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Fascist Language in *The Adams Cantos* of Ezra Pound

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Among all those twerps and Pulitzer sponges
no voice for the Constitution,
No objection to the historic blackout
(Canto 95)

Introduction

In the middle of his epic poem *The Cantos*, Ezra Pound devotes eighty pages to retelling the life of one of America's founding fathers, its second president, John Quincy Adams. This paper argues that this section of the poem, Cantos LXII to LXXII, known as *The Adams Cantos*, demonstrates Pound's belief that the American Revolution should be seen as an exemplary 'text' for a twentieth century cultural revival. However, it is also argued that *The Adams Cantos* mark a turning towards an authoritarian discourse of history, one that propels Pound inexorably towards advocacy of Mussolini's Fascism.

The Adams Cantos display the poetic attempt of a self-exiled American to recover the "full world" of Early America from supposed cultural loss or "historic blackout" (see Pound, *Guide to Kulchur*). In this attempt Pound represents in fragmented form documents of law, legal history, and the historic precedents for the Constitution which he found in the writings of Adams. These writings provide the grounds for Pound's exploration and explanation of the legal and historic assumptions which were in circulation in Revolutionary America. This leads to a text which is a fragmented and elided version of its source, one, moreover, which seeks to represent Adams' times and thought via a use of legal and historic mottoes.

This tendency of the poem towards a motto-like text has important political consequences, for it exposes an inherent contradiction within Pound's methodology. Pound seeks to present Adams, and thus the American Revolution, as the flowering

of rationalist philosophy. However, his poem undercuts such a depiction because the materials he selects from Adams' writings are presented as fragments lacking any coherent logic or rationale. Reading these cantos in this light, it becomes possible to develop a critique of Pound's political position during the 30s. The fracturing of logic and argument implied by Pound's recourse to a motto-like text allows his poem to circulate the idea of fascist revolution as both a parallel to the American Revolution, and as an antidote to the cultural decline which he supposes to have set in after the deaths of Jefferson and Adams. Thus the view of language proposed by *The Adams Cantos*, that it performs an act of cultural recovery by presenting Adams through a series of representative mottoes, is entirely consonant with Pound's advocacy of Mussolini over the 30s. The motto implies a discourse of authority, a language in which word and world are forced together, where no gap is admitted between aesthetic and political judgements. Such language becomes, as Walter Benjamin would argue, a language of fascism (222).

One instance in *The Adams Cantos* of how Pound sees Adams as an exemplary figure is in the apparent approval with which he quotes the words "Ignorance of coin, credit, and circulation!" (Canto 71, 421). Presented here as a motto, this statement of Adams collapses any sense of rational argument. Political judgement becomes merely a matter of style, of how well the words are expressed. Stylistically this leads to the extreme condensation we experience throughout *The Adams Cantos*. Here language is pushed to the limits of its representative power. When the reader comes to the word "circulation" in the example above it is already heavily overdetermined. Earlier occurrences of the word in the sequence mean that it has acquired meanings that are economic, legal, political and sanguinary, as well as textual:

Bracton,
Britten, Fleta on Glanville, must dig with my fingers
as nobody will lend me or sell me a pick axe.
Exercises my lungs, revives my spirits opens my pores
reading Tully on Cataline quickens my circulation
(Canto 63, 353)

It is into just such a closed poetic system of circulation that we are launched as readers of *The Adams Cantos*. And it is this closed poetic system which underpins Pound's representation of Adams as a rationalist, and which is the basis for Pound's historic stylistics in this section of the poem. Here Adams' public and private personae coincide in his figurative digging into legal history and his actual digging of the land, both of which quicken his circulation. His public and private identities merge here into the persona of an Enlightenment gentleman for whom law is the circulation of the writings of past lawyers and jurists, and recreation is reading the classics. In such circulation of documents--"Fleta on Glanville"; "Tully on Cataline"--is encased a view of knowledge which assumes that the world can be fully explained through the limited circulation of discourses of law and history culled from the writings of Adams. The remainder of this paper explores how Pound's selection of material from his source produces a poetic text that reads like a

which in turn shows itself to be an historical and political act in relation to the description of Hamilton. Such language admits no gap between these categories of history and politics because of its use of the slogan "he was the prime snot in ALL American history." Acts of historical and political judgement are thus subsumed by Pound's poetic act of sensationalist sloganizing.

Pound's position as historical interpreter rests upon his ability to write both himself--"my authority"--and his audience--"we may take it"--into his text. Not only does this lead to a poetics of exclusion (in what position do we find ourselves as a reader if "we" are not the "we" who "may take it"?); it also demonstrates how the elision of political and textual acts in *The Adams Cantos* leads towards an authoritarian and self-justifying rhetoric. This becomes increasingly apparent when we look at the second half of the passage. The versification turns this passage into a series of political slogans. We come to praise Adams, assumes Pound. And its closing encomium ominously parallels the rhythms and immediacy of historical analysis associated with the mass political rally. The appeal is to an immediacy which compels the audience to express their solidarity in the rallying cry "ARRIBA ADAMS." This exclamatory shout has been arrived at by the preceding lines in which Adams' acts--"fairness, honesty and straight moving"--and the action of the reader in the text--"made us," "saved us"--have, because of the poetic lineation, become tantamount to mottoes.

Pound's poetic practice and language here are constructed from a desire on his part to counter ignorance. His didactic aim finds form in a motto-like text where language is seen, in David Trotter's words, to deliver "an older and more immediate knowledge" (88). In the lines "But for the clearest head in the congress / 1774 and thereafter," for instance, historical knowledge tends towards motto, and statement replaces argument. Ignorance is countered by recourse to textual precedent (this motto being a fragment of an earlier document), the validity of which is established by the circulation of such a motto amongst a limited audience. By acting in this way as a summing up of Adams, this passage presumes and delineates a willing audience who will accept Pound's historical judgement. Thus in its very poetic strategies *The Adams Cantos* appeals to a limited audience: the judgement of Adams is validated by the circulation of 'evidence' amongst a limited judiciary, whose assessment of Adams is dictated by the limited circulation of that evidence, which Pound's didactic authority as motto maker, and his poetics, here endorse. Pound's history of revolutionary America is seen, therefore, to be dependent upon the process by which he selects, edits and transmutes his source, the words of John Adams. The remaining two sections of this paper examine how Pound's explicit rewritings of his source in *The Adams Cantos* have a vital effect on the depictions of Adams as a father-figure for Revolutionary America, and as a lawyer concerned with the rights of Americans enshrined in the Declaration of Independence.

Adams' Old Style, Adams' New Style: Text and History

An awareness of the process by which the historical record is constantly being rewritten, constantly re-appropriated by another text, and the relationship of this textual process to Pound's history of early America, is present in the lines with which *The Adams Cantos* open:

*'Acquit of evil intention
or inclination to perseverance in error
to correct it with cheerfulness
particularly as to the motives of actions
of the great nations of Europe.'*
or the planting
and ruling and ordering of New England
from latitude 40o to 48o
TO THE GOVERNOR AND THE COMPANIE
Whereon Thomas Adams
19th March 1628
18th assistant whereof the said Thomas Adams
(abbreviated)
Merry Mount become Braintree, a plantation near Weston's
Capn Wollanston's became Merrymount.
(Canto 62, 341)

What we have here is an account of the history of the Adams family running in parallel with the setting up of the American colonies. Although "(abbreviated)," its style is that of a legal document, and thus draws attention not only to the annexation of new land by the colonists--"the planting / and ruling and ordering of New England"--but also to the conventional legal discourse in which such annexation takes place. For example, that land itself is divided up amongst rulers (one might say by ruling lines on a map), who order the land by writing of it in terms of a discourse of degrees of latitude. This discourse is typically legalistic in its concern for rectitude. With the profusion of numbers, names and dates, and with the declaratory "TO THE GOVERNOR AND COMPANIE," its aim is to provide binding legal conditions through a discourse of supposedly irrefutable taxonomies. Rather than providing these binding conditions, though, we are aware of how the legalistic style is a product of a particular historic moment, and thus liable to change. As well as the archaisms--for instance, the spelling of "Companie"--and Pound's note to his readers that he has abbreviated his source, this awareness of historical change is also given attention because of the change of name from "Merry Mount" to "Braintree." Naming itself, the source of supposedly binding taxonomies, is here shown to be subject to historical flux.

A similar awareness is apparent in the first section of this passage. The words, italicized and placed in quotation marks, come originally from Charles Francis Adams' Preface to *The Works of John Adams*. They are a conventional disclaimer. However, the way in which they are represented in the canto draws attention away

from their claim that *The Works of John Adams* will rectify the historic record onto a concern about how that record may be changed by being rewritten, about how history depends upon a particular style, and about how history itself is seen to be a process of textual revision. The first three lines of Pound's passage are culled from a different paragraph of the original from that of the final two lines. In his second paragraph, Charles Francis Adams moves away from a disclaimer about any errors in the edition of his grandfather's works and states:

This [effect of new material to rectify impressions of earlier events] is particularly true in regard to the motives of action, which governed the policy of the great nations of Europe during the Revolution ... (qtd. in Sanders 50)

The conflation of these two paragraphs in the Canto means that the disclaimer seems specifically to be about the motives of European nations, and that any error with regards to them will be later corrected. This is not, as can be seen by reference to the source, what was meant by Adams' grandson. Not only, then, does the passage express concern with how history rewrites its documents, but it also demonstrates that very process of change. And this change is seen to be a matter of style: apparent facts are changed by being rewritten in another style.

