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Chapter 20. Canto 32

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First published with Cantos 31 and 33 in the Summer 1931 issue of *Pagany: A Native Quarterly*, Canto 32 remains a curiously elusive text when compared to the more closely-scrutinized Cantos it appeared alongside. And yet, as an example of the "American turn" in Pound's Middle Cantos, it neatly encapsulates the tensions that characterize his relationships not only with his homeland, but with the many literary milieus that he belonged to in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Indeed, Canto 32 exhibits some of the major antitheses that underwrite *The Cantos* themselves: sardonically didactic in some areas, yet collegiate, even collusive in others; opaque passages of textual collage in one section give way to pleas for clarity in another; and epistemological meditations frequently segue way into ledgers of commodities and materials. Its opening lines distil such dichotomies neatly:

> "The revolution", said Mr Adams
> "Took place in the minds of the people."
> …with sixty cannon, ten tons of powder,
> 10,000 muskets and bayonets, lead, bed-covers,
> Uniforms and a colonel, to affirm their neutrality… (*Cantos* 157)[1]

From the start of Canto 32, then, Pound counterpoints the lofty ideals of the American Revolution, articulated in 1815 by John Adams in a letter to Dr. J. Morse,[2] with the material instruments of their prosecution (a gulf hinted at by the indent in the first line in its *Pagany* presentation). In Cantos 31–33, Pound erects lattices of lists, sums, transactions, and valuations amongst the axioms and observations extracted from the writings of Revolutionary figures to negotiate a new relationship between poetry and its socio-political contexts.

By 1931, the cultural upheavals caused by the Great Depression had become deeply entrenched. Of the "American Cantos," Canto 32 especially gestures towards the economic and human costs of military conflict, and echoes of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" surface in

Pound's quotation of Jefferson: "much desired that war/ be avoided" (*Cantos* 158). Indeed, Canto 32 is haunted by the possibility of war precipitated by an economic or political crisis, a sentiment Pound had articulated in his 1921 review of C.H. Douglas's *Credit Power and Democracy* in *Contact* 4, in which he implied that corporations and corrupt governments were responsible for fuelling the carnage of World War I.[3] As Tim Redman has shown, Canto 32 is an integral part of "an arc stretching from Jefferson to Mussolini," one that "offers witness to Pound's momentous conversion from Social Credit to fascism".[4] Undergirding those narratives are Pound's attempts to mobilize historical precedents into a coherent warning, in which a future crisis might be averted by appealing to a specialized group of readers, such as those of William Carlos Williams's little magazine *Contact*, but also to the broader American reading public who had taken notice of *Pagany*. Like Cantos 31 and 33, Canto 32 was "drawn largely from Pound's copy of *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1905), [...] a gift from T. S. Eliot."[5] Although it is rightly read in the schematic context of its publication in *Eleven New Cantos*, then, Canto 32 also registers Pound's engagement with little magazines, and its appearance in *Pagany* suggests a useful context for framing its negotiation of history, economics and writing. The present reading explores the material and critical cultures of Canto 32's production in order to suggest ways in which *The Cantos* form dialogic relationships with modernist periodicals, and between America and Europe.

Critics generally agree that *Eleven New Cantos* charts a crucial series of transitions in Pound's career.[6] His renewed enthusiasm for Douglas coincided with his drift towards Italian fascism, on the one hand, and the American Revolution, on the other. The result, as Stephen J. Adams, notes, was an "economic reformer carrying the banner of Social Credit" who also wrote as an "American patriot, and as [an] ardent supporter of Mussolini.".[7] Moreover, the period in which these Cantos were published, 1931–4, was crucial for sustaining these tenuous links, "because they place the collection prior to Pound's virulent anti-Semitic turn, which Surette has dated convincingly to early 1934, and prior to Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia in October 1935, which raised the outrage of the world against him."[8] They look simultaneously backward to Pound's intense engagement with Douglas and A.R. Orage in the post-war period, and forward to his anti-Semitic fascism, as well as to the achievements and preoccupations of the Adams and Pisan Cantos.

As the Great Depression took hold, Pound became convinced that "Social Credit and Gesellism" movements could offer creditable "financial solutions which would remedy the evils of the Depression."[9] Yet these remedies could only be implemented with the direct

intervention of public authorities, and as his interests drifted back towards America, so too did his interests in political representatives. In Canto 21, Pound's longstanding emphasis on "Renaissance father-figures and arts patrons" became linked with the "Father of the [American] Revolution" Thomas Jefferson; in *Eleven New Cantos*, that association "coincide[d] with Pound's figuration of Mussolini's fascism as a revolutionary movement."[10] Concomitantly, the poet began gathering historical "evidence" to support his own belief systems, a project that started in the late 1920s.[11] By apposition, juxtaposition, parataxis and other cross-referential strategies, such fragments formed the bedrock of a cultural program Pound tried to galvanize in both the Cantos and various periodicals.[12]

Edited from Italy but intended primarily for U.S. readers, the first issue of his only solo little magazine project *The Exile* was printed in Dijon by the Three Mountains Press, before shifting production to Chicago, where the publisher Pascal Covici took over. Four issues appeared from 1927-28, and Pound only published work that he personally endorsed. During this period, his editorials were often filled with paranoid invectives that focused on factors which impeded travel and communication between geographic locations, and which railed against the practical and legal barriers that he faced producing the magazine for his fellow citizens overseas.[13] Import duties, customs officials, and the exigencies of American copyright law surface frequently in these tracts, prompting him to contemplate political solutions to these problems of location in various thought experiments. In the first issue, he describes "both Fascio and Russian revolution [as] interesting phenomena" and argues that "the capitalist imperialist state must not be judged only in comparison with unrealized utopias, but with past forms of the state."[14] Here Pound is interested in the idea of political revolution, but only insofar as it advances the production (and producers) of cultural capital and re-instates established models from the Renaissance and antiquity. Despite his continued insistence on the primacy of the artist's interest, then, *The Exile* provided a forum in which Pound's increasingly extreme politics inched closer to articulation. His quotation from Benito Mussolini in the second issue – "[w]e are tired of government in which there is no responsible person having a hind-name, a front name and an address" – revealed a renewed emphasis on the geographical provenance of cultural and political authority that coincided with his re-engagement with the United States.[15] Of course, Pound's overt endorsement of *il duce* did not appear until Canto 41, but these preoccupations gathered force in the *Pagany* group of Cantos. Moreover, following his tumultuous re-engagement with an American audience in *The Exile*, his own relevance to his homeland was also clearly at issue.

In the late 1920s, other modernist writers had taken notice of Pound's *Exile*. For example, the New York Dadaist Matthew Josephson castigated "Mr. Ezra Pound and the Other 'Exiles'" in *transition* for "admir[ing] and ap[ing] [...]the slavish and decadent section of European society" who in turn "take their rule from New York."[16] The barbs continued into the 1930s, even in the magazine in which Cantos 31–3 would eventually appear. The second issue of *Pagany* featured a lengthy article by Sherry Mangan, the journal's de facto co-editor, in which he accused T. S. Eliot of exerting a "corrupting" influence on young writers because of his "academic" approach to poetry.[17] Mangan also took aim at Eliot for his introduction to Pound's *Selected Poems*, which he derided as simplistic and condescending. This critique prompted Pound to issue a response in an article that evaluated *Pagany*'s first year of publishing. Surprisingly, Pound replied by praising *Pagany*, and only defended Eliot's introduction to his *Selected Poems* by explaining that it was intended for the British market, which Pound held in contempt. "The Bri'sh public is hardly our public," Pound concluded, and his publication of new Cantos in American little magazines attempted to re-calibrate his relationship with his homeland.[18]

Clearly, Pound's endorsement of *Pagany* announced a new affiliation for him, but tacitly, it also announced a rupture with another. In 1930, Cantos 28–30 appeared in *The Hound & Horn*, the experimental journal based in Harvard for which Pound served as contributing editor from 1930–31. That association ended acrimoniously when Pound endured a myriad of petty slights from editors and reviewers at *The Hound & Horn*, and responded predictably with a series of caustic letters, some of which were printed in the journal (and some of which targeted Eliot's own little magazine *The Criterion*).[19] Privately and publically, Pound distanced himself from both *The Hound & Horn* and Eliot, and, more broadly, journals with "academic" associations. Unlike the ivy league and more avant-garde little magazines, Richard Johns's *Pagany* offered a literary miscellany that would "[fill] in the middle scene between the excellent conventional magazines and those which are entirely experimental in content"– one that would consider America's localities as small and appraisable, but interconnected, units, while relying on selected "outsiders'" transatlantic perspectives.[20] Appropriated from Williams's semi-autobiographical 1928 travel novel *A Voyage to Pagany*, Johns's title suggested a symposium that would frame the American experience as both domestic and ambassadorial. Johns also presented his journal as a repository for and chronicle of a growing archive of American modernism, as well as point of departure for new literary engagements. The publication of Cantos 31–3 announced the magazine's overt engagement with the grand narrative of America's modernist canon, but it

also signaled its broader commitment to other poems "including history".[21] For Pound, it meant a route into larger, but still specialized, audience with a more overtly political and social focus, outside of the Eliot-dominated academy. This tack matched the direction he was taking in *The Cantos* themselves.

Cantos 30–33 began configuring poetry as a platform for economic and political propaganda in his poetry, but there is evidence that Pound was growing anxious about such literary interventions. Drawing on Pound's manuscript notes on the Cantos, Redman observes that "Canto 33 finds Adams writing to Jefferson on 28 June 1812 'Litterae nihil sanantes' [Literature curing nothing], echoing yet concealing Pound's own ongoing crisis: whether in response to the world turmoil of the Great Depression his poetry was not merely frivolous."[22] The anxieties that underpinned the relationship between politics, writing and print culture also surface between the fragments of "evidence" assembled in the *Pagany* Cantos. As Canto 32 veers into America's historical "entanglements" with Russia and Jefferson's views on the project of 'civilizing the indians [sic]', for example, Pound's reference to "shepherd dogs, true-bred" lends a disturbing eugenic overtone to the sequence, particularly in the context of his escalating admiration for fascism and Mussolini (*Cantos* 158). In the "native" context of *Pagany*, Pound seems to be encouraging an "editorial" intelligence (Jefferson and/or Mussolini?) to "breed" desirable traits not only in the mind of America's indigenous peoples, but also in the mind of the nation, and reclaim its Revolutionary genius in the process.[23] Pound probably did not intend to evoke a eugenic assault on indigenous peoples, or any other aspect of their widespread genocide in the Americas, yet his associative strategy and subsequent reference to the "Cannibals of Europe" nevertheless encourages that chilling reading (*Cantos* 159). And the role that print culture plays in facilitating Pound's vision of a paternalistic social prophylactic against war (and its potential support of a eugenics-inflected project of "civilizing" the Americas) is telling, shepherding, as it does, the reader's eye from the task of breeding desirable traits in America, to the nuts and bolts of print culture:

> If you return to us, to bring a couple of pair
> Of shepherd dogs, truebred…much desired that war
> be avoided.
>
> type-founding to which antimony is essential, I
> therefore place Mr. Ronaldson in your hands.

