

HISTORICIZING MODERNISM

THE
LATE
CANTOS OF
EZRA POUND

COMPOSITION, REVISION,
PUBLICATION

MICHAEL KINDELLAN

BLOOMSBURY

The Late Cantos of Ezra Pound

Historicizing Modernism

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The Late Cantos of Ezra Pound

Composition, Revision, Publication

Michael Kindellan

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Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA

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First published 2017
Paperback edition first published 2019

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Kindellan, Michael, author.

Title: The late cantos of Ezra Pound : composition, revision, dissemination /
Michael Kindellan.

Description: London ; New York : Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. | Series:
Historicizing modernism | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017010086 | ISBN 9781474258746 (hardback) | ISBN
9781474258753 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Pound, Ezra, 1885-1972. Cantos. | BISAC: LITERARY CRITICISM /
Poetry. | LITERARY CRITICISM / American / General.

Classification: LCC PS3531.O82 C2859 2017 | DDC 811/.52--dc23 LC record available at
<https://lccn.loc.gov/2017010086>

ISBN: HB: 978-1-4742-5874-6

PB: 978-1-3501-0723-6

ePDF: 978-1-4742-5876-0

ePub: 978-1-4742-5875-3

Series: Historicizing Modernism

Typeset by Fakenham Prepress Solutions, Fakenham, Norfolk NR21 8NN

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In gratitude and friendship, this book is for Richard.

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Series Editors' Preface

This book series is devoted to the analysis of late-nineteenth to twentieth-century literary Modernism within its historical context. *Historicizing Modernism* thus stresses empirical accuracy and the value of primary sources (such as letters, diaries, notes, drafts, marginalia or other archival deposits) in developing monographs, scholarly editions, and edited collections on Modernist authors and their texts. This may take a number of forms, such as manuscript study and annotated volumes; archival editions and genetic criticism; as well as mappings of interrelated historical milieus or ideas. To date, no book series has laid claim to this interdisciplinary, source-based territory for modern literature. Correspondingly, two burgeoning sub-disciplines of Modernism, Beckett studies and Pound studies, feature heavily as exemplars of the opportunities presented by manuscript research more widely. While an additional range of “canonical” authors will be covered here, this series also highlights the centrality of supposedly “minor” or occluded figures, not least in helping to establish broader intellectual genealogies of Modernist writing. Furthermore, while the series will be weighted towards the English-speaking world, studies of non-Anglophone Modernists whose writings are ripe for archivally based exploration shall also be included.

A key aim of such historicizing is to reach beyond the familiar rhetoric of intellectual and artistic “autonomy” employed by many Modernists and their critical commentators. Such rhetorical moves can and should themselves be historically situated and reintegrated into the complex continuum of individual literary practices. This emphasis upon the contested self-definitions of Modernist writers, thinkers, and critics may, in turn, prompt various reconsiderations of the boundaries delimiting the concept “Modernism” itself. Similarly, the very notion of “historicizing” Modernism remains debatable, and this series by no means discourages more theoretically informed approaches. On the contrary, the editors believe that the historical specificity encouraged by *Historicizing Modernism* may inspire a range of fundamental critiques along the way.

Matthew Feldman
Erik Tønning

Preface

This book forwards a series of speculative arguments about the material history of the late cantos of Ezra Pound, construing this history as something implicitly resistant to, and therefore critical of, the kind of textual scholarship I also try to deploy. Knowing something about how Pound planned and wrote *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones*, how he revised them (or did *not* revise them, as was often the case), and the circumstances of their publication can lead to new insights at the same time as creating new obstacles for interpretation. Combining an investigation into how these sections were written with an explication of what they mean is appropriate to the late cantos especially because they, more than any other cantos, constantly foreground writerly concerns, making them into topics and subjects of the poetry.

In what follows I do not propose to do much in the way of elucidating what seems to me to be Pound's purposeful opacity. The aim of this book is not to provide some radically new revelations. In fact, only rarely do I even try to shed new light on old readings. As such, this book is susceptible to the entirely legitimate criticism that it shirks some of the hard and necessary graft involved in identifying and elucidating extensive networks of reference, associations and cross-linkages that imbricate these cantos at every turn. Instead, this book proposes to read the late cantos philologically, looking into their stages of development, from first inception to final published version(s), and to extrapolate therefrom new understandings about the processes and procedures that governed Pound's writing. Even though this decidedly modest attempt itself cannot come close to giving a comprehensive account of *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones*, my underlying argument is that a more detailed description of how this poetry came into being will contribute to a clearer understanding of its significance.

That said, such reasoning might easily apply to every literary artifact ever created; indeed, scholars, editors, and literary critics who are either sympathetic to materialist hermeneutics or who are interested at some level in how

texts come into existence would take this supposition as read. What makes my approach—one that combines elements of textual scholarship (the investigation into the provenance and development of texts) with literary criticism (the interpretation or evaluation of those texts)—particularly germane to cantos 85 through 109 I can only hope to show over the course of this study.

Acknowledgments

This project was begun during an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation postdoctoral research fellowship (2012–14). I am enormously grateful to that organization for its support, as well as that afforded to me by Prof. Sylvia Mayer and my host institution, Universität Bayreuth. I am also very grateful to colleagues at the University of Sheffield, particularly the head of the School of English, Prof. Adam Piette, and Charlotte Harden, coordinator of the Vice Chancellor's Fellowship scheme, who have graciously allowed me the time needed to finish writing.

By the time this book comes into print, some early sections of it may well have appeared, in rather different forms, in *Paideuma* and *Glossator*. I am grateful to Ben Friedlander and Betsy Rose of the former, as well as to Alexander Howard and Ryan Dobran of the latter, for their support and encouragement. I would also like to thank the anonymous peer-reviewers of both journals for their comments and advice. Some ideas, arguments, and examples appear intermittently throughout the first chapter (mainly pages 12–24) that were developed in grateful collaboration with Joshua Kotin, in an essay we co-wrote called “*The Cantos* and Pedagogy.” Since my recent thinking has been deeply influenced by our work together, the reader may wish to read chapter 1 alongside our essay and consider the former my extended meditation on the latter. “*The Cantos* and Pedagogy” is due for publication in *Modernist Cultures* later this year.

Having undertaken some archival work over the past few years, I remain deeply indebted to a number of archivists and librarians: Ingrid Lennon-Pressy, Diane Ducharme, and Nancy Kuhl of the Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Raffaella Gobbo of the Fondo Scheiwiller, Archivi della Parola dell'Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale, Università degli Studi di Milano; Gabriel Swift and AnnaLee Pauls of the Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University; Leslie Morris and her colleagues of the Houghton Library, Harvard University; Richard Watson and

Chido Muchemwa of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin; Erika Dowell and Carin Graves of the Lilly Library, Indiana University; James Maynard of The Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, SUNY Buffalo; Josh McKeon of the Archives and Manuscript Division, Berg Collection, New York Public Library; Mark E. Tillson and Christian Goodwillie at the Burke Library, Hamilton College; Anna Flügge of the Amerika-Institut at LMU; and Katherine McInnis of *Meanjin*.

I have had fruitful, often necessary conversations with many friends and colleagues over the past several years. Tim Redman, Zhaoming Qian, John Gery, Alec Marsh, Lucas Klein, Meredith Warren, Ranjan Sen, Roxana Preda, Steven Yao, Peter Manson, Ben Dawson, Chris Woods, and Mark Byron all provided timely and often essential expertise. I owe especial debts of gratitude to Miranda Hickman, Peter Nicholls, Sam Ladkin, Eric White, Peter Middleton, and Keston Sutherland, without whose insights and criticisms I could not have begun to frame the outlines of this project let alone get it off the ground. I have been in regular contact with Alex Pestell who has continually offered much needed critical common sense.

David Avital, Mark Richardson, and Lucy Brown at Bloomsbury, as well as series editors Matthew Feldman and Erik Tønning, have been gracious and patient and kind. David Tucker has been integral throughout, both in terms of guidance and support.

To my wife Julia and my two young daughters, Greta and Agnes, *was kann ich noch sagen? Ich danke euch sehr!* Now that this work is done there should be fewer cries, screams, and tantrums about the house.

Throughout, I have been granted unrestricted access to Richard Taylor's monumental project "Annals, Documentation for a Variorum Edition of *The Cantos*." This as-yet unpublished work is a breathtaking achievement of individual scholarship that gathers together, in a file currently some 300,000 words long, an enormous mass of chronologically presented ancillary information regarding the composition, revision, and publication of Pound's *Cantos*. Taylor's *Annals* gives a detailed history of the development of Pound's poem; it has proved an invaluable resource to a project such as this. Without his work, mine would be all the poorer.

Abbreviations

Works by Pound

- ABCR* *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1960).
- Cantos* *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1975).
- CWC* *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, ed. Haun Saussy, Jonathan Stalling, and Lucas Klein (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).
- EPCF* *Ezra Pound's Chinese Friends: Stories in Letters*, ed. Zhaoming Qian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- EPJL* *Ezra Pound and James Laughlin: The Selected Letters*, ed. David M. Gordon (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1994).
- LE* *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1960).
- SL* *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907–1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: New Directions, 1971).
- SP* *Selected Prose, 1909–1965*, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973).

Archives

- APICE* Fondo Scheiwiller, Archivi della Parola dell'Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale, Università degli Studi di Milano.
- EHA* Eva Hesse Archive of Modernism and Literary Translation, Die Bayerische Amerika-Akademie, Munich, Germany.

- EPC* Ezra Pound Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.
- EPP* Ezra Pound Papers, YCAL MSS 43, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. References to *EPP* are followed by folder number.
- HRA* Ezra Pound Material 1949–1960, Subseries 3A–G, Hudson Review Archives (C1091), Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
- NDPC* New Directions Publishing Corp. Records, circa 1932–1997, MS Am 2077, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
- NHP* Norman Holmes Pearson Papers, YCAL MSS 899, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. This collection contains box but not folder numbers.
- SMP* Sheri Martinelli Papers, YCAL MSS 868, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. This collection contains box but not folder numbers.

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Note on the Text

Every attempt has been made to render Pound's words, and indeed those of his correspondents, as written, which means that I have not tried to correct anyone's eccentricities of syntax or spelling. In square brackets, I do occasionally make minor editorial interpolations to avoid what Pound colorfully referred to as "further dambiguities." Where not otherwise attributed, translations are my own.

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In addition, for permission to quote from unpublished correspondence and other archival material, I am grateful to Eva Hesse; Alina Kalczyńska, executor of the estate of Vanni Scheiwiller; the Estate of Frederick Morgan; the New Directions Ownership Trust, which represents the estate of James Laughlin; the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, which represents the estate of Norman Holmes Pearson; and the individual estates of Sheri Martinelli, Willis Hawley, Achilles Fang, Hugh Kenner, Archibald MacLeish, George Oppen, and John Espey. All copyrights are retained by their respective holders.

“I have always loathed reading”: Pound and Philology

The persistent avoidance throughout a full decade of most of the past and all living authors of high dynamism, the perpetual dalliance with tepidities, of blunt and crummy mentalities, leave a printed page that I find utmost difficulty in traversing.¹

On May 17, 1955, Ezra Pound wrote to Michael Reck from St. Elizabeths Hospital: “I have always loathed reading, and can now read practically nothing save to learn what I don’t know / FACTS.”² If the sentiment expressed here is sincere, the gentle and long-suffering reader will probably be taken by surprise. Surely Pound’s “laborious appropriations”³ of classical—and, by this stage in *The Cantos*, increasingly recondite—literatures indicate the work of a poet not in hate with but in fact excessively passionate about reading? Is Pound not the twentieth century’s pre-eminent poet-philologist, literally *in love* with *logos*? Entering at that time its late stages of composition, what is this vast, compendious, encyclopedic, and impressively intertextual poem, if not a testament to the enduring value of and pleasure in reading? Surely Pound stands unambiguously at the leading edge of “the tradition of twentieth century philological poetry”⁴ and as such, is committed deeply to a scrupulous attention to language in all its material and transmitted forms?

Counterintuitive as Pound’s disclosure might seem, he made similar statements throughout his life, albeit with neither the frequency nor the

¹ Ezra Pound, “Toward Orthology,” *EPP*, 6062.

² Quoted in Michael Reck, *Ezra Pound: A Close-Up* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), facsimile opposite 99.

³ Keston Sutherland, “J. H. Prynne and Philology” (PhD thesis, Cambridge University, 2004), 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

vehemence of some of his other, more celebrated claims. As early as 1911, he wrote that since “the eye-sight is valuable, we should read less, far less than we do.” Besides, the “best of knowledge,” he continued, is “in the air” and not, therefore, upon any printed page.⁵ Towards the opposite end of his prose-writing career, Pound elaborated further. In *Guide to Kulchur*, published still some twenty years before his letter to Reck, we read (*if we must*):

To read and be conscious of the act of reading is for some men (the writer among them) to suffer. I loathe the operation. My eyes are geared for the horizon. Nevertheless I do read for days on end when I have caught the scent of a trail. And I, like any other tired businessman, read also when I am “sunk”, when I am too exhausted to use my mind to any good purpose.⁶

These remarks point to a rather peculiar fact: for Pound, writing existed in a deeply *problematic* relation to reading. Far from being complementary activities, the two are if not opposed then radically disarticulated. Rather than being a poem that celebrates (however masochistically) its status, as Margaret Dickie once so brilliantly described it, as a “fragment between its beginning in other writing and its end in other readings,”⁷ *The Cantos* as *writing* could itself constitute an explicit protest *against* reading.

In this light, the oft-cited slogan, “*Dichten = condensare*,”⁸ which Pound borrowed from Basil Bunting, sounds more like a plan designed to allay suffering than a prescription for new poetic texts. That Pound found reading loathsome is supremely ironic given the fact he dedicated most of his adult life to writing one of the longest poems in the language, so that a strong detestation of reading is expressed as an equally strong compulsion towards writing. This disjunction results, somewhat predictably, in the following double-standard: the poem, though written in flagrant contravention of

⁵ “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris,” *SP*, 23.

⁶ *GK*, 55. Pound echoes Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Nature,” so that his being a poet is somehow consistent with his inability to notice certain detail: “there is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all parts, that is, the poet”; and later: “the health of the eye seems to demand a horizon. We are never tired, so long as we can see far enough.” *Emerson’s Essays*, ed. Arthur Hobson Quinn (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1920), 3, 7. Relevantly, the expansive vision Emerson describes chimes with Pound’s own condemnation of “philology” as kind of *short-sighted* provincialism (more about which below): “Take a man’s mind off the human value of the poem he is reading (and in this case the human value is the art value), switch it on to some question of grammar and you begin his dehumanisation.” “Provincialism the Enemy,” *SP*, 197.

⁷ Margaret Dickie, “*The Cantos*: Slow Reading,” *ELH* 51, no. 4 (Winter 1984): 823.

⁸ *ABCR*, 36.

normative standards of attention, diligence and care nevertheless demands as much from its readers. In the late verse especially, Pound cultivates an air of haste, approximation and urgency—

in 辭
discourse
what matters is
to get it across e poi basta⁹ 達

—even though it is *not* normally read hastily or urgently or with only approximate attention. Instead, we usually read *The Cantos* with a great deal of scholarly care, a fact which reveals a further irony, namely that Pound's attempts to circumvent, *détourne*, travesty and otherwise eschew the protocols of philology have led to the formation of so many more philologists, almost to the exclusion of every other kind of reader. No poem I can think of is so temperamentally opposed to institutionalized learning, and yet—despite steady commercial saleability—no poem is so ensconced within the ivory tower.

(Polite notice: there exists a comparatively small but highly informative body of scholarly work on Pound's renowned antipathy for philology, an antipathy expressed most often and most eloquently early in his career. Generally, this scholarship focuses on what Pound said about philology and why, offering biographical, historical, and cultural context by way of explanation. This study, though deeply indebted to such work, neither rehearses these arguments nor adopts methodologies used in making them. Instead, I attempt to describe, and where possible assess, the impact of Pound's attitude to certain scholarly approaches upon the theory and practice of his own late work. That is to say, I am interested in how and why his disdain for what he

⁹ *Cantos*, 79/486. The Chinese characters in question, 辭 *tz'u* (M6984) and 達 *ta* (M5956), meaning "Words; speech. A sentence, an expression or phrase. A message; instructions; statements. A form of poetical composition" and "Intelligent; successful. To succeed. To obtain advancement. To be in office. To apprehend. Prominent" respectively, were for Pound a summary of Confucius's thoughts on style: "He said: Problem of style? Get the meaning across and then STOP" The abbreviated rendering of the second ideogram may be thought of as either a consideration to the reader, limiting the communication to only the bare essentials, or as a nuisance to him or her, impeding the search for a referent. The numbers in parentheses refer to ideogram entries not pages. Unless otherwise stated, the "meanings" ascribed to "ideograms" throughout are derived from *Mathews* not because they are necessarily correct but because they are usually those Pound consulted.

once called “scholar-sheep”¹⁰ is not just complementary to, but constitutive of, the verse that comprises *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones*.)

The fact remains that Pound’s staunch refusal of philological care is habitually responded to by scholars with even stauncher demonstrations of the need for philology as such: the hermeneutics Pound effectively banished from his own reading practices are precisely those employed by scholars in theirs. In other words, there exists an essential—and ultimately irreconcilable—disjunction between the kind of reading exhibited *in* Pound’s late cantos and the kind of reading imposed *by* them.

One consequence of the disjunction between disparate reading strategies is evident in the schedule of difficulties *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones* present: rampant intertextuality, obscurity of reference, violent shifts in semantic and syntactic registers, cacophonous deployment of multiple languages all exist in part because Pound, actually *in hate* with reading, moved so quickly through whatever text he had before him (his theories of luminous detail and ideogrammic writing were attempts to save readers from the drudgery of their vocation). We, in contrast, and in many cases as a direct result, cannot do the same. Dickie put it succinctly, extending a line of thinking that reaches back via Roman Jakobson to Friedrich Nietzsche, when she wrote that Pound’s “rapid switches in language and contexts” solicit “the art of slow reading”; since the poem is, in her opinion, “open, fragmented and discontinuous,” we *must* read slowly.¹¹ In the course, as it happens, of advocating the opposite approach, that is, “fast” reading, Donald Davie nevertheless noted that:

the *Cantos*, erudite though they are, consistently frustrate the sort of reading that is synonymous with “study,” reading such as goes on in the seminar room or the discussion group. It is hopeless to go at them cannily, not moving on to line three until one is sure of line two. They must be taken in big gulps or not at all. This means reading without comprehension? Yes, if by comprehension we mean a set of propositions that can be laid end to end.¹²

¹⁰ Ezra Pound, *DK/ Some Letters of Ezra Pound*, ed. Louis Dudek (Montréal: DC Books, 1974), 72.

¹¹ Dickie, “*The Cantos*: Slow Reading,” 819. Mark Kyburz also speaks of what he calls Pound’s method or model of slow reading. See Mark Kyburz, “*Voi Altri Pochi*”: *Ezra Pound and his Audience, 1908–1925* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1996), 52, 57, 132–3.

¹² Donald Davie, *Ezra Pound* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 84. Davie does not deny that “some teasing out of quite short excerpts, even some hunting up of sources and allusions, is profitable at some stage”; and also concedes that though “the verse lines of *The Cantos* have to be read *fast* for their meanings,” they should be read “*slow* for their sounds.” Davie, *Pound*, 93.

Christine Froula makes a related point:

However fundamental our scholarly tracing of sources and their interrelations is to study of *The Cantos*, it is not in itself the act of reading Pound designed, and it is finally only groundwork and prelude to the actual challenge his poem including history presents.¹³

Which is to say that Pound's anti-philological disposition, insofar as it exists, highlights, therefore, a problem both *of* and *for* scholarship. Under pressure, if not attack, is what Pound considered to be the pervasive positivistic attitude of scholarship at large (though he would not have used a term like "positivistic"), so that a consequence of his distaste for "criticism" is a structural sabotage of it, a claim that this book as a whole works towards bringing into greater focus. Pound's contradictory, obscure, and, in the end, highly idiosyncratic methods of composition, revision, and dissemination must become, I mean to suggest, the objects of critical inquiry because the late cantos are not designed to reward reading strategies that we learn in universities. Davie's larger point is that a reader's "bewilderment" must be consciously retained. While it must of course be admitted that aforementioned difficulties characterize *The Cantos* more generally, so too must it be admitted that by the 1950s they had become especially acute:

the mere look of Canto 85 on the page, especially the very beautiful Italian printing of *Rock-Drill*, announces itself as "unreadable" [...] This is at least an advance on the Chinese History and American History cantos, which looked readable but were not. All the same, what are we to do with it? Most readers will understandably decide that life is too short and close the book—though reluctantly, because of the beauty in the look of it.¹⁴

Such unreadability is partly what attracts scholarly attention in the first place (the present book is itself moved by this attraction).

Another way of framing the central interpretive problem of the late cantos is to suggest a troubled rapport between aesthetics and legibility. Towards the

¹³ Christine Froula, *To Write Paradise: Style and Error in Pound's Cantos* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 165. Cf. Michael Coyle's suggestion that "although Pound was unquestionably interested in his source texts, this was not the kind of reading he sought to produce." Michael Coyle, *Ezra Pound, Popular Genres, and the Discourse of Culture* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 226.

¹⁴ Donald Davie, *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 204–5.

end of his “de luxe” period (roughly 1930), a younger Pound satirized this conundrum:

“ Buk! ” said the Second Baronet, “ eh...
 “ Thass a funny lookin’ buk ” said the Baronet
 Looking at Bayle, folio, 4 vols. in gilt leather, “ Ah...
 “ Wu... Wu... wot you goin’ eh to do with ah...
 “ ... ah read-it? ”

Sic loquitur eques.¹⁵

In *Rock-Drill*, Pound subjects his readers to something more audacious. The question now is no longer merely *are* you going to read it, but *can* you?

not water, ôu iu chouèi	身		
	戾	min	
	監	kién	10.12
There be thy mirror in men.	土		
	中		
	旦	Tán	
	日	iue	
	配	pèi	
	皇	houàng	

¹⁵ *Cantos*, 28/139. For a longer discussion of the relation in Pound’s thinking between beauty, ownership, and legibility, see my, “Ownership and interpretation: on Ezra Pound’s deluxe first editions,” in *Reconnecting Aestheticism and Modernism: Continuities, Revisions, Speculations*, ed. Bénédicte Coste, Catherine Delyfer, and Christine Reynier (New York: Routledge, 2016), 187–202.

XIII, 9

k'i p'eng

其

朋

Odysseus "to no man"

火

tcho

敬

and you can know the sincere¹⁶

I read self-consciously exotic passages like this one as demonstrative of a work, despite appearances to the contrary, formally *closed* to the myriad literary possibilities of multilingual writing events (though here just English and Chinese). Readers competent in English are radically excluded from the discourse because it is mostly in Chinese; readers competent in Chinese are impeded by nonsensical appropriation: the second ideogram in the sequence, 戾 (M3854), meaning "To do violence. Perverse; rebellious. Calamities; tribulations; miseries; crime; sin," is a misprint for 民 (M4508), "The people; mankind," so that what Pound probably meant as "supervise the people" reads more like "oversee violence/perversity." The other ideograms are excerpted from disparate parts of Couvreur's *Chou King*.

Pound's protests against reading manifest, as in the foregoing passage, as a fidgeting inconsistency whose startling juxtapositions throw up as much confusion as insight and makes that self-same activity all the more challenging for us. Though less ostentatiously exotic—it has markedly fewer ideograms, for example—*Thrones* is arguably even *more* recondite than *Rock-Drill*, while rendering questions about reading and intelligibility increasingly central and urgent. David Moody has suggested, in contradistinction to Davie's remarks about the visual allure of *Rock-Drill*, that in *Thrones* "Pound is not writing now for aesthetic effect" at all; instead, Pound said his "intentions were paideutic and analogical," "a form of verbal algebra."¹⁷ The result of which is usually a

¹⁶ *Cantos*, 85/554–5.

¹⁷ A. David Moody, *Ezra Pound: Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3: 399.

considerable abbreviation of style, at times so extreme that Richard Sieburth, commenting upon Canto 97, remarked:

the economy of this text is virtually autistic. Pound seems to have wilfully withdrawn his poem from circulation and deposited its signs in a secret account whose arcane dividends are accessible only to the initiate. If there is an economy to this text, then, it is primarily self-referential, autarkic: the reader is more or less precluded from participating in its hermetic systems of exchange.¹⁸

In some senses, Pound understood readerly access to this later work as a process of habituation, a kind of non-associative education wherein learning takes place only after the repeated presentation of stimuli. As Pound wrote to Vanni Scheiwiller, whose Milan-based press, All’Insegna del Pesce d’Oro, first published both *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones*:

nobody can understand what the final cantares are ABOUT until they have read the earlier ones/ hard enough to DRILL an idea into the mush headed mokes ANYhow. And I doubt if anyone will have the necessary technique until they have been thru the earlier parts of the poEM. poEM, not poems.¹⁹

On the face of it, Pound makes a fairly banal point. As with a great many works of literary art, if you want to know what is happening *now* you must have an inkling about what happened *before*—though, interestingly, Pound implies the process entails a gradual familiarization with technique rather than, say, narrative action. As Pound put it to Ingrid Davies, with whom he carried on a lengthy correspondence during his time in St. Elizabeths, most readers have “minds so LOW that they eggspeck the 85th Canter of a long poEM to be instantly understandable without ref/ to preceding parts of the poEM.”²⁰

And yet, much of this late verse is actually composed for those, as Pound phrases it in Canto 91, “who are skilled in fire.”²¹ Like any aptitude, acquiring this skill (whatever it may be) is partly a function of one’s innate ability, and

¹⁸ Richard Sieburth, “In Pound We Trust: The Economy of Poetry / The Poetry of Economics,” *Critical Inquiry* 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1987): 144. Cf. Peter Nicholls’ more recent remarks that as *The Cantos* progresses it becomes “ever more recondite and privatized.” Peter Nicholls, “*The Cantos: Thrones de los Cantares*,” in *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia*, ed. Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos and Stephen J. Adams (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 46.

¹⁹ November 14, 1956 Letter, *APICE*.

²⁰ June 4, 1955 Letter, *EPC*, Box 5, Folder 15.

²¹ *Cantos*, 91/615.