

SOME CONTEXTS FOR CANTO XCVI

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Thrones: 96–109 de los Cantares was collected in 1959, and published in Milan by All’Insegna del Pesce D’Oro, shortly after Pound’s final departure from the USA, and is predominantly made up of materials written while the poet was incarcerated in St Elizabeths hospital in Washington, materials which had been published in various journals through the mid-1950s.¹ The poetics of *Thrones* have seemed obscurantist to many, even by the standards of the earlier *Cantos*. Partly due to this—though also because of the uncomfortable facts of Pound’s continued imprisonment and the contemporary orthodoxy of New Criticism—Canto XCVI has been interpreted largely exegetically, shorn, because of its discomfiting context, of context. The initial reviews offer us some idea of how *Thrones* was first read, and sketch a manner of understanding this part of Pound’s poetic output that predicts the later consensus. Delmore Schwartz, for example, writes of *Thrones* in the February 1960 number of the *New Republic* that “despite their frequent passages of great beauty, learning, metrical invention and prophetic significance, they are often no more than Pound’s discursive monologue about his own *personal* experience of history,”² an assessment that anticipates many subsequent approaches to the late *Cantos*, as well as pointing out their unsuitability to the precepts of the New Criticism. Similarly, M. L. Rosenthal complains in the *Nation* that, though “when Pound rises toward his lyrical heights, few poets can do anything comparable,” “[i]t would be hard for even the specialist *aficionados* to deny that the Master is overdoing it, and that some of the initial impetus of the *Cantos* [...] has been lost.”³ The confessional poet W.

¹ I would like to acknowledge the advice and input of *Glossator’s* anonymous peer reviewers, who improved this article substantively with advice on both form and content.

² Schwartz, “Ezra Pound and History,” 369.

³ Rosenthal, “The Pleasures of Pound,” 376.

D. Snodgrass bemoans the fact that, in contrast to *Thrones*, “some of his cantos have also sung; there *have* been long, sustained passages, many with a heavy musical or ritual content, to carry us through”⁴—the italicised auxiliary letting us know that such passages are now in the past.

This tone can be found throughout much of the work of Pound’s annotators; George Kearns encapsulates many reactions when he writes that, though the volume “contains some pages of great lyric beauty,” “the *Thrones* cantos are largely ineffective as poetry.”⁵ Kearns connects the “lyric” directly to “poetry”; poetry that is not lyrical is not poetry at all—a position that is perhaps of only limited application if we want to approach Pound’s late *Cantos*-method in the manner that it deserves. Similarly, Donald Davie regrets that “even a loyal reader might feel a sinking feeling of the heart as the *Cantos* moved into their second century.”⁶ This regret is located in a binary like Kearns’s lyrical/unlyrical dialectic; thus, while in *Thrones* the “paradisaic quality was clear and haunting,”⁷ “one cannot read *Thrones* without remembering that the author had spent twelve years in a hospital for the insane.”⁸

In the face of all of this equivocation the contemporary reader is left to consider what the poetics of *Thrones* might be, and why have they been read in this dismissive way. Of Pound’s source-hunters it is perhaps William Cookson who is most positive about *Thrones*, calling it “one of the most solid historical achievements of the *Cantos*” and noting that it has “a coherent structure in itself.”⁹ This is the beginning of an answer, but we will need to add complexity to Cookson’s solidity and coherence in order to understand the baffling poetics of *Thrones*. I will attempt my own answers to these questions in this paper, then, initially by reading Canto XCVI within a series of related contexts that have often been ignored in favour of a quasi-New Critical reliance on the context of *The Cantos* as a poem—a tendency which was influenced by the controversy that swirled around Pound during the first years of “the Pound industry.” I will then move on to look at some of the mechanics of Pound’s *Thrones*-

⁴ Snodgrass, “Four Gentlemen; Two Ladies,” 380.

⁵ Kearns, *Guide to Ezra Pound’s Selected Cantos*, 223.

⁶ Davie, *Studies in Ezra Pound*, 198–99.

⁷ Davie, *Studies in Ezra Pound*, 199.

⁸ Davie, *Studies in Ezra Pound*, 200.

⁹ Cookson, *A Guide to The Cantos*, 122.

method in an attempt to reformulate the dichotomies of Kearns and Davie.

Canto XCVI first appeared, as “Canto 96,” in *The Hudson Review* in Spring, 1956, three years before its collection in *Thrones*. At that time Pound was still in St Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, DC, where he had been for nearly a decade in pretty miserable circumstances after having plead incompetence to stand trial for treason in 1945. Eyewitness Peter Buitenhuis describes a visit to the poet during this period, writing that he

showed Pound’s letter [of invitation] to the guard at the main entrance, and we were escorted through some locked doors to his ward. The last door opened onto a scene of indescribable noise, confusion, and stench. A dozen radio and TV sets were blaring away. Men were lying in beds, or on the floor in foetal positions, some in a pool of their own urine and stinking of excrement. In the middle of this bedlam, behind a curtain that offered little barrier to the noise and smell, was Ezra, lying on a chaise longue.¹⁰

Pound himself wrote the following to Archibald MacLeish in 1955:

I can’t work here [...] The little and broken-up time that I get (with no privacy and constant interruption and distraction) makes impossible that consecutive quality of feeling so important to me [...] This daily laceration and frustration of a creative impulse, carried on even a little while [...] can and surely will with me I’m afraid, end with complete artistic impotence.¹¹

The effects of this hellish existence can be read in at least two related ways in *The Cantos*. Some critics have laid the blame for the supposed dropping off of Pound’s poem on these conditions. Peter Makin, for example, notes “many symptoms of the over-stretching of Pound’s mind” in *Thrones*, writing that “[h]istory loses its differentiations of quality: the verbal forms that render eighteenth-century China are

¹⁰ Buitenhuis, “Ezra Pound: The Genius in the Bughouse: A Review,” 65.

¹¹ Hayman, *The Last Rower*, 238.

as those used for a law-code of ninth-century Byzantium. And conclusions are now too glib.”¹² Alec Marsh acknowledges the effect that his imprisonment must have had on Pound (partially concurring with the Schwartz, Snodgrass, Davie and Kearns readings of the period’s poetics), sensing the poet’s biography in the texture of the *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones* volumes, which

show the effects of Pound’s incarceration. They rely heavily on the poet’s wide and eccentric reading; the world filters in via his correspondence and reactions to newspapers or the world’s blaring TV. They feature works no one has ever heard of—and that seems to be the point.¹³

This reading offers an explanation of the difference between the poetics of the *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones* block of *Cantos* and *The Pisan Cantos*. Whereas for the drafting of the earlier volume the poet was without almost all source-texts and therefore obliged to return to the internal resources of memory and the careful observation of the world around him, by the mid-1950s Pound had access to the Library of Congress and other useful sources for books,¹⁴ but, perhaps partly for reasons of self-protection, was less willing to consider his own past at length, and similarly unwilling to dwell on his surroundings. Massimo Bacigalupo reads the fragmentary collage of *Thrones* as drawn “from the depths of textual memory,”¹⁵ a description which is helpful in reminding us that this is not a text drawn from the poet’s own memory, as at Pisa, but from a supposedly shared cultural recollection found in the pages of a series of recondite historical sources. Thus we see Pound employing the same modes of fragmentation and habits of distant, partial, recall as in the earlier volume, but here those methods are applied to ancient and medieval texts that are often new to the poet, and even more unlikely to be known to the general reader—or even students of modernism—than the anecdotes of other modernists and collaborators that appear so frequently in *The Pisan Cantos*.

While we might be tempted to think of Pound’s time in Washington as a period of internal exile and intense isolation—with

¹² Makin, *Pound’s Cantos*, 259.

¹³ Marsh, *Ezra Pound*, 189.

¹⁴ Marsh, *Ezra Pound*, 189.

¹⁵ Bacigalupo, *Forméd Trace*, 339.

the poet's physical freedom, privacy and dignity curtailed within the walls of the hospital—the St Elizabeths years actually marked a period of involvement with the outside world that was freer and more extensive than the war years; the late, near-silent, senescence of Pound's final years in Italy; and even the years of the Rapallose "Ezuversity" on the Ligurian coast in the 1930s. In fact, Washington thrust Pound, through a seemingly endless series of visitors, into the American poetry scene in a way in which he never was at any other point. Though a captive, Pound would find himself in conversation with a great range of people, and at the heart of a vortex as strong as any that he had known since that of London before the Great War. He would renew acquaintanceships with poets like William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky and meet younger writers like Charles Olson and Robert Duncan, energising them in their refashioning of the Poundian inheritance into the New American Poetry. Less "Poundian" writers, including Robert Lowell, John Berryman and Elizabeth Bishop, would also take the opportunity to visit the caged bard—securing Pound a wider range of association than in other periods.¹⁶ At the same time he was also available to the American academic community in a way that we never was before or after. By 1960, Donald Hall was already complaining that "Pound has been petrified into an industry by the academics";¹⁷ key projects in the shaping of Pound's poetic afterlife, the Pound industry—such as Kenner's refashioning of modernism on the Poundian model, Noel Stock's *The Life of Ezra Pound* and Carroll F. Terrell's project to annotate *The Cantos in A Companion to The Cantos of Ezra Pound*—took wing following visits to St Elizabeths, and everything Pound wrote from *Rock-Drill* on was written with an awareness of this developing professional interest. On balance it might be said that Pound's withdrawal to St Elizabeths provided the poet with the most prominent public platform of his career.

Nor did Pound's writing cease, Marsh even calls it the poet's "most productive" period,¹⁸ with the poet completing two volumes of *Cantos* and translating Confucius, *Elektra* and *The Women of Trachis* at St Elizabeths, while overseeing an extensive republication

¹⁶ Moody details these visitors at length. See the 'Kindergarten' and 'Adult Conversation' sections of his biography. Moody, *The Tragic Years*, 305–11, 318–23.

¹⁷ Hall, "The Cantos in England," 373.

¹⁸ Marsh, *John Kasper and Ezra Pound*, 1.

programme and a voluminous correspondence. Thus, whether the effects of Pound's imprisonment were quite as unequivocally negative as Makin et al. suggest remains to be seen. Perhaps there is something in Marsh's "desperate lunges" that can be read positively; something potentially gestural and utopian in a way that develops *The Cantos* further than Pound had imagined they could be up to that point. Perhaps such gestures are profoundly suited to this late, paradisaal poetry.

Rock-Drill and *Thrones* are the only parts of *The Cantos* to be indubitably American in origin; the earliest segments of the poem having been written in London and then Paris, before the bulk of the sequence was written from Italy; Rapallo, Venice and Pisa. *Drafts & Fragments*, *The Cantos'* final instalment, would be written partly in the same American milieu as *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones*, but would peter out in Rapallo, Venice and Brunnenburg. Canto XCVI appeared in and from an America much changed during the construction of *The Cantos*. International politics were still decidedly "post-war" in 1956, but poised at an historical turning point. Dwight D. Eisenhower was President (winning re-election in November) while Nikita Khrushchev was consolidating power in the USSR. There were, partly illusory, signs of thaw in USA/USSR relations; Khrushchev would deliver his report *On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences* to the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, a speech that began the process of moving the USSR away from Stalinist totalitarianism, and history away from the dominant, dangerous, personalities who dominated the 1930s and informed the early to middle sections of *The Cantos*. Kearns worries that it is the lack of powerful personalities that does for the poetry of *Thrones*, though we might read this absence, in the context of the Cold War, as a conscious change that keeps the poem in line with the era while positing an appropriately Dantescan diminution of personality as the poem reaches the rarefied airs of its paradisaal climax.

Pound also seems to intentionally move his poem away from "politics," or wishes to be seen to make that move, around this time, with the poet making the claim, to James Laughlin, that "E.P. [is] no longer a Political figure, has forgotten what or which politics he ever

had,”¹⁹ matching the diminution of the culture hero noted above. Of course, Pound’s claim to have forgotten the political should not wholly be taken at face value, for the other effect of Pound’s changed company and reduced access to the outside world can be read in a distinctive political development in his thought. Marsh writes that

reading the newspapers and watching the ward’s TV through the 1950s confirmed Pound’s worst fears about America. The country was overrun with Soviet spies, mostly Jewish. Pound became an enthusiastic supporter of Senator Joseph McCarthy. In turn, supporters of McCarthy began to take notice of him.²⁰

In addition to the poets and academics a subset of supporters coalesced around Pound who were united by their far right ideologies. As Marsh shows, various distinctively right-wing political concerns of the 1950s, including Cold War anti-communism,²¹ condemnations of the uneasy peace in Europe (“Deutschland under Dulles” in XCVI/677) and segregation (“maintain antisepsis” in XCIV/655), found their way into the poem, superseding the politics of the pre-war years, and colouring the poetics of Canto XCVI.

¹⁹ Letter from Pound to James Laughlin, 24 Nov. 1959. Barnhisel, *James Laughlin, New Directions, and the Remaking of Ezra Pound*, 172.

²⁰ Marsh, *Ezra Pound*, 190. See also *John Kasper and Ezra Pound*, 95–96 for Pound’s growing interest in and support for McCarthy.

²¹ Pound was not a conventional anti-communist, and includes the words of Lenin at various points in *The Cantos* and in *Thrones*, including at the outset of Canto C (733), a moment discussed by Alex Pestell in his article on Canto C, also in this journal.

THE
Hudson
REVIEW

EZRA POUND:

Canto 96

JOHN HOLLOWAY:

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FRANK BUTLER:

To the Wilderness I Wander—a story

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The Name of Odysseus

SONYA RUDIKOFF:

Theories, and Art Itself

POETRY BY JOHN HOLLANDER, RICHMOND LATTIMORE,
MAY SARTON, VERNON WATKINS.

TRANSLATIONS FROM G. G. BELL, BY HAROLD NORSE.

ARTICLES AND REVIEWS BY WILL C. JUMPER,
SEYMOUR KRIM, MARVIN MUDRICK, IRVING SINGER.

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To get a better idea of the context of the writing and publication of Canto XCVI, it may be helpful to look at the kind of work Pound was being published alongside in 1956. The Spring number of *The Hudson Review* offers us a useful insight into Pound's particular context—or one of his particular contexts—in the mid-1950s. Pound's canto opens the number and is followed by two poems by American poet and translator Richmond Lattimore: "Hercules at the Crossroads" and "The Bridge at Arta" which, from their titles alone, suggest a sensibility at least congruent with Pound's. A look at the first lines of the first confirms this, as they combine a Frostian indecision with a lineation and musicality that derive from Pound's work:

Through drenched grass, dawn unmisting, the April day's
prime hour, to a place where a spring comes cold in the shadow
of poplar trees
and the cross-arms of the pounded road branch, two ways,
young Hercules
trudged, singing the morning up. And there in the shade
two girls waited him. She of the left hand fork stood pale
and sweet, in a flowered dress, and smiled with made

lips, and allured him with a blue gaze, and sidled forward to
hail

her hero.²²

The process of Hercules' gradual emergence from the morning mist echoes the "Kimmerian lands" of Canto I, "Covered with close-webbed mist,"²³ and Lattimore begins his poem with a booming dactyl, "Through drénched gráss" and carries on with a pair of trochees, "dáwn unmísting," both of which metrical feet are characteristic of Pound's *Cantos* and translation voices, as represented in the first lines of the first canto and in works like "The Seafarer." Lattimore's poem exists in the same interstice between translation and original creation as Pound's poetics at the start of his long project and, like Canto I and early texts like *Cathay*, eschews explicatory material and unnecessary prepositions in favour of a particular modernist solidity that mimes the process of reading from and adapting the cribs that coloured Pound's translations.

One of Pound's voices is clear in Lattimore; the best-known voice of *The Cantos*, but it is not, however, the voice of Canto XCVI. By 1956 Pound's Poundianism had—even as his acolytes' Poundianisms began to floresce and to dominate sections of the American academic world—outstripped that of his peers. Lattimore himself would complain of the unevenness of Pound's late style, commenting on Pound's *Women of Trachis* (in 1956, and thus contemporaneously with the drafting of canto XCVI) that "Deianeira, once the gentle lady though nobody's fool, talks through this version like a brassy, cocksure guttersnipe which, in this version, she seems to be. And all the other characters talk the same way."²⁴ This most Poundian of translators comes to criticise Pound for lacking the sonorities that Pound had been so key in developing into the default language for modernist translation. As Hall suggests, the poet was left "finishing his great poem in an amphitheatre without an audience";²⁵ while he had a public position that he had never had before, even those trained to hear Pound and sympathetic to his work were not attuned to his new voice.

²² Lattimore, "Hercules at the Crossroads," 38.

²³ Pound, *The Cantos*, 3.

²⁴ Davie, *Studies in Ezra Pound*, 194.

²⁵ Hall, "The Cantos in England," 375.

In part, the poetics of *Thrones*, as unveiled in Canto XCVI, marks a continuation of the pre-war historiographical methods of *Cantos LII-LXXI* (1940), with their extensive quotation from relatively *recherché* documents and extended focus on historical themes. In this respect they mark a step back from the greater and more personal field of reference of *The Pisan Cantos* (1948). But the “spezzatto” (LXXIV/458) nature of the Pisans continues into this volume, with the sometimes already gnomic references and extracts of *Cantos LII-LXXI* further paired down and made more difficult to explain without reference to the poet’s sources. Pound’s quotations are shorter, his lines are shorter and his idea-paragraphs (the units that can be said to make up the progress of *The Cantos*) are generally shorter—often cut back to blocks of just one or two lines.

Similarly, Pound’s musicality is less central to this volume than it had been to *The Pisan Cantos* and the volumes preceding *Cantos LII-LXXI*. A comparison of the opening lines of XCVI with Lattimore’s translation reveals the extent of the poet’s abandonment of those musical elements that are often considered ubiquitous parts of his poetic voice:

XCVI

Κρήδεμνον

κρήδεμνον

and the wave concealed her,

dark mass of great water

Aestheticisme comme politique d’église, hardly religion

& on the hearth burned cedar and juniper

that should bear him thru these diafana

Aether pluit numismata

Tellus vomit cadavera,

Thusca quae a thure,

from the name of the incense, in this province is

ROMA quae olim

In the province of Tuscany is Rome, a city which formerly

(XCVI/671)

We are a long way from *Cathay* here, and a long way from Lattimore. Pound's typography works against the mellifluous internationalism of "Poundian translation," with Greek words hanging suspended and untranslated—unless we still bear in mind the "bikini" of Canto XCI (636), Pound's idiosyncratic translation of the Greek "kredemnon"—while a welter of languages, short lines and varied indentation follow. As we read on we find that the content has also changed significantly from the early work that colours Lattimore's voice. As Cookson has it, XCVI "opens with the shipwrecked Odysseus—who has been saved from drowning by the veil of 'Leucothae' at the end of *Rock-Drill*—seeing her disappear in the waves"²⁶ in a brief flash of old-style Poundian lyricism with the near Alexandrine of "and the wave concealed her, / dark mass of great water." Thus "kredemnon" is an anchoring point carried over from *Rock-Drill*, linking Cantos XCV and XCVI and *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones*, though Odysseus' aid soon drifts away. Terrell also suggests that the "incense" here tracks back to "Dionisio et Eleutherio" (XCV/667) at the end of XCV, as well as predicting the religious ceremonies that enter the later stretches of *Thrones*.²⁷ Odysseus is again recalled with the "cedar and juniper" that burned on the hearth of Calypso on Ogygia—an incense which also looks backwards to the lyrical outburst of Canto XC as well as forward to the ceremonies of the Na-Khi in the later sections of *Thrones*—insisting the scent of religious ceremony in Pound's long poem, though in the midst of the passage we read "Aestheticisme comme politique d'église, hardly religion" (XCVI/671)—"Aestheticism as church politics" in Terrell's translation²⁸—an interjection which undermines the paradisaic ceremony developing around it and alerts the reader to a set of worldly concerns which will develop in parallel with Pound's paradise.

Pound/the reader/Odysseus is then carried through a series of "diafana" (the translucent forms of Cavalcanti previously encountered in Canto XXXVI (177); here historically meaningful moments that support Pound's political and aesthetic argument), beginning with tales of the foundation of various Northern Italian cities taken from Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardum* (*History of the Langobards*) and *Historia Miscella* (*Mixed History*), and moving on

²⁶ Cookson, *A Guide to The Cantos*, 122.

²⁷ See Terrell, *A Companion*, 591.

²⁸ Terrell, *A Companion*, 591.

to a brief relation of seventh-century Britain taken from the Venerable Bede, all three of which texts were read by Pound in the ninety-fifth volume of J. P. Migne's *Patrologiae*, an enormous anthology of clerical writings from between the third- and thirteenth-centuries which is, in an unusual moment in *The Cantos*, cited in the text of XCVI (672). This section is treated briefly by most of Pound's commentators, and is, typically, described by Peter Makin as "a rapid chronological survey,"²⁹ while Bacigalupo writes that "Pound's main purpose is to provide a background for the Byzantine 'research' of the second part of the long canto."³⁰ Moving on from the Langobards, XCVI builds to an unevenly annotated timeline of late Roman and Byzantine Emperors, who are paraded in a chronological manner that suggests the Chinese and Adams Cantos. This historical divagation builds to a climax with details of a war about coinage waged between Byzantine Emperor Justinian II and the modernising Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (646-705)—"Habdimelich" for Pound.³¹ Pound refers to this conflict as "the crux of one matter" (XCVI/677) which matter is the connection between coinage and religion, what Terrell calls "the sacred or 'sacerdotal' nature of coinage,"³² a connection that will come to dominate much of the argument of *Thrones*, with in, for Bacigalupo, the disagreement between Justinian and "Habdimelich" "indicating that economic autonomy is the necessary premise of art and religion."³³ For the story of "Habdimelich," and throughout the late *Cantos* on such questions, Pound follows Alexander Del Mar's *History of Monetary Systems* (1895), offering a radical condensation of monetary history. Mohammad Y. Shaheen complains of Pound's retention of Del Mar's misreadings, and writes that "Abd-el-Melik [a more orthodox transliteration of Habdimelich] was not a rebel who reformed the monetary system: he merely completed the process of

²⁹ Makin, *Pound's Cantos*, 279.

³⁰ Bacigalupo, *The Forméd Trace*, 340.

³¹ This is Pound's version of the name; the *Oxford Dictionary of Islam* has Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan. See Shaheen, "A Note on the Spelling of 'Habdimelich' for 'Abd Al-Malik' in *The Cantos*." Del Mar and, on one occasion, Pound use "Abd-el-Melik" (See *History of Monetary Systems*, 126, quoted in Shaheen, "The Story of Abd-el-Melik's Money in Canto XCVI and XCVII," 421, and Pound, *The Cantos*, 688.

³² Terrell, *A Companion*, 602.

³³ Bacigalupo, *The Forméd Trace*, 343.

Arabizing the coinage which had been going on for some time.”³⁴ Shaheen’s complaint can be seen as representative of some of the problems that arise from Pound’s technique in XCVI: Pound relies on a small selection of unusual texts and seems to insist on their useful veracity, yet he also seems relatively unconcerned with the final “truth” of those texts, exhibiting an almost cavalier disregard from the internal consistency of his sources. It is as if his sources have now taken on a kind of totemic power as *sources*, and that that capacity is the important thing about them, rather than the information or apparent truth they may or may not contain.

Justinian II’s involvement also brings us to medieval Byzantium, the central locale of XCVI. Pound wrote to Olivia Rossetti Agresti that “ALL Byzantine history [...] is part of black out,”³⁵ suggesting that readings of this period had been suppressed by historians in support of the official, liberal view of history. Canto XCVI now turns to redressing this unbalance, with a long description of the organisation of Byzantine trade and economics, under the rule of Roman Emperor in the East Leo the Wise (866-912) and a text initially produced (though later much-amended) under his rule; a work variously known as *The Eparch’s Book*, *The Eparch’s Edict*, *The Book of the Eparch* and *The Book of the Prefect* (for Marsh “the scary *Eparch’s Book*”³⁶) and read by Pound in an edition the Swiss professor Jules Nicole, *Le Livre du Préfet* (1893), which contains a Greek transcription and Latin and French translations of the original text. For Cookson *The Eparch’s Book* becomes “a sort of map for the possibility of an ideal city,”³⁷ perhaps a late iteration of the “Aquinas map,”³⁸ but one that is marvellously different from Dante’s steady progress: an apparently counter-intuitive choice for a paradisaical document.

The Eparch’s Book is comprised of 22 chapters of regulation pertaining to the guilds whose activities made up much of the economic life of Byzantium. The Eparch was something like the

³⁴ Shaheen, “The Story of Abd-el- Melik’s Money in Canto XCVI and XCVII,” 421.

³⁵ Pound, “*I Cease Not to Yowl*”, 174.

³⁶ Marsh, *Ezra Pound*, 189.

³⁷ Cookson, *A Guide to The Cantos*, 123.

³⁸ “As to the *form* of *The Cantos*. All I can say or pray is: *wait* till it’s there. I mean wait till I get ’em written and then if it don’t show, I will start exegesis. I haven’t an Aquinas map; Aquinas *not* valid now.” Pound, *Letters of Ezra Pound*, 323.

mayor of the city, and was responsible for the enforcement of the strict rules set out in this text; rules which governed the processes of production and exchange in the city, thereby directly affecting its social cohesion and character. As Phillip Sherrard suggests, “it was intended to regulate the social and economic sphere of life in the manner in which God regulated the cosmos”³⁹; a kind of natural harmony, then, but one backed up by the threat of strict punishments, which ensured, in Sherrard’s words, “that no one should overstep the measure of justice.”⁴⁰ The chapters of *The Eparch’s* book are devoted to the organisation and regulation of: notaries; dealers in bullion and money-lenders (these first two sections are by far the longest, and the ones that Pound is most interested in); bankers and money-changers; merchants of silk stuffs; merchants of manufactured goods imported from Syria and Baghdad; raw silk merchants; raw silk dressers; silk dyers; linen merchants; perfumers; (wax-chandlers and taper-makers; soap-chandlers; grocers; saddlers; butchers; pork butchers; fishmongers; bakers; inn-keepers; the deputy of the Eparch; agents and assessors of the market and contractors (of various kinds including carpenters, gypsum workers, marble masons, locksmiths and painters).⁴¹

David Moody writes that *The Eparch’s Book* “was the earliest attempt to legislate in detail for the good government of a market economy.”⁴² The work’s organisational function would have appealed to Pound, as well as its age and provenance, its existence as a text, and what Bacigalupo calls its “corporative leanings,”⁴³ which we can see in its organisation of work into guilds. We should remember that Pound’s and Mussolini’s political journeys towards fascism both began through involvement in versions of Guild Socialism through contact with A.R. Orage at the *New Age*. As Pound notes in 1936,

Orage grew *out of* Guild Socialism. The Duce grew out of
Guild Socialism, and refers now and again to Proudhon.

³⁹ Cookson, *A Guide to The Cantos*, 123.

⁴⁰ Cookson, *A Guide to The Cantos*, 123.

⁴¹ Terrell, “The Eparch’s Book,” 228. Terrell’s essay gives us the most detailed analysis of how *The Eparch’s Book* works in *The Cantos*, demonstrating how Pound follows Nicole’s edition with a method somewhere between composition, note-taking and anthologising.

⁴² Moody, *The Tragic Years*, 347–48.

⁴³ Bacigalupo, *The Forméd Trace*, 343.

A representative body wherein each kind of worker is represented by a man of his own trade cannot fall into [...] servility.⁴⁴

This kind of “representative body wherein each kind of worker is represented by a man of his own trade” would seem to be close to Pound’s understanding of *The Eparch’s Book*. Similarly to the Magna Carta, which also appears repeatedly in the late *Cantos* (“the root is that charter” [CVII/777]), *The Eparch’s Book* would seem to offer a model whereby tyranny at the hands of the privileged is resisted and justice codified and guaranteed. Just as the Magna Carta meant the dilution of royal power rather than the arrival of democracy, however, the guilds of Constantinople should not be read as an early appearance of organised labour, for we might ask who would really benefit from the strictures detailed in *The Eparch’s Book*. It should be noted that among the first things that Pound chooses to include from his source are the details of punishments; “flogged and liable to confiscation”⁴⁵ in both Latin and Greek—suggesting that Pound was not unaware or uncomfortable with the potential violence of his utopian text, though he is wary enough of the import of such lines to leave them in both Latin and Greek, but to withhold his English

verberator et bonus mulcator

until later: παιδεύεσθω καὶ εἰσκομιζέσθω (XCVI/679). This phrase is translated indirectly in punishments such as the threat to be “shaved, whipped and chucked out” (XCVI/685) that appear later in the Canto. In fact, the litany of punishments in this passage speaks of Pound’s approval of the practical oppressiveness of *The Eparch’s Book*, with other threats include the promise that “Whoso tries any monkey-shines / shall be put on a jackass and led through the streets quite / slowly / flogged, shaved, and put out” (XCVI/685–6) and, of goldsmiths, “[i]f they adulterate / cost ’em a hand” (XCVI/687).

The Eparch’s Book was put together to protect privilege—its daily function would have been to help the Eparch to effectively police the city, raise taxes and freeze out artisans unallied with the ruling oligarchy. Rather than reflecting the demands of collective action, the guilds appear designed to maintain the exclusivity of certain trades—to support the monopolies that rile Pound. Makin describes the *Book* as entailing “an unimaginable and arbitrary bureaucracy,”

⁴⁴ Pound, “The Italian Score,” 107.

⁴⁵ This is Terrell’s translation. Terrell, *A Companion*, 603.

going on to point out that in a city organised along such lines there would

be no room for unauthorised young men like Pound's friend Gaudier-Brzeska, who set up shop under the railway arches and invade the territory of the professionals. Between Yeats's Byzantium of tin cockerels in glinting haze, and Pound's of harried shopkeepers, the choice is not attractive.⁴⁶

Be this as it may, Pound incorporated this work into his paradise, and the kind of text that it is (both in itself and in Pound's understanding of it) will have important ramifications for how we understand Pound's late paradise/utopia.

Pound's *Paris Review* interview with Donald Hall in 1960 gives an account of some of Pound's intentions with *Thrones*, offering a picture of a volume that had a clear place and function in the poet's philosophy and the project of *The Cantos*, but which caused the poet great difficulties in its drafting. It also gives us some guidance as to what *The Eparch's Book* meant to Pound and what its function is in Canto XCVI. Pound begins by pointing up the distance between the ordering of *The Cantos* and the "Aquinas map" of *The Divine Comedy*. He tells Hall that he "was not following the three divisions of the *Divine Comedy* exactly. One can't follow the Dantescan cosmos in an age of experiment."⁴⁷ Pound goes on, however, to quickly provide a codicil to this statement: "But I have made the division between people dominated by emotion, people struggling upwards, and those who have some part of the divine wisdom."⁴⁸ This analysis is retrospective, and is unlikely to provide a definitive picture of what Pound was thinking throughout the drafting of *The Cantos*, but it can be relied upon to provide us with an insight of at least one of the ways that Pound was thinking about the project at the time of *Thrones*. He continues: "The thrones in Dante's *Paradiso* are for the spirits of the people who have been responsible for good government. The thrones in the *Cantos* are an attempt to move out from egoism and to establish some definition of an order possible or

⁴⁶ Davie, *Studies in Ezra Pound*, 373.

⁴⁷ Cookson, *A Guide to The Cantos*, xxii.

⁴⁸ Cookson, *A Guide to The Cantos*, xxii.

at any rate conceivable on earth.”⁴⁹ This division, between the possible and the conceivable, is crucial to Pound’s straightened utopianism during these last stretches of *The Cantos*. As Pound moves away from the theological/geographical conceptions of Dante, he is also moving away from the “possible” reforming of society that had dominated his thought and poetics through the 1930s and early 1940s (note the reference in XCVI to the Greek word “αλογίστους” as “quite beautifully used, tho’ utopian” (XCVI/679) which suggests at least a diminution of Pound’s belief in the imminence of a perfected society). As we replace that utopianism with the merely “conceivable,” Pound’s project switches dimension, from being a guide towards a real and improved society to an exercise in conception; a project in which the act of thinking a new society replaces that of making one. Thus we move in this volume from praxis to a kind of Aestheticist theory of utopia; a realignment that explains much of the manner in which Pound’s sources are approached throughout Canto XCVI and the rest of *Thrones*. Pound told Hall that “*Thrones* concerns the states of mind of people responsible for something more than their personal conduct.”⁵⁰ These characters, the enthroned, are the great masters of praxis—the Byzantine emperors and Ataturk (the founder of the Turkish republic, about whom Pound claims *The Eparch’s Book* “was still there for [Mustafa] Kemal in our time” [XCVI/679]) alike, yet they’re not enthroned for their practical achievements, but for their sheer “states of mind,” a category that might see the poet of praxis/theory also accede to paradisaal enthronement. The tension between praxis and conception lies at the heart of the volume’s unique and undervalued poetics. Seen from this perspective, the contradictions between the true purpose of *The Eparch’s Book* and its ostensible paradisaal/utopian function become less important—its utility as a document in support of justice is of little importance to Pound, it is far more significant that the document was written at all and that it can be construed to offer such a vision—the materiality of this argument is its real value, the “materially textual” which Bacigalupo notes as the energising factor in Pound’s approach to documentation in *Thrones*,⁵¹ developing a tendency already noted in the case of “Habdimelich.”

⁴⁹ Cookson, *A Guide to The Cantos*, xxii–xxiii.

⁵⁰ Cookson, *A Guide to The Cantos*, xxiii.

⁵¹ Bacigalupo, *The Forméd Trace*, 340.

Buried in the fragmented notes of this canto we find a crucial, curt statement of Pound's late poetics that we should consider in relation to the adapted utopianism above. Pound interjects, midway through XCVI:

*If we never write anything save what is already
understood, the field of understanding [sic]⁵² will never be
extended. One demands the right, now and again,
to write for a few people with special interests
and whose curiosity reaches into greater detail.*

(XCVI/679)

Pound repeats some abiding concerns here; the didactic is central, the thrust into an educational procedure that is something like “seeding”—aimed at those “whose curiosity reaches into greater detail”—perhaps exactly the readers of *The Hudson Review* in the mid-1950s. We can perhaps understand the hope behind this statement to approach, in some sense, the somewhat balder division of Pound's project as an attempt upon the “possible” and the “conceivable”—we are not important as readers who are likely to put Pound's advice into action, but as co-conspirators capable of thinking these ideas for themselves.

While this intervention perhaps marks out the place of the reader in the canto, later on Pound quotes an uncharacteristically extended extract from his source text regarding the legal requirements appended to the career of clerk, which seem like instructions for reading that might be placed in contrast with the instructions for reading which we have just read:

To be tabulary, must know the Manuale
to recite it, and the Basiliks, 60 books
and draw up an act in the presence, and be sponsored
by the primicier and his colleagues
and have a clear Handschrift
and be neither babbler nor insolent, nor sloppy in habits
and have a style. Without perfect style
might not notice punctuation and phrases

⁵² This mistake is not found in the *Hudson Review* publication of Canto XCVI, but is included in the first edition of *Thrones* and is retained in subsequent New Directions publications of *Thrones* and *The Cantos*.

also ἀλογίστους quite beautifully used tho' utopian		紫	tzu ³
καπηλεύων	or	之	chih ¹
στομύλος ἀγοραῖος	that is "mouthy" forensic	奪	to ^{2 5}
λάλος	babbler	朱	chu ¹
ταραχώδης	as on the East bank from Beaucaire		
μὴ τῆ τοῦ ἐπάρχου ἐσφραγισμένον			
not stamped with the prefect's seal βούλλη			
καμπανὸν νενοθυμένον			
Ducange στατήρ			
Here, surely, is a refinement of language			
	(XCVI/678)		

Pound also translated the passage from the *Analects* in 1951, shortly before working on XCVI—the relative values of red and purple are clearer here than in Terrell's translation:

He said: I hate the way purple spoils vermilion, I hate the way the Chang sonority confuses the music of the Elegantiae, I hate sharp mouths (the clever yawp, mouths set on profits) that overturn states and families.⁵⁴

Confucius equates failure to maintain proper methods of cloth dying with decadence in public life, while the Greek of the *Eparch's Book* recalls a "mouthy" "babbler" haggling, just like the "sharp mouths" of Confucius. Terrell points out that Pound is making "a comparison with royal purple because in the early years only kings could afford it."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Pound, *Poems & Translations*, 740.

⁵⁵ Terrell, *A Companion*, 603.

The colour scheme also brings to mind Pound's *ABC of Reading* (1934), where the poet had outlined his understanding of the Chinese ideogram, its combinatorial possibilities and their usefulness for a modern poetics by showing how he imagined a Chinese writer would "define red":

He puts (or his ancestor put) together the abbreviated pictures
of

ROSE CHERRY

IRON RUST FLAMINGO[.]⁵⁶

The page in Canto XCVI is revealed, in spite of its forbidding complexity, to be consistent with themes and methods that stretch back through Pound's career, though the change in Pound's poetics since his early work is clear. The subject in this late ideogram inhabits that complex junction between lyrical *erhebung* and documentary research that troubled Pound's contemporary reviewers. Market-traders, medieval Byzantium and complaints about new kinds of dye in Confucian China seem far removed from the traditional topics of lyrical poetry, yet, by recollecting the concentration on the quality of concentrated colour, a kind of poetic essence is revealed. An echo of Pound's *Cathay* voice can still be heard in the patterning of colour here ("The purple house and the crimson", for example, in "The River Song"⁵⁷), but it is hard for the reader to arrive at this connection unaided (this is the section of the poem about which Pound had written for those "*whose curiosity reaches into greater detail*"), and the resulting poetry could not be further from Lattimore's Poundian translating mode. The placing of Confucius next to the *Eparch's Book* challenges the conception of what readers like Kearns would consider "a refinement of language" (XCVI/679), forcing a new consideration of where the lyrical might be found.

In spite of his declared antipathy towards Pound's *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones* poetics, Davie, in a crucial late essay entitled "'Res' and 'verba' in *Rock-Drill* and After" (1982), does much to define the field

⁵⁶ Pound, *ABC of Reading*, 22.

⁵⁷ Pound, *Poems & Translations*, 250.

of discussion of that poetics. Davie sets out a distinction between “mimetic” and “structuralist” readings of Pound, suggesting that the traditional, source-hunting Poundians (exemplified, for Davie, by Michael Alexander) privilege the “mimetic” approach, while a new generation pursue a “structuralist” approach to the poet as a player with words (John Stevens Childs is Davie’s example here, of a tendency that has not flourished to the extent that Davie predicted in 1982). This dichotomy is intimately connected to the lyrical/philological divide we have seen. Davie tends

to think that the most pressing dilemma facing Pound’s admirers today is whether such ‘play’ can be considered responsible (as most structuralist theories would agree that it can be), or else must be declared irresponsible (as most mimetic theories have regularly judged it).⁵⁸

These two approaches to the reading of Pound are encapsulated in the terms of Davie’s title, “res” and “verba,” with the first representing the traditionalist mimetic, and the second postmodern structuralism. Davie reads Pound’s position regarding this dichotomy as complex; while Pound’s critical strictures and most famous editorial interventions would seem to unequivocally celebrate “res” in a spirit of bluff practicality, the new poetics of *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones* can be read (as they are by Stevens Childs) as a contradictory celebration of “verba.” Davie, the anti-structuralist, is finally negative in his assessment of such a reading, concluding that “Pound’s claim to *res* not *verba* can be, and must be, vindicated; and that a thorough-going or dogmatic structuralism milks this text, as presumably any other, of human pathos and human significance.”⁵⁹ Makin formulates the argument in a slightly different, though related, way, and also finally offers *Thrones* a negative assessment, writing that

Pound has become a Symbolist [...]. Many will be satisfied to see Pound become a brilliant Symbolist, for to them that is what a Paradise is about: the transition to the purely

⁵⁸ Davie, *Studies in Ezra Pound*, 327.

⁵⁹ Davie, *Studies in Ezra Pound*, 339.

spiritual, that which is of the mind only. But something of Pound's enterprise seems lost.⁶⁰

That which is lost would seem to be “mimetic” historicity. In such a poetics “res” is preferable to “verba”; signified before signifier, a relation that is challenged (in Davie's estimation) “between the conclusion of *Rock-Drill* and the beginning of *Thrones*,” with Canto XCVI exactly the point at which “Pound's word-play ceases to be serious and becomes frivolous.”⁶¹ The idea of a “serious” Poundian word-play is attached to the earlier *Cantos* and Pound's concern with “a disposition which *precedes* the framing of propositions or the making of distinctions”;⁶² that idea that lies behind Pound's interest in Neoplatonic form and what he terms the “rose in the steel dust” (LXXIV/469). Davie's final estimation of *Thrones* was entirely negative. In a later essay (1990's ‘More on the Muddle of *Thrones*’), Davie writes that “[t]he truth is that *Thrones* is largely rubbish, but no one likes to say so”⁶³ and reversed his earlier defence of Pound's *Thrones*-poetics, finally giving it over to the Structuralists, writing that “[t]he *Thrones* sequence as written (though not apparently as the author conceived of it) cannot be saved from the structuralists and post-structuralists; and just that is what is wrong with it.”⁶⁴

Thrones-Pound is perhaps inverting his res and verba, the very words of his source texts taking on the weight of law, then. Bacigalupo notes Pound's overriding interest in the “materially textual” in Canto XCVI, implying that it overrides the poet's commitment to argument, with *The Eparch's Book* becoming “the background *in fieri* from which the word of the Law may emerge.”⁶⁵ Peter Nicholls offers a related argument that similarly detects an emerging dialectical complexity in the poetics of *Thrones*. He locates much of this difficulty in Pound's interest in coinage and money (as opposed to wealth); introduced in that “crux” by “Habdimelich” and Justinian II, and repeated in the concern with dyes. For Nicholls, in late Pound “[w]hat is fetishised is [...] the weightless and insubstantial monetary sign” rather than money itself (exchange

⁶⁰ Makin, *Pound's Cantos*, 258.

⁶¹ Davie, *Studies in Ezra Pound*, 332.

⁶² Davie, *Studies in Ezra Pound*, 332.

⁶³ Davie, *Studies in Ezra Pound*, 373.

⁶⁴ Davie, *Studies in Ezra Pound*, 376.

⁶⁵ Bacigalupo, *The Forméd Trace*, 340.

value, surplus value or otherwise); it becomes rather more like “verba” than “res,” then; all the facticity of Pound’s sources, like Pound’s poetics, supporting a new kind of detached signifying, because “[b]y a significant inversion of the conventional trope, ‘good’ money comes to be defined through its proximity to the genuinely creative signifying system of writing,”⁶⁶ “a Platonic hierarchy in which the verbal sign is the absolute measure of authority.”⁶⁷ In spite of the fact that the materiality of monetary issue is a key theme in this part of the poem, money is also dematerialising throughout XCVI.

I would argue that the tension that Davie opens up, and which Bacigalupo and Nicholls tentatively celebrate, bolsters Pound’s argument in the late *Cantos*, and its full emergence in *Thrones* is crucial to Pound’s paradisaical project, demonstrating just how far Pound had gone beyond Pound (the Pound of Lattimore et al.) by the time he came to write the end of *The Cantos*. Moody is helpful here, referring to Pound’s poetics at this stage as “metapoetry,” with the poem not, “as it had been up to *The Pisan Cantos*, a composition of immediately luminous and intelligible details, but rather a composition of anagogical symbols which at times becomes a form of verbal algebra.”⁶⁸ This anagogic turn equips the poem for the spiritual uplift that Pound requires for the final sections of *The Cantos*. It is because of this change of approach that a text as apparently unsuited to a utopia as *The Eparch’s Book* can be raised up to the paradisaical.

⁶⁶ Nicholls, *Ezra Pound: Politics, Economics and Writing*, 214.

⁶⁷ Nicholls, *Ezra Pound: Politics, Economics and Writing*, 216–17.

⁶⁸ Moody, *The Tragic Years*, 399.

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