Pound's style literally cuts across Adams' style--the elegant sinuosities of Adams' prose are chopped up into a legalistic staccato--so that the history with which we are presented becomes a record of the change from an old style to a new style, rather than a record of facts. The notion of history is therefore unwittingly problematized by the way in which the text is seen to rewrite its material whilst appealing to an unproblematized notion of the origin and lexical purity of its source. As to this being a question of style, one has to look no further than a few lines down the page of the Canto to encounter:

Born 1735; 19th Oct. old style; 30th new style John Adams
(Canto 62, 341)

Even the date of Adams' birthday is a fact that depends upon the (calendrical) style in which it is written. In concluding this section I shall argue that this problematic relationship between style and the writing of history vitally affects Pound's presentation of Adams, that this is apparent in the chronology of *The Adams Cantos*, and that it propels Pound into an authoritarian reading of Adams' history.

The confusion over Adams' date of birth highlights a consideration of history as a matter of agreement over style: it is a matter of consensus. Such consensus depends upon the acceptance of a particular way of writing history. The implication of this line, coming as it does on the opening page of *The Adams Cantos* is that we must accept Pound's version of history throughout the Adams section. In accepting that, we give consent to Pound's style and to the limited circulation of material which he chooses to represent. Throughout *The Adams Cantos* there is a constant awareness

of how Adams' "old style" is being made new. Such reliance of the new upon the old may well provide a figure for the emergence of the New World from the Old World, but it also focuses attention on the emergence of Pound's text from a limited source, *The Works of John Adams*, upon which he relies for the ordering of his material. As a consequence of this Pound's text does not follow a straightforward chronological pattern. Peter Makin writes that Pound's source, "does not proceed in a straight chronological line," and then goes on to argue that, in constructing a Poundian *paideuma* from it, Pound's "method of writing is drastic cutting" (230). Yet he fails to consider the implications of either of these statements. We might now look at these implications by considering the non-linear chronology and the method of drastic cutting that are used in *The Adams Cantos*. The use of these two is an extension of Pound's motto-like style, and as such has important consequences for his presentation of supposed historic reality, and for his adoption of an authoritarian language.

Pound's reliance upon *The Works of John Adams* means that *The Adams Cantos* move sequentially through the differing styles of John Adams' Biography, his Diary, his Public Papers on the Theory and Practice of Government, to end with his Correspondence (Read 266-85; Sanders 18-20). These changes in the documents of the source are not acknowledged by Pound, except in the first instance where the change from third person Biography to first person diary is noted by "Vol Two (as the protagonist saw it;)" (Canto 63, 352). This arrangement means that certain historical events are returned to, as though being turned over by the text, constantly reassessed (Furia 87). In effect these cantos seem to circulate around a limited set of historical events, in what feels like an attempt to return to beginnings in order to rectify the historic record. However, instead of presenting a set of gists and piths, or the truth about Adams, we are aware more of the process as being a textual free-for-all. Pound's drastic cutting of his text leads him to impose his own style upon the reporting of those events. This is seen in the two different reports of the Boston Massacre which Pound is allowed to give as a result of the chronology of the original Adams volumes.

I begin by considering the second time in which the Boston Massacre is related in *The Adams Cantos*. In this instance the report derives from Adams' Diary. Pound's style here is sombre and legalistic, matching that of lawyer Adams:

About 9 o'clock in evening, supposed to be signal of fire
men in front of the barracks and baker's boy afore mentioned
Mr Forest known then as the 'Irish infant'
tears streaming over his face
for that very unfortunate man, Captain Preston
in prison
wants council and can get none, Mr Quincy
will serve if you will
Mr Auchmuty declines unless you will engage'
(Canto 64, 359)

Pound's engagement in this passage is with events "afore mentioned" (the alert reader will remember, however, that in the first recording of the Boston Massacre Pound mentions a "barber's boy," and states that it took place "in the morning" (Canto 62, 342). By repeating this event Pound's text is attempting to weight its importance, to accrue significance for it. Undoubtedly, Adams' defence of Preston was of great significance, both for his career as a lawyer and for the fortunes of the American colonies (Bowen 342-85; Bailyn 116). Its presentation here marks that significance and highlights Pound's manipulation of his material in order to fit it into his reading of Adams' history. It reflects Pound's revisionary drama, his attempt to present Adams in terms of first principles. In context, this passage appears in a section of a canto in which Adams himself is seen to be engaged in documents "afore mentioned." His search is for legal precedence, for the clarity and justice of past records. On the same page as this passage, we are told that Adams "had imported from London the / only complete set of British Statutes / then in Boston" (Canto 64, 359). Such revisionary speculations, Pound implies, are what influenced Adams in his decision to "engage" in the defence of Preston. Also, the style of the passage itself demonstrates Pound's own revisions of his source. It is cursory and note-like, missing out connectives and articles, a style squeezed dry in an attempt to get to the principles sustaining it. However, we feel the influence of Pound's arbitrary power as editor, the pressure of which he rather testily acknowledges in the "ego scriptor cantilenae / Ez. P" (Canto 64, 360) at the top of the following page.

When we are first told about the Boston Massacre in *The Adams Cantos*, Pound's arbitrary power is demonstrated by his slangy style, which is as much his signature as the "Ez. P" mentioned above (Rabaté 122). But the passage is so dominated by Pound's textual signature, that the actual event, Preston's order to fire upon the crowd, suffers a total elision, and is only motioned to by an "etc." It is Pound's style, then, which marks the event as significant, and not the importance of the actual event in the history of the American colonies:

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so about 9 o'clock in the morning Lard Narf wuz bein' impassible
was a light fall of snow in Bastun, in King St.
and the 29th Styschire in Brattle St
Murray's barracks, and in this case was a barber's boy ragging the sentinel
so Capn Preston etc/
lower order with billets of wood and 'just roving'
force in fact of a right sez Chawles Fwancis
at the same time, and in the Louses of Parleymoot...
so fatal a precision of aim, sojers aiming??
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(Canto 62, 342)

Pound's dominant tone is apparent in his reference to the editorial comment in his source by Charles Francis Adams, and in the final question, which is not to be found in the source. These examples emphasize how Pound's poetic technique of motto-making reduces complex historical events to simplistic formulations.

From these two Boston Massacre examples it can be seen that, despite his attempt throughout *The Adams Cantos* to recover the 'lost' historical truth, Pound's effort is continually frustrated by his dominant poetic style and method. The revisionary drama he makes from the events of Adams' life inscribes his own stylistic signature across those very source documents he circulates for their assumed purity. Adams' original text is therefore consumed by Pound's authoritarian reading of it: Adams' 'Old Style' is written over by Pound's 'New Style.' It is with just such an imposition of a seemingly authoritative legalistic style upon his reading of history that Pound's language in *The Adams Cantos* moves towards fascism. This becomes even more apparent when considering how Pound presents Adams' relationship to the writing of the Declaration of Independence.

"We hold these truths": *The Adams Cantos* and the Declaration of Textual Authority

This final section examines firstly the presentation of Adams' relation to the Declaration of Independence. It then looks at how Pound seeks to relate Adams to Mussolini, before analyzing his presentation in these cantos as founder and father of the American nation and the relationship of such a presentation to Pound's idealized vision of Fascism.

In *The Adams Cantos*, the Declaration of Independence appears as a document which contains a rich heritage of political principles; it sets down rational "truths" with which the future is to be governed. As a political document it acts as a mediator between precedent and descent. In his musings upon the Declaration, though, we see Adams in typically revisionist mode:

'I have often wondered that J's first draft has not been published
suppose the reason is the vehement philippic against negro slavery'
(Canto 65, 367)

The Declaration, then, in its various re-draftings is seen as a record of political expediency, and not an arbiter of original truths which prove their validity by their applicability at all times, past, present and future (Wills 363-69; White). Adams reports on Patrick Henry's reaction to the document in exactly these terms, as he quotes a letter received from Henry:

I put up with the Declaration for unanimity's sake
it is not pointed as I wd/ make it
(Canto 67, 391-92)

Truths in the Declaration are therefore seen not to be self-evident but contingent upon the particularities of the historic moment, upon the ideology that writes them, and on the style of their author--which here "is not pointed" in the way Henry wanted, or which, in the earlier passage, leads Adams to state that Jefferson "can

write ten times better than I can." The authority for such 'truths' becomes, therefore, a question of emphasis. Rhetorical emphasis can, at least in part, be seen to provide the authority with which the Declaration expresses the so-called 'natural right' of dissent. It is written in a style where the grammatical subject is held back by its periodic prose. The prose itself, then, enacts the movement from origin to descent. As an example we need look no further than the opening two sentences of the Declaration:

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's god entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness: that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying it's foundation on such principles, and organising its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety happiness. (qtd. in Wills 374)

A similar suspension of the subject is prevalent throughout *The Adams Cantos*. Peter Nicholls has described this effect in these cantos as an "oblique syntax [that] tends to undermine our grasp of the main issues, calling upon the reader to accept major grammatical and historical uncertainty" (134). Whilst this is undoubtedly the effect of such syntax in these cantos, it stems from Pound's attempt to grasp what he sees as the main issues and to give them the emphasis of a motto-like authority. Such an effect can be seen in the passage above where Adams speculates on the drafting of the Declaration: the line breaks emphasize and suspend "been published" and "negro slavery" for no apparent purpose.

The intricacies, subtleties of argument, and measured prose of Adams' text are shattered by this procedure. It entails Pound's own declaration of textual authority for it allows him to select only that material which he feels contains "truths" that he himself believes to be self-evident. It is an authoritarian reading of Adams not only because it chooses what its origins may be, but also because it is conducted in a language which determines to what end such material may be used. The descent from origins, mirrored by the very syntax of *The Adams Cantos*, is the basis on which Pound builds his reading of Adams' works into a set of exempla for his advocacy of Mussolini. The latter's descent from the revolutionary ideals of America is the silent axis upon which Pound's poetics in *The Adams Cantos* turn. Pound's depiction of Adams circulates the idea of a 'continuing revolution,' the fascist *rivoluzione continua*, whose origins, according to Pound, are to be found in the legal and historic writings of early America:

The heritage of Jefferson, Quincy Adams, old John Adams, Jackson, Van Buren is HERE, NOW in the Italian Peninsula at the beginning of fascist second decennio, not in Massachusetts or Delaware. (*Jefferson/Mussolini* 12)

Clearly, the line of descent from Adams' rationalism to Mussolini's fascism proves more problematic than the vehemence of Pound's statement would have us believe. On the one hand, there is Adams' rationality, his denunciation of those who are "against any rational theory" (Canto 70, 413) and the codification of that rationality in the Declaration. On the other hand, there is the anti-rationalist ideology of Fascism. This contradiction sustains Pound's language throughout *The Adams Cantos* and is seen in his use of a sloganizing, motto-like text. The silent juxtaposition of his readings of Adams and of Mussolini can be seen to relate to Pound's use, from the 30's onwards, of the Confucian motto 'Make it New' as a guiding poetic principle. Renzo de Felice has commented, in a statement that has surprising parallels with Pound's depiction of Adams, that "Fascism ... is the impulse to renew, to interpret certain needs, certain stimuli, and certain themes of renovation" (de Felice 44). The impulse to renew is everywhere present in the history of Adams as it is presented by Pound. It finds expression in a language which, although claiming for itself a rational interpretation of certain historical events, undermines its own basis in rationality by appealing to models of non-rationality. Pound's reliance on a poetic of slogans, fragmentations, and didactic authority, propels him towards the sort of language described by James Gregor as inherently fascist (60-71). Such a language is based, in Fascism, on a non-rational appeal to elemental myths which, as Gregor has noted, seek to restore "lost values," and which attempt to be "true, summary, and elliptical expressions of complex truths that, fully articulated, are too difficult for the popular mind" (229). It is exactly this move towards an authoritarian language which we encounter in *The Adams Cantos*, and it is this move which leads Pound away from advocacy of Jefferson in the early 30's towards his espousal of Adams by the close of the decade.

In the early 30's Pound saw Thomas Jefferson as an exemplary figure. In Canto 31, for instance, he is presented as a "Renaissance man"; a multi-faceted personality who displays encyclopaedic learning and a dynamic energy of construction. By the time of *The Adams Cantos* the emphases of this renaissance have altered. Pound now seeks to present Adams as a founding father, who, like a last great Confucian emperor, sets order amongst his people. Whereas Jefferson's energies had exercised their influence over Pound's revolutionary fervour of the early 30s, he now fell out of the picture to be replaced by the revisionary drama of law and history Pound discovered in Adams' writings. Reed Way Dasenbrock, in an excellent article, has noted that "one reason why Adams takes the place that once belonged to Jefferson is that Pound has become concerned with the machinery of government" (55). And indeed Adams is presented as one who seeks out the solid roots of government: he digs the ground in his search for a "rational theory" (Canto 70, 413) from which he can diffuse a "knowledge of principles" (Canto 63, 351). The legