation. It is also a family anecdote, and we might be tempted to see a connection between the newborn lambs and the upbringing of Pound’s daughter in the verdant mountains of the Tyrol, which returns us to the “Mother of Courage” hinted at in the “nurse” of the opening lines. The canto thus forms a series of relations between the abundance of the natural world, human sexuality and reproduction, and sound principles of economics. Alec Marsh has suggested that the natural world, agriculture, and economics are closely linked to sexuality in *The Cantos*, and that the contest between sturdy economic principles and usury often plays

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<sup>28</sup> Coke, *The Second Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England*, 643.

<sup>29</sup> Coke, *The Second Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England*, 642.

<sup>30</sup> M. de Rachewiltz, *Ezra Pound, Father and Teacher: Discretions* (New York, New Directions, 1975), p. 58.

out as a struggle between natural fertility and the exploitation of nature.<sup>31</sup> For usury, Pound had declared in Canto XLV, amounts to “sin against nature” (XLV/229). In Canto CVIII, this takes the form of an opposition between abundance and scarcity (and valid and invalid tithes), which are umbilically tied to sexuality and reproduction. If Pomona is to be found in Canto CVIII, she takes the dual form of a goddess of abundance—of absolute abundance, as her hands contain “infinite” kindness—and of a guardian, to Pound, against the evils of usury.

Does this fully solve the mystery of those opening tercets and clear up the identity of the unnamed woman? Perhaps not entirely, for there are other women named in the canto, and we will do well to consider the opening lyrical lines in relation to these female presences. There are two other female figures throughout the canto. One is mentioned only once, just after the lines about Carlo Delcroix: “and, from Taufers, Margherita” (CVIII/785). “Margherita” appears variously in *The Cantos* as “Old Margherita” and “Margarethe”, presumably Margherita of Savoy, mother of Victor Emmanuel III of Italy.<sup>32</sup> She is frequently positioned alongside Uncle Carlo—the royal mother and the fascist “uncle” are matched—probably due to her fascist sympathies. Yet more important is another royal woman of whom Pound approves as a sound leader:

## ELIZABETH

Angliae amor,  
ad valorem reducta.

(CVIII/788)

Note the capitals. Elsewhere, Pound uses capitals to emphasize techniques, such as his capitalized “COMMUNIT / ... BRUM” in the opening lines, which highlight his use of tmesis. He repeatedly capitalizes the word THAT (CIV/761, 763) in order to add another level of emphasis to a pronoun that is already used to identify a

<sup>31</sup> A. Marsh, *Money and Modernity: Pound, Williams, and the Spirit of Jefferson*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press), 1998, p. 113.

<sup>32</sup> Bacigalupo notes that this ‘Margherita’ refers to “alias Val di Tures, in the environs of which P’s daughter was raised”. Bacigalupo has the Val di Tures (the Tauferer Ahrntal in the Southern Tyrol) in mind, but it is left unclear who the ‘Margherita’, whose alias he identifies, actually is: Bacigalupo, *The Forméd Trace*, p. 452.

specific person or thing. Sometimes he capitalizes names for emphasis or identification: “YAO’s worry: to find a successor” (XCV/664): Yao was one of three successive emperors who became a model of good government and a yardstick against which other rulers would be measured; here, Pound emphasizes that the worry belongs to Yao, and not to one of the other rulers. Pound would often capitalize names as a mark of rank and significance. Elizabeth I, deserving of capitals, is not a figure to be taken lightly or ignored. Pound tells us that Queen Elizabeth I attracted the love of the English, “Angliae amor”, and here she receives the attention of Pound for her solid economic governance. In the next line, Pound quotes from the engraving on Elizabeth’s tombstone in Westminster Abbey, on which was inscribed the words “*Moneta ad suum valorem reducta*”, she brought money back to its true value. The monarch inherited a debased coinage, but was able to restore it to its proper value. In 1560-61, all remaining debased coinage was withdrawn and melted down, and subsequently replaced with newly minted, full-bodied Elizabethan coins.<sup>33</sup> England’s trade relations improved, the country flourished economically, and the monarch earned the confidence and love of the English people.

Elizabeth is present elsewhere throughout the canto. We can’t help but hear echoes of her famed virginity when Pound speaks of the “vierge,” the practice of remaining within six miles of the sovereign. If we might be tempted to see Elizabeth’s virginity as antithetical to Pomona’s fertility, we must remember that the monarch would provide in other ways, and that her good governance and fiscal wisdom led to the prosperity of a nation. Moreover, to remain within a short distance of the sovereign is to remain physically close, almost intimate, with the ruler. No wonder that the canto would return to Elizabeth as it draws to a close. These are its final lines:

Stat. de 31 Eliz.

Angliae amor.

(CVIII/790)

The canto finishes with “Stat de 31 Eliz” from Coke’s *Institutes*. This statute, from the section ‘Concerning Cottages and Inmates’, was to

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<sup>33</sup> S. Deng, *Coinage and State Formation in Early Modern English Literature* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), p. 96.

prevent “the great inconveniences which are found by experience to grow by the erecting and building of great numbers and multitudes of cottages.”<sup>34</sup> The statute stipulated that there be four acres of space left around any newly built cottage, a measure that was intended to prevent overcrowded living conditions and to halt the expansion of slums by ensuring adequate open space around each house. Pound repeatedly returns to this stipulation that there be “For every new cottage 4 acres” (CVIII/790). We might hear echoes in this of the spatial abundance of Pomona’s field of pomegranates. This statute was important to Pound, and it would be picked up once again in the next canto, appearing again both at the beginning of Canto CIX (“enough land about each of them”) and near its end, as Canto CIX repeats, word for word, the final five lines of the penultimate canto. Canto CVIII ends with a reminder and an affirmation of Elizabeth’s deserved admiration, “Angliae amor”, and we finish the canto with the impression that the reverence held for the monarch by the English people is shared by the poem itself. With its final words of love and adoration, the canto returns us right back to the lyrical tercets of its first page, to that expression of worship, and to a mode of quiet reverence that goes some way towards balancing out the violence encoded in *comminuit*, in the shattered head, in the poem’s tmesis and the textual and historical violence it traces thereafter.

When reading *The Cantos*, critics have often been tempted to choose a particular thread and to trace the way in which that thread is woven into a vast, complex, and uneven tapestry. The danger for critics is the temptation to inflate the importance of any one concept such that it becomes the major guiding principle which risks obscuring or smoothing over the poem’s many, often conflicting components; to become convinced that a single idea is the key that, with enough persistence, will unlock the rest of the poem’s secret doors; to discover, in short, “the gold thread in the pattern” (CXVI/817). On the other hand, narrowing in on a single idea and tracing its progress through the poem is an appealing exercise—it is important to navigate the ways that ideas change throughout the space of a volume or indeed over the course of a lifetime. Pound’s ideas transform in their form and use, and we must, as dutiful readers, keep up with these developments. As an interpretative

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<sup>34</sup> Coke, *The Second Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England*, 736.

strategy it also makes good practical sense. After all, how else are we supposed to deal with a volume as immense, dense, and disjointed as *Thrones*? Is there any adequate way of coming to terms with the complexities of a single line or passage, let alone an entire canto, or a volume?

When Pound capitalizes “COMMINUIT”, he knows well that we will seek out the connecting “BRUM.” The poem resists the ease and simplicity of a linear text at every turn. This is especially true in its later stages, when the poem becomes something other than a text that we can follow from start to finish, when, as Kenner notes, *The Cantos* shifts from “tidy narrative” to “verbal phantasmagoria.”<sup>35</sup> The risk in seeking out coherent paths through this phantasmagoric landscape is either that a single one of the poem’s concepts will overwhelm all others, or that these concepts will be impossible to bring together—that we will be left, as critics, with readings which are as conflicted and various as the poem itself. For when we zoom out from the micro unit of the line to the broader theme or concept, it at once becomes easier to see the relation between the links in any single conceptual sequence—to understand what Pomona might have to do with Elizabeth—and more difficult to link the sequences themselves. If these incommensurable strands and their attendant pressures are what would ultimately limit the poem and obviate the possibility of any one satisfactory conclusion, they are also what fill it with interpretative potential, leaving Pound’s readers to pursue their own paths through the poem, to tread untrodden terrain.

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