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Recycling the Remnants: The Ghost of "Exhausted Literature" and the Waning of Creative Authority in Pound's Cantos

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ABSTRACT: *Ezra Pound's Cantos stand as a monumental work where invention yields to invocation and creation crack beneath the weight of tradition. This article, under the banner of "Recycling the Remnants" traces the spectral presence of exhausted literature, a realm where the overwhelming reliance on inherited voices - through citation, allusion, intertextuality and fragmented memory - replace original expression. As the Cantos weave together the remnants of a crumbling cultural inheritance, they reveal not only the anxieties of artistic ambition, but also the waning of creative authority itself, casting modern literature into twilight of endless recollection.*

KEYWORDS: Ezra Pound, Cantos, Exhausted literature, Cultural inheritance, Creative authority

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Introduction

"Works are created by works, texts are created by texts, all together they speak to each other independently of the intention of their authors" (qtd. in Sengupta, 2004, p. 152).

Literature, once the wellspring of original fresh expression, is increasingly becoming a "hall of mirrors" where shadows of borrowed voices consistently echo reverberations of what once was new. In his book *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet (1970),* Walter Jackson Bate traces the history of the ongoing struggle poets have faced since 1660, as they grappled with the unsettling fear that the powerful legacy of their forerunners might have exhausted the possibility of creating truly original and lasting poetry. The epistemological rationale for what is deemed "the authentically original" was that "there is nothing new under the sun" (Ruthven, 2001, p. 124). All that might be said has, in some way, already been uttered. Regarding the fantasy of originality, authorship - long regarded as a contentious issue in literary discourse- emerges as a form of literary creation grounded in duplicity. Since "no original enunciation," is possible, then "to write is first of all to quote" (Ruthven, 2001, p. 125). This form of art forgery, founded mostly on citational practice, can no longer be treated as the guilty secret of literary creation.

Harold Bloom, in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1997), adopts a similar stance, asserting that strong poets must define the originality of their work in opposition to the creative legacy of their predecessors, their symbolic paternal figures. Bloom contends that poets of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were especially afflicted by a heightened anxiety of influence - a sense of historical belatedness within the broader arc of cultural tradition. This condition, which John Barth famously termed "the literature of exhaustion" in 1967, signals the symptoms of creative fatigue in an era saturated with past achievement.

In the modernist landscape where innovation was both a demand and a burden, Ezra Pounds' Cantos emerge as a very literal example of textual ambition entangled with exhaustion. Rather than forging an entirely new idiom, Pound turns back to tradition, summoning Homer, Dante, Confucius, and countless others, not simply as a source of influence, but as the structural pillars of his work. His poem becomes a mosaic of borrowed voices, citations and mythic fragments, stitched together through what modernist writers hailed and labelled "citational apparatus" including intertextuality, the mythical method, and allusion. Yet beneath this intricate web of references lies another truth: a deep creative fatigue, a literature exhausted by the weight of its own inheritance.

This study explores what might be called "exhausted literature" a mode of writing marked by a crippling reliance on cultural memory, relentless allusion and the substitution of reference for invention. Saturated with intertextuality, the Cantos transform poetry into an "echo chamber" (Barth as cited in kugler, 1999, p. 124) where shrieks of the oracular spirits of the past overwhelm the poet's own voice. In this haunted field, the anxiety of influence becomes palpable - the fear that literary creation becomes an act of "Art Restoration" or worse than that being likened by some as "a barbarous class of literary robbery". As creative authority wanes beneath the pressure of tradition, Pound's work reflects the deep crisis of modern authorship: The fear that everything worth saying has already been said and that all that remained is to rearrange the ruins by means of intertextuality, allusions and the mythical method.

I. Ezra Pound's the Cantos: the Chamber of Echoes

Ezra Pound, often hailed as one of the most formidable forces in modern poetry, has long been the subject of intense scrutiny, particularly in relation to his stylistic legacy and poetic ambiguity. His works are widely regarded as some of the most enigmatic, sphinx-like poetry to have emerged in the modern literary world, challenging and overturning previous rules and conventions. In an *Introduction to Literary Essays of Ezra*

Pound, T. S. Eliot declared that: "Mr Pound is more responsible for the 20th- century revolution in poetry than is any other individual" (as qtd. in Pound, 1968, p. XI). In the same line of thought, Eric Homberger (2013), reaffirmed in remarks gathered in a book entitled *Ezra Pound* that: "Ezra Pound is the poet who, a thousand and times more than any other man has made modern poetry possible in English" (p. 457). Hence, understanding Ezra Pound has never been an easy task. His erudition and experimentation, not to mention his assertiveness have persistently posed challenges even to the most seasoned, high profile readers. Pound's life as an expatriate- moving between Venice, London, Paris, and Rapallo - blurred the contours of his poetic identity. Believed to be not merely a poet but a conjuror of civilizations with the piercing vision of a prophet and the obsession of a scholar, Pound set out to rebuild the edifice of culture from the scattered stones of its ruins. Drawing upon medieval Italian, American, English, Chinese, French, and contemporary traditions, he created works that are as complex as they are absorbing.

The Cantos, Pound's lifelong poetic endeavour spanning fifty - four years, is far more eclectic, digressive, repetitious, and exhilarating than he himself acknowledged. Haunted by the whispering echoes of centuries past, this unfinished maze of verse absorbed the myriad traditions that shaped his vision. Written over decades and across continents, the poem draws upon an astonishing range of materials: Confucian aphorisms, Homeric cadences, troubadour lyrics, medieval commentaries, and the soaring architecture of Dante's vision. As Ira B. Nadel (2007), in *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound*, states: "From the classical world of Greece to Renaissance Italy, from China in the T'sung dynasty, to America during and after the War of Independence, the poem contains an encyclopaedic range of allusion and reference" (p. 4).

Pound believed that a text is made up of multiple writings, drawn from a wide array of cultures. In a 1921 letter to Margaret Anderson, editor of *The Little Review*, he reflected with characteristic irony: "I have done more log rolling and attending to other people's affairs, Joyce, Lewis, Gaudier, etc...but I'm in my own small way, a writer myself" (qtd in. Longenbach, 2010, p. 467). This is not a voice one typically associates with the architect of the English Vortex – Pound - who is widely regarded by scholars as an innovator, a provocateur, an artist whose own flourishing made possible the flourishing of others. And yet, beneath this self- assured persona lays a true unease: that his work might become, in Barth's words, little more than "a chamber of echo." Pound's understanding of influence was rooted in classical thought. For him, the true artist does not evade influence but cultivates it, drawing on revered models, not to replicate them, but to transform them, to make them new. Like Eliot, Pound was not concerned with "indebtedness" per se, but with the artist's conscious participation in an evolving literary continuum. One might recall, herein, Eliot's own words in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*: "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead" (Spellmeyer, 2012, p. 96). Indeed Tradition, undoubtedly, carries weight as a record of the great authors who have shaped it, for a writer's significance is, in part, measured by the extent to which they influence those who came after them. Yet, alongside this heritage lies an inevitable anxiety of influence - a real burden that challenges every new voice who seeks to create within the shadow of their precursors.

II. The Burden of Tradition and the Citational Web in Pound's Cantos:

Ezra Pound's poetry arises beneath the heavy shadow of tradition, where the past is not merely recollected but persistently summoned. Through dense citational layers, Pound strived to redeem meaning from cultural debris by excavating cultural memory and turning to a literary past that anchors the present. It comes as no surprise that the Poundian Cantos are saturated with a wide range of allusions and references - drawing from the classical heritage of Greece, the splendours of the Italian Renaissance to the cultural richness of

China's T'sung dynasty, the American Revolution, and the shifting European landscape before and during the Second World War.

Pound's work, rich with modernist elements, is often infused with the haunting echoes of oracular spirits from the past. This return to tradition establishes the indeterminacies, the epistemological uncertainties, and subtly open- ended themes that define much of his works. It would be inaccurate to suggest that Pound's poetry is solely "a sigh for vanished glory of the past" (Batra, 2001, p. 79), Pound does not eulogize the past at the expense of the present. Instead by employing James Joyce's the mythical method, Pound juxtaposes the past with the present, the old with the new, and the primitive with the modern- uniting them all within a shared human experience. Modernist poets, in general, and Pound, in particular, consider the task of what Longenbach labels the "existential historian" who endeavours in Bradley's words to "breathe the life of the present into the death of the past" (qtd. in Longenbach, 2014, p.162). In Towards a Philosophy of History, José Ortega y Gasset (2002) confirms: "The past is not past because it happened to others but because it forms part of our present, of what we are in the form of having been... If then, there is a past, it must be something present, something active in us now" (p. 212). Pound considered the past as a persisting, dynamic and integrative part of the present, calling for "a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (Eliot as qtd. in Owusu, 1999, p.78). Along the same line of thought, Pound himself asserted in *The Spirit of Romance: "*All ages contemporaneous …This is especially true of literature, where the real time is independent of the apparent, and where many dead men are our grandchildren's contemporaries while many of our contemporaries have been already gathered into Abraham's bosom" (Patea, 2017, p. 4).

From the very beginning, Pound held a clear vision of his poetic enterprise: a poem broad and elastic in form- capable of encompassing a wide range of references and allusions. He articulated his ambition succinctly when he claimed that: "an epic is a poem including history" (Bates, 2010, p. 222). Later, in 1938, after the publication of fifty - one cantos, he declared: "there is no mystery about the Cantos, they are the tale of the tribe" (qtd. in Nadel, 2007, p. 63). The poem's documentary impulse - manifested through Pound's habit of quoting, borrowing, and referencing other texts, whether the letters of Malatesta, John Adams, or Confucius - rendered its imagery, allusions, and even formal structure elusive and difficult to trace. As Basil Bunting aptly observed: "The Cantos refer, but do not present" (qtd. in Nadel, 2007, p. 63). Even Pound himself seemed uncertain about the dimensions of his undertaking, writing to Joyce in 1917: "I have begun an endless poem of no known category [....] all about everything" (DuPlessis, 2023, p. 19).

Pound invites his readers to both connect and disconnect, demanding a kind of interpretive agility, an ability to move swiftly between fragments without losing thread. He asks the reader to discover unity within disjunction, coherence amid apparent chaos. As he evokes in the opening of his early sequence, *I Gather the Limbs of Osiris,* which appeared in the *The New Age* in twelve parts (1911-1912), suggesting a process of reconstructing what has been shattered. He advanced that the movement through his poetry resembles the structure of a fugue: "we advance by the method of the fugue," a technique that pieces meaning together fugally, across time and text rather than straightforward, linear absorption.

Pound's poetry is overloaded with allegorical references, cryptic allusions, direct quotations and literary reminiscences. He was open to multifarious literatures and multitudinous philosophies. Yet this citational practice in the Cantos is far from decorative or merely referential for its own sake. Instead Pound weaves an intricate network of intertextual threads, intended to revive and reawaken the cultural memory embedded in textual tradition. The vast breadth and density of intertextual references woven into the poem surpass anything Pound composed before or after. Readers approaching Poundian texts without the necessary scholarly resources may quickly find themselves lost in its maze of overlapping narratives. To

truly grasp the scope of this epic, one certainly requires: "a thorough grounding in the classics, a knowledge of western philosophy, a grasp of American history and a fondness for obscurity to boot. The danger in relying so heavily on intertextuality is that its obliquity will alienate those critics and general readers who are either unable or unwilling to trace the references" (Alcobia- Murphy, 2006, p. 26).

Because Pound's work is so comprehensively allusive in nature, it would seem that one would proceed by explaining how one text was influenced by the others. Although the main purpose of this essay is descriptive, the intertextual approach especially as outlined by Julia Kristeva in *Revolution in Poetic Language* seems well - suited to the Poundian texts in question. Julia Kristeva posits that any text is "constructed as a mosaic of quotation, any text is an absorption and transformation of another" (qtd in Clayton and Rothstein 322). In a similar vein Evripides Zantides (2014) argues:

> A text is... a multidimensional space in which variety of writings none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations. [...] The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the other, in such a way as to rest on any one of them. (p. 36)

The intertextual reciprocity that illuminates both the past and the present through a single poetic image stands as one of the modern literature's most significant innovations. Every literary text emerges from a foundation of prior works, shaped by genre patterns, literary forms and recurring tropes inherited from earlier traditions. Pound's Cantos are deliberately fragmented compositions that reject systematic or coherent progression of thought; instead, his poetry is characterised by a kaleidoscopic complexity, an intertextuality that resists closure. His lines not only echo voices from the past but speak through them, weaving a vast palimpsest of civilizations.

The extensive literary traditions that inform his verse - from English poets and Dante to Confucius, Medieval chroniclers, Elizabethan dramatists, Roman historians, as well as Victorian and Georgian writers - all contribute to the dominant literary inheritance he draws from. As Romana Huk (2003), asserts in her distinguished work *Assembling Alternatives: Reading Postmodern Poetries*: "Ezra Pound's Cantos represent a form of polyglot intertextuality held together by a totalizing will, a thirst for order that is entirely American or Euro - American in origin and largely consonant with the practice of cultural imperialism. The intertextual text ... embraces a variety of multicultural productions" (p. 208). In the same vein, Renate Lachmann, in her seminal book *Gedachtnis und Literatur*, offers a foundational reflection on the notion of memory through the prism of intertextuality; a defining feature of her influential approach lies in the persistent alignment of memory with the category of intertextuality: "The memory of a text," she contends, "is its intertextuality" (as qtd in Grabes, 2005, p. 271).

Pound's citational practice is not simply an act of reverence toward the past; it is a restless, almost compulsive weaving of voices, an intertextual field where the present is haunted by echoes. Intetextuality, hence, becomes a ritual and allusion in his hands, it becomes both a technique and ethic - each reference is a gesture toward lost orders, vanished wisdoms, and the dream of cultural continuity. Pound does not merely quotes he resurrects. His method, often aligned with Eliot's "mythical method," is rather a structuring device than a means of invoking ruins.

Yet with each invocation lies a deep, unspoken dread that the poet's voice is but an echo of ancestral authority. Here, the spectre that Harold Bloom famously termed "The Anxiety of Influence," and Roland

Barthes interpreted as "The Exhaustion of Literature" arises. Every act of production is merely an act of reproduction - a gesture of art restoration rather than invention.

III. Exhausted Literature: From Barth to Pound

Around a dozen years ago, John Barth released an often misinterpreted essay entitled *The Literature of Exhausted Possibilities*, more provocatively referred to as *The Literature of Exhaustion*. The simple burden of this article was that: artistic forms and conventions are not fixed, they are "liable to be retired, subverted, transcended, transformed or even deployed against themselves" (Maiorino, 2010, p. 163). The underlying notion reflects a recurring sentiment - held by many artists in specific historical and cultural moments - that literature is *kaput*, that everything worth saying has already been said, that every path has been already walked, every form explored, and that modern writers are left with the troubling sense that nothing truly new seems possible.

In his influential essay, Barth helped popularize the notion that the depletion of certain literary possibilities need not provoke disillusionment and despair, so long as the writer leans into the very "used-upness" of traditional forms. He clarifies that, " by exhaustion I don't mean anything so tired as the subject of physical, moral, or intellectual decadence, only the used-upness of certain forms or exhaustion of certain possibilities - by no means necessarily a cause of despair" (Barth, 1977, p. 70). Gilles Deleuze, meanwhile, offers a more radical interpretation of exhaustion - defining it not as the realization of the possible, but as its total depletion. For Deleuze, to exhaust the possible is to drain it entirely, to consume all its variations until nothing remains. As he puts it, "the exhausted is the one who makes the possible impossible because he exhausts the very possibility of the realization of the possible" (Pombo Nabais, 2022, p. 355).

It is in this interval where saturation gives way to expressive silence, that Barthes' notion of exhausted literature becomes strikingly relevant. For Barth, it is not the collapse of language that signals exhaustion, but its overuse; language, in his view, is exhausted by repetition and over-familiarity. Literature, under such conditions, becomes drained through continual repetition, and the endless recycling of forms and references, until what once seemed novel becomes a mere variation. Writing transforms into an 'echo chamber,' reflecting only prior sounds. Barth's vision anticipates the condition of texts that rely too heavily on intertextuality, where significance is endlessly postponed across a web of references and borrowed myths. In such literatures, creativity is replaced by citation and innovation gives way to re-composition and assembly. This literary work; hence, no longer speaks its voice but it alludes only.

Indeed Pound's the Cantos stands as a strikingly literal example of what John Barth calls "the literature of exhaustion." It is a work marked not only by a palpable sense of physical and textual fatigue but also by a sustained meditation on whether the modern writer can still craft meaning out of exhaustion and "used-upness." In this intertextual fabric, the Cantos stages a struggle for originality - an act of poetic salvage conducted under the shadow of literary predecessors. This condition, Barth suggests, speaks the writer's confrontation with the impossibility of newness in an age burdened by inherited expression. Yet such a struggle also evokes what Harold Bloom defines in the *Anxiety of Influence* as the poet's agonistic relationship with the past, in which creation is bound up with misreading, resisting, or assimilating the influence of one's forebears.

IV. The Ghost Behind the Pen: Pound and the Anxiety of Influence

In the Cantos, Pound enacts precisely The Bloomian drama of Influence. His work entails a fragmentation so profound that it seems patched together from the remnants of prior works - a mosaic of quotations, allusions and oracular voices held together by the gravity of tradition. Before approaching the poem's

rhetorical structure or stylistic legacy, it is essential to confront the spectral presence of the literary past that both haunts and unsettles its verse.

In a work composed under the pressure of tradition, where creation becomes inseparable from quotation and allusion, and influence becomes both a muse and a threat, Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* finds one of its most powerful articulations not merely as a poet's resistance to the grandeur of predecessors, but as an aesthetic condition, where originality dissolves into accumulation or a mere act of "art restoration."

The eminent critic Harold Bloom introduced a seminal theory in his work *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry (1973)*, where he explores the inner turmoil and creative tension experienced by emerging poets when confronted with the formidable achievements of earlier writers. At the heart of this conflict lies a poetic unease: the apprehension that all that could be expressed has already been articulated, and that earlier master poets have left little room for originality. Literary scholar Chris Baldick encapsulates Bloom's thesis by noting that "the Anxiety of Influence" depicts "a poet's sense of crushing weight of poetic tradition, which he has to resist and challenge in order to make room for his own original vision" (qtd. in Jasinski, 2001, p. 14).

Bloom perceives the relationship between past and present as rooted in a human dynamic, centred on the core concept of dominant predecessors - eminent poets, critics or canonical figures - and their successors, whom he terms "Ephebes." These younger poets, Bloom suggests, must grapple not only with the great legacy of their literary forerunners, but also with an internalized fear that they have nothing truly original to contribute. It is through this agonistic struggle with tradition that the emerging poet begins to discover a distinctive voice, ultimately, aspiring to become a strong poet in their own right. Bloom chiefly applies his theory of the Anxiety of Influence to nineteenth century Romantic poetry, wherein "The Founding Fathers cast a gigantic shadow over future generations laying on them the burden of measuring up to the father's awesome achievements" (Howard -Pitney, 2005, p. 9). In a similar vein, James Jasinski (2001) observed: "In Bloom's terminology, the founders were strong poets, and the aspiring leaders of the early 19th century, were their "sons"..." (p. 14).

The notion of influence enables Bloom to contend that true originality in literature is an allusion; that each new literary work is, essentially, a reinterpretation or variation of an earlier one and that such influence is inescapable. All writers, whether consciously or not, adopt, reshape, reinterpret, or internalize elements of theme, form, or subject matter from their literary ancestors. To illustrate this point, Bloom cites Oscar Wilde: "Influence is simply a transference of personality, a mode of giving away what is most precious to one's self, and its exercise produces a sense, and, it may be, a reality of loss. Every disciple takes away something from his master" (qtd. in Bloom, 1997, p. 6). In a similar vein, T. S. Eliot once argued:

> Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion. A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest.
>
> (qtd. in Goethals & Haberer, 2001, p.12)

In theory, influence may appear as a constructive, positive force - understood as the transmission of knowledge or experience from one individual or generation to the next: "a kind of loan or peaceful takeover of a preceding tradition that inspires or benefits the new creator" (Talavera, 2025, p. 87). Yet, in stark contrast to this optimistic view, Harold Bloom contends that literary influence is more harmful than

constructive. Rather than uplifting, it engenders doubt, unease, creative anxiety, and even resistance in emerging writers who feel compelled to distinguish themselves from their forebears. To stake out a poetic identity of their own, these young authors must confront the shadow of their literary predecessors, persuading themselves that those earlier figures did something wrong. K. K. Ruthven (2001), in *Faking Literature*, captures this dilemma by observing: "Every rill they behold flowing derives from 'a perforation made in some other man's tank" (p. 143). Ruthven further contends that poets are ultimately driven to "kill" their literary forebears, and to do so they must perform an act of misreading or imaginative rewriting of the earlier canon. Only through this act of creative displacement can the aspiring strong poet claim an original imaginative space.

Pound's citational practice seems to comply with the conventional concept of literary influence. Throughout the Cantos, Pound weaves influential nettings through multiple borrowings, diverse allusions, quotations and intertextual mythical links. Notably, Pound's creative impulse is not driven by a desire to distort the past, but rather to revive it, to place himself among the ancients not as a heir, but as host. In other words, Pound does not misread his precursors; he quotes them, preserves their voices, and sanctifies their legacy.

V. The Rhetoric of Authenticity and Fantasies of Originality:

Discussing Harold Bloom's notion of literary contamination and the inescapable anxiety of influence would be incomplete without acknowledging the rhetoric of authenticity and the persistent fantasies of originality. Scholars, critics, poets, and writers often disagree about the originality of a poetic text that incorporates borrowings from various sources. While some maintain that such borrowings cause no harm to the originality of the text, others contend that literature merely plagiarizes itself, arguing that since there can be "no original enunciation," then "to write is first of all to quote" (Ruthven, 2001, p. 125). They advance that: "Poetic originality is largely an original way of assembling the most disparate and unlikely material to make a new whole" (qtd. in Kennedy, 2018, p. 7). In his seminal essay *Tradition and The Individual Talent*, Thomas Stearns Eliot asserts that: "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists" (qtd in Robson, 2020, p. 254). Some other specialists in the field, on the other hand, believe that a highly intertextual literature can never be original in the most common sense because any poet's scopious use of citations and allusions runs the risk of labeling his poetic text an "exhausted literature" due to the overdependence on sources of influence. Pound attempted to clarify his stance, insisting on the originality of the appropriate kind of poetic citational practice and for the integrity and coherence of the text in which such poetic borrowings are injected. He echoed T. S. Eliot's oft-cited aphorism that: "immature poets imitate, mature poets steal, and a good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time or alien in language, or diverse in interest" (qtd. in Goethals & Haberer, 2001, p.12).

VI. From Creation to Citation: Literary Exhaustion in Pound's Cantos:

Rife with historical references, literary allusions, and dense intertextual links, Ezra Pound's 120 Cantos have sparked wide critical debates and generated extensive scholarly engagements. Their dense fabric of allusions - to myth, philosophy, literature, and politics from both contemporaneity and antiquity - has challenged generations of readers and critics alike, as Henri Matisse in his book *Matisse: The Artist Speaks* aptly observed: "A painter doesn't see everything that he has put in his paintings. It is other people who find these treasures in it, one by one, and the richer a painting is in surprises of this sort, in treasures, the greater its author" (qtd. in Bock-Weiss, 2009, p. 36).

In this spirit, the following analysis attempts to unearth the historical presences, literary allusions, intertextual links, and mythological echoes embedded in some selected cantos - works drawn from the nine volumes of the Cantos - in order to illuminate the mechanisms of borrowings, the anxiety of influence, the spectral presence of exhausted literature, and the fraught question of originality at the heart of Pound's epic project.

a- Canto I: The Ghosted Text in the Ruins of Authorship

Given that the subject matter of the first seven cantos is mythical, legendary, and visionary - blending a wide range of themes: Odysseus's descent into the underworld, Helen's fabled beauty as its role in igniting the Trojan War, the divine transformations of Dionysus, echoes of the troubadour tradition, and Italian resonances of Ovid's Metamorphoses. Canto I, crafted from 1917 onwards, introduces the central tensions that haunt the Cantos as a whole- namely: the anxiety of literary inheritance, the spectral burden of literary tradition over the modern imagination, and the persistent recycling of cultural remnants.

Canto I, a long three - stanza poem, revives the journey of Odysseus back to Ithaca, adopted from Homer's Odyssey via the Latin translation of Andreas Divus. The opening lines "And then, went down to the ship, /Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea" (Pound, 1996, p. 3), evoke the ancient episode in which Odysseus ventures to the land of the dead to summon the shade of Theban prophet Tiresias. Here, Pound draws on the archaic notion of "nekuia" - an episode taken directly from Homer - an act of blood offering whereby the hero brings the dark blood of a sacrificial sheep to summon the dead prophet and seek knowledge of his fate. Odysseus' nekuia enabled Tiresias to have a fleeting semblance of life; she foretells that Odysseus will indeed return to Ithaca, but only after losing all his companions.

Odysseus's revival of Tiresias coincides with Pound's own poetic resurrection of Andreas Divus, the Renaissance humanist scholar whose Latin translation of Homer's Odyssey, became the textual foundation for Canto I rather than Homer's original Greek work. Pound reinforces his use of Divus in the lines: "Lie quiet Divus. I mean, that is Andreas Divus,/ In officina Wecheli, 1538, out of Homer" (Pound, 1996, p. 5). The phrase, "the godly sea" (Pound, 1996, p. 3) gestures beyond Homer, it subtly echoes Vergil's Aeneid VI, another tale of descent into the underworld. Similarly, the term "swart ship" (Pound, 1996, p. 3) carries with it the weight of Old English resonance and mythic darkness, marking the transition into Erebus, the shadowy realm of the dead.

In the poem's first stanza, lines six and seven, "bore us out onward with the bellying canvas / Circe's this craft, the trim-coifed goddess" (Pound, 1996, p. 3), invokes the enchantress Circe, recalling the moment Odysseus and his crew depart her island abroad the boat she provides. Soon after, in the lines: "Tiresias, Theban, holding his golden wand" (Pound, 1996, p. 4), Pound summons the blind prophet whose presence looms large not just in Homer but across the wider Greek tragedy. By line twelve, the poem references the "Kimmerian" people, a mythical tribe said to dwell at the farthest edge of the world, a cursed land cloaked in unending mist, no stars only eternal night:

> To the kimmerian lands, and peopled cities
> Covered with close- webbed mist, unpierced ever
> With glitter of sun-rays
> Nor with stars stretched, nor looking back from heaven
> Swartest night stretched over wretched men there.
> (Pound, 1996, p. 3)

The subsequent lines detail the emergence of souls from the underworld among them: Pluto, the Roman deity who reigns over the dead, along with his wife, Proserpine. In this ghostly reality, Odysseus unexpectedly encounters a fallen companion: "Elpenor, unburied, cast on the wide earth,/ Limbs that we left in the house of Circe" (Pound, 1996, p. 4). Elpenor's untimely death on Circe's island and his lack of a formal burial are revealed through the haunting image of him being: "Unwept, unwrapped in sepulcher" (Pound, 1996, p. 4). Pound's direct allusion to this lesser-known Homeric figure heightens the ethical and spiritual significance of remembrance, positioning Elpenor as a symbol for voices forgotten beneath the grandeur of epic legacy. The reference to the Wechel (1538) not only signals the pathway of classical inheritance but also reflects the modernist fascination with the textual artifact itself, exposing the scaffolding of translation and the physical remnants of literary tradition.

At the beginning of the third stanza in Canto I, the speaker recounts how, unexpectedly, Odysseus encounters the spirit of his mother, Anticlea, even before he has the chance to respond to Elpenor's plea. As the Canto draws to a close, Pound writes: "With golden Girdles and breast bands, thou with dark eyelids/ Bearing the golden bough of Argicida. So that:" (Pound, 1996, p. 5). This line consciously evokes the golden bough from Book VI of Virgil's Aeneid - a talisman that enters and exit the underworld unharmed. Pound's invocation of this classical symbol for ritual passage links the Latin epic's transformative descent with Odysseus' own mythic return, and by extension, to the poet's own engagement with literary resurrection. In the closing lines, Pound draws upon the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite: "In the Cretan's phrase with the golden crown, Aphrodite,/ Cypri munimenta sortita est" (Pound, 1996, p. 5), which is Latin for " Cyprus' citadels were her chosen realm," suggesting that such a mythic journey can only be justified by love.

In this opening Canto, Pound constructs a palimpsest of sources - ancient Greek and Roman epics, with Renaissance translation, and his Modernist re-voicing; creating a textual layering where a single poem becomes an archive of echoes.

b- Canto II: The Sirenic Echoes from the Depths of Exhausted Texts

Canto II, arguably a key part of Ezra Pound's Cantos project, deepens the Poem's mythic and literary architecture. It is loaded with references and allusions to various historical figures, poetic predecessors, mythological archetypes, and semi-theological elements. Written around 1917-1919 and first published in a draft of XVI Cantos (1925), canto II immerses the reader in female archetypes, sea goddesses, oracles, and poetic rivals, blending traditions from Greek mythology, ancient Eastern references, biblical echoes, and contemporary literary interlocutors. While Canto I conjured the underworld through Homeric descent, Canto II plunges into a sea of shifting mythologies and metamorphic female figures, where language, memory and myth swirl together. The Canto opens with an imaginary dialogue between the poet and the author of *Sordello*, Robert Browning:

Hang it all, Robert Browning,
there can be but the one "Sordello."
But Sordello, and my Sordello?
Lo Sordels si fo di Mantovana.
So-shu churned in the sea.
Seal sports in the spray-whited circles of cliff-wash,
Sleek head, daughter of Lir,
eyes of Picasso.

(Pound, 1996, p. 6)

"Hang it all, Robert Browning,/ there can be but one "Sordello." Here, Pound playfully acknowledges Browning's labyrinthine narrative, invoking the epic poem *Sordello* - a notoriously dense Victorian work - as a symbol of poetic difficulty, overwritten heritage and the burden of influence that all modern poets must grapple with. Immediately, the text descends into mythological waters; a rapid succession of marine images was invoked. The sea is Aphrodite's native element. The invocation of "So- shu churned in the sea" evokes Eastern myth or tradition, possibly referencing Japanese or Chinese sea deities. Though it remains ambiguous, Pound's method of layering obscure culturally distant fragments to extend the reach of his allusive canvas. This fluidity is deepened with the phrase "daughter of Lir" which situates the poem in global mythic ocean populated with female archetype voices and sea- goddess resonance. Lir (or Ler) is a figure from Irish mythology, specifically from Mythological Cycle. He is a sea god, often associated with the ocean and vast waters. The most famous story involving him is *The Children of Lir*, in which Lir's children are transformed into swans and condemned to wander the seas for hundreds of years. Pound's invocation of "Daughter of Lir" links the female figure being described with the sea, myth, and transformation. This image can be understood as a mythic sea-woman, perhaps an echo of swan - maidens, sirens, or nymphs, gliding among the "Silk sports in the spray and "white circles of cliff-wash." Soon after, in the same opening stanza, Pound makes a reference to "Eleanor" - "Under black fur-hood, lithe daughter of Ocean; /And the wave runs in the beach -groove:/"Eleanor, ελεναυς and ελεπτολις!" (Pound, 1996, p. 6); Pound's Eleanor is often associated with Eleanor of Aquitaine, who, like Helen of Troy (Greek Mythology) left her husband to marry a foreigner who was lower in rank than her husband and a potential enemy. Eleanor of Aquitaine places a medieval, political resonance alongside the epic chronology. Later, "And poor old Homer blind, blind, as a bat,/ Ear, ear for the sea-surge, murmur of old men's voices:/ "Let her go back to the ships" (Pound, 1996, p. 6), introduces a sudden tonal rupture. Pound summons Homer not with awe but familiarity, irony, and even irreverence. Yet within that irreverence lays a modernist paradox: the blind Homer "hears" the sea- surge and, thus, like the poet himself, attunes to the music of tradition, even if deprived of clear vision.

The Canto, then, shift to the Greek figure "Tyro"- a Nereid in Greek mythology and mother of Pelias and Neleus - evoking both sea divinity and Hellenic lineage: "And by the beach-run, Tyro,/Twisted arms of the sea-god" (Pound, 1996, p. 6), evoking Tyro's violent encounter at the sea's edge, mixing classical myth with the poem's larger sea imagery and fluid metamorphic motifs. After the Tyro passage, Pound invokes a figure described as "fair Dafne of sea- bords," a marine- inflected allusion to the classical Daphne (who was pursued by Apollo and transformed into a laurel tree to escape him). Pound's "Dafne" is associated with sea imagery and transformation blending the classical myth of flight and metamorphosis with the aquatic, often surreal images of the poem.

The coming lines multiply the mythic geography: "And by Scios,/ to left of the Naxos passage" (Pound, 1996, p. 7); "Scios," (a Greek word for "god"), and Naxos (a site of Dionysian myth). The poem then surprises the reader with a modern, rough-edged realism: "And an ex-convict out of Italy/ knocked me into the fore-stays" (Pound, 1996, p. 7), this modern voice, an actual historical figure most likely referring to Italian immigrant labourers, undercuts the mythic register and re-injects the poem into a modern terrain. Pound returns to myth with, "King Ivy upon the oars, King Pentheus, /grapes with no seed but sea-foam" (Pound, 1996, p. 7). "King Ivy" is a mythological figure and symbolic reference to the Greek god Dionysus (also known as Bacchus in Roman mythology). Whereas, "king Pentheus" is the king of Thebes, Cadmus' grandson and adversary of the Dionysus cult - as retold in Euripides's play *Bacchae* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*

Towards the end of the poem, Pound weaves diverse legendary presences and mythic allusions where he evokes Titanic sea-spirits like Proteus and the fauns and frogs that multiply the image of a rustic mythos:

"And we have heard the fauns chiding Proteus/in the smell of hay under the olive-trees,/ And the frogs singing against the fauns/in the half-light /And ..." (Pound, 1996, p. 10). Here, Pound summons the skewed, luminal realm between nature, season, myth, and human ritual. It creates a world of sound with leftover echoes - half myth, half memory - driven by deep emotion and poetic longing.

In this condensed sea of voices, Pound orchestrates multi-layered intertextual links: Greek epic (Tyro, Dafne), Roman myth (Ivy, Pentheus), Christian- modern (ex- convict from Italy)...etc. These voices, layered across history and geography, create a saturated archive; echoing what Pound once called "luminous details" in a field of fractured time.

VII. Conclusion

To wrap up, it is worth emphasizing that this study has not aimed at completeness but at clarity. In selecting only *Canto I* and *II* from Pound's vast orchestration of 120 cantos, this paper has chosen depth over breadth to expose the dense web of Intertextual links, literary allusions, and mythic echoes that saturate even the very threshold of *The Cantos*. These two early cantos alone disclose an astonishing archive of references - from Homeric epic to Latin scholasticism, from Greek sea gods to Renaissance translators, and from biblical figures to Browning's poetic inheritance - revealing the overwhelming spectral presence of the literary past that inhabits and animates Pound's modernist poetics.

Through these selections, the article has traced how the cantos stage the modern poet's confrontation with a burdened tradition, and how that confrontation manifests not in rejection but in recycling - a weaving together of fragmented voices, echoes, and ruins. Pound's method, as clarified here, does not attempt to silence the past, but rather to call forth its ghosts, allowing their spectral force to shape the very form and meaning of his epic. In this gesture, the essence of what this article has termed - the ghost of exhausted literature - not a literature that has nothing left to say, but one haunted by everything that has already been said. By focusing solely on Canto I and Canto II, we began to sense the weight of literary inheritance, and the anxiety of influence that pulses throughout the entire project. If these opening Cantos are already saturated with so much allusive density, one can only imagine the complex network and the labyrinth that arises through the rest of the poem's 120 cantos.

Ultimately, The Cantos stand as a monumental yet fragmented response to the crises of modern authorship - a work suspended between tradition and innovation, reverence and irreverence, vision and exhaustion. In their chaotic brilliance, Pound's early Cantos embody the very tensions they thematize: the struggle for originality in a work saturated with citation, and the restless search for meaning amid the debris of the inherited word.

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