…be avoided if circumstances will admit…(*Cantos* 158)

As Carroll F. Terrell notes, James R. Ronaldson and Jefferson hoped to reduce America's dependence on British books. Together with fellow Edinburgh native Archibald Binny, Ronaldson set up the first permanent type foundry in America in Philadelphia in 1796. In 1809, Ronaldson wrote to Jefferson to help him acquire antimony, a metal used in the manufacture of type, from France or Spain to reduce the impact of a British trade embargo on America's print industry; by doing so, as Terrell notes, Ronaldson and Jefferson hoped to reduce America's dependence on British books, and provide a solid material infrastructure to create a secure foundation for the burgeoning cultural life of the nation.[24] In this way, Canto 32 develops a thread of *The Cantos* that connects transatlantic exchanges of ideas to the transit of material goods and economic instruments–from exalted leaders and movements to lesser-known craftsmen. For example, in Canto 12, which originally appeared in Ford Madox Ford's *transatlantic review*, he associated the American businessman Francis S. (aka "Baldy") Bacon, an acquaintance he met in his 1910 visit to the United States, with the Americas' colonial past. Pound alludes briefly to the risks, rewards, and systematic exploitation of people (especially minorities) involved in the economic history of the United States, and inevitably, ties these systems of exchange to the printed word: Bacon "returned to Manhattan, ultimately to Manhattan" to resume the work of "job printing," to "distributing jobs to the printers," and transforming the written word into cold, hard cash (*Cantos* 53).

These Cantos meticulously and insistently cement the clear links that Pound identified between economics and literature – between the printed word and political power – and in *Pagany*, Pound was not alone in this respect. The majority of *Pagany*'s content explored issues of class, politics, and labor in social realist fiction rather than poetry, however, but Williams's serialized novel *White Mule* actually contains some parallels with Pound's *Pagany* Cantos. Williams's protagonist is a printer involved with union politics, and this snapshot of national economic forces inflecting American domestic life in some respects forms a parallel with Ronaldson, the Scottish immigrant printer to whom Pound refers in Canto 32. For both poets, the business of producing the news was itself becoming inextricable from the political and economic headlines of the times.

In the little magazines, Pound often framed his economic histories in a collusive, almost conspiratorial tone, encouraging an audience of peers to revisit their own

revolutionary history and apply it with intellectual vigor to the political realities of the Great Depression. And typically for Pound, the spirit of generosity that he fostered in the pages of these magazines co-exists with odious overtones of the political agenda taking in the *Pagany* Cantos and vitriolic invectives against those who he believed offended him. Equally, his estimation of editing, social reform, and intellectual collaboration similarly strained against the almost solipsistic reverie of his individual poetic practice. Yet the desperation of the times stoked Pound's sense of urgency, and visibly altered his themes and methods. Accordingly, exchanges of goods, capital, and intellectual energies across the Atlantic reach an almost frantic clip in Cantos 31–3. These Cantos explore with increasing anxiety the relationship between commodities and the exercise of power in the global arena, haunted by the prospect of war as he watched the economic crises spread and unfold. They are naturally preoccupied with major political figures such as Jefferson, Adams, and various aristocrats and rulers in Europe. However, as I have argued, these Cantos are also notable for the attention they give to enterprising but comparatively minor figures such as Ronaldson and Binny, anti-colonial rulers such as Hyder Ali (a maharaja whose strategic allegiances helped oppose the British in Mysore),[25] and Revolutionary financiers and agents of espionage, such as Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, the French playwright who "provided arms ammunition and supplies for the American Revolution," but who was never reimbursed or rewarded for that support–a fact that he complained bitterly about until his death.[26] Physical ciphers for crisis and contradiction also abound, such as Beaumarchais' ship, the Amphritite, which appears in Canto 32. Since "her cargo [was] mainly munitions" (157), the transit of this vessel stands in sharp contrast to Jefferson's insistent incantation that "war be/ avoided" (158).

As Canto 32 concludes Pound anticipates Canto 33 by moving from the material infrastructures of the American Revolution to Marxist-inflected accounts of class and postcolonial struggle (in which the ruling classes conspire to keep indigenous populations and workers "down by hard labor, poverty/ ignorance" [158])–from the material and political machinations of American conflicts to the stimuli of European conflict. Here Pound recalls the bitter lamentations of "Mauberley," where "a myriad [...] of the best" died "For an old bitch gone in the teeth,/ For a botched civilization."[27] However, whereas "Mauberley" evoked the "hysterias" and shell shock of trench warfare,[28] Canto 32 locates the madness of warfare with a corrupt aristocracy, who exploit the "unremitting labor" of workers "to maintain their privileged orders in splendor and/ idleness" (*Cantos* 158). Pound draws on the letters of Jefferson to demonstrate that this torpor in its leadership leads inexorably to idiocy, madness, and ultimately, war:[29]

Louis Sixteenth was a fool, the King of Naples a fool
[...] the King of Sardinia,
was, like all the Bourbons, a fool, the
Portuguese Queen a Braganza and therefore by nature an idiot,
The successor to Frederic of Prussia a mere hog
in body and mind, Gustavus and Joseph of Austria
were as you know really crazy, and George 3d was in
a straight waistcoat, [...]
a guise de leon
The cannibals of Europe are eating one another again
quando si posa. (159)

As the Great Depression took hold, the climate of crisis prompted Pound to consider the possibility that another great European war was taking shape. In his 1822 letter to Adams, Jefferson turns "to the news of the day" to observe that "it seems that the Cannibals of Europe are going to be eating one another again."[30] The closing lines of Canto 32 flank the crises in Europe with Dante's description of the troubadour poet Sordello crouching like a lion.[31] In this way, Pound evokes Sordello's judgment on the moral failings of the rulers that inhabit the Vale of Princes, which he guards in Purgatory. Thus, in Canto 32, the poet interpolates "the news" to speak truth to power, a tendency which finds political expression through both the Revolutionary Fathers and later, in Canto 41, through "The Boss" Mussolini (*Cantos* 202). Yet "the news" and the motifs and methods for this shift were clearly established in the *Pagany* Cantos, as Pound attempted to convince his peers of not only of his findings, but of the historical connections between literature and the actual world, from the highest corridors of power to the quotidian routines of getting and spending. Magazines such as *Pagany, The Exile,* and *the transatlantic review* helped Pound make news that stayed news.

[1] Ezra Pound, "Canto XXXII," in "Three Cantos: XXX [i.e. XXXI] – XXXIII," *Pagany* 2 no. 3 (1931): 43–53 (47–9).
[2] Carroll F. Terrell, *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1993 [1980]), 125.
[3] Ezra Pound, "Credit Power and Democracy, by Maj. C. H. Douglas and A. R. Orange [sic]," *Contact* 4 (1921): 1.
[4] Tim Redman, "An Epic Is a Hypertext Containing Poetry: Eleven New Cantos (31–41) by Ezra Pound," *A Poem Containing History: Textual Studies in The Cantos*, ed. Lawrence Rainey (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 117-49 (117).
[5] Redman, "An Epic Is a Hypertext Containing Poetry," 117–18.
[6] See especially Redman, "An Epic is a Hypertext." Also see David Ten Eyck, who argues that in these Cantos "Pound's documentary method had undergone significant changes," with the "bulk of the poetic burden" falling less on "[n]arrative statements" than on "the documentary transcription of source-based material;" *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 51.
[7] Stephen J. Adams, "The Cantos: Eleven New Cantos XXXI-XLI," *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia*, eds. Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos and Stephen J. Adams (Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press. 2005), 30–3 (30).
[8] Adams, "The Cantos," 30–1.
[9] Roxana Preda, "Social Credit in America: A View from Pound's Economic Correspondence, 1933-1940," *Paideuma* 34.2–3 (2005): 201–27 (201).
[10] Nick Selby, "Revolutionary Figures in Canto XXXI," in *Ezra Pound and America*, ed. Jacqueline Kaye (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1992), 114– 31(115–16).
[11] See Redman, who argues that "to some extent this pattern will become typical of Pound during the period. He will arrive at some conclusion about public affairs and then find what he takes to be confirmation of his views in his historical readings;" "An Epic is a Hypertext," 119.
[12] See Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound's Adams Cantos*, 51-54. A. David Moody describes Pound's intertextual strategy as a 'musical' process whereby 'things not syntactically connected can link up thematically' in these Cantos; *Ezra Pound: Poet. A Portrait of the Man and his Work. Vol. II: The Epic Years, 1921-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 162.
[13] See Craig Monk, "The Price of Publishing Modernism: Ezra Pound and The Exile in America," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 31.1 (2001): 429– 46 (437–8).
[14] Ezra Pound, "The Exile," *The Exile* 1 (1927): 88–92 (89–90).
[15] Ezra Pound, "Modern Thought," *The Exile* 2 (1927): 117.
[16] Matthew Josephson, "Open Letter to Mr. Ezra Pound and the Other 'Exiles'," in "New York: 1928, A Group Manifestation," *transition* 13 (1928): 83–102 (98–102, 99).
[17] Sherry Mangan, "A Note: on the Somewhat Premature Apotheosis of Thomas Stearns Eliot," *Pagany* 1.2 (1930): 23–36 (30).
[18] Ezra Pound, "The First Year of 'Pagany' and the Possibility of Criteria," *Pagany* 2.1 (Jan.–Mar. 1931): 104–11 (111). Also see Ezra Pound to William Carlos Williams, 22 Mar. 1931, in *A Return to Pagany: The History, Correspondence, and Selections from a Little Magazine 1929-1932*, ed. Stephen Halpert and Richard Johns (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 259–62.
[19] As Michael Faherty points out, however, Pound also shifted his contributing editorship in October 1930 to *The New Review*, which may also have been a reason for the split with *Hound & Horn*; "Hound & Horn (1927-34)," *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume II: North America 1894–1960*, eds. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 420-36. (431-32).
[20] Johns, Richard, "Announcing Pagany," in Halpert and Johns, *A Return to Pagany*, 40.
[21] Ezra Pound, "Date Line (1934)," in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 86.
[22] Redman, "An Epic Is a Hypertext Containing Poetry," 119.
[23] Alec Marsh has argued that "Pound saw the modern artist as an editor of tendencies and texts" (239). In this reading, Pound configures political leaders in similar terms, so that "Mussolini, as Pound saw him, was 'an EDITORIAL eye and ear – precisely – an editor, who will see through the bunkum;'" *Money and Modernity: Pound, Williams, and the Spirit of Jefferson* (Tuscaloosa; London: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 239.
[24] For synopses of the exchanges between Ronaldson and Jefferson, see Charles Creesy, "Monticello: the History of a Typeface," *Printing History* 25, No. 1 (2006): 3–19.. Terrell's account of the events characterizes their historical significance, but it was France, rather than Spain, who would eventually supply the antimony– although Spain was mentioned in as a possibility in Ronaldson's letter to Jefferson (Terrell, *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound*, 127).
[25] Terrell, *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound*, 125.
[26] Terrell, *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound*, 122.

[27] Ezra Pound, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley: Life and Contacts," *Poems and Translations*, ed. Richard Sieburth (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 2003), 549–63 (552).
[28] Pound, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley: Life and Contacts," in *Poems & Translations*, 552.
[29] The source of the lines is Jefferson's 1823 letter to Supreme Court Judge William J. Johnson in Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, Vols. XII and XV*, eds. Andrew Lipscomb and Albert Bergh (Washington D.C., Thomas Jefferson Memorial Society, 1905), *XII*, 377–9; also see Terrell, *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound*, 127-8.
[30] Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson Vol. XV*, 371. In this letter, Jefferson used a reference to a specific crisis (a conflict between Russia and Turkey) as an opportunity to meditate on the animalistic nature of human conflict (Terrell, *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound*, 127-8). Pound's reference to Sordello as a lion has certain parallels.
[31] Terrell, *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound*, 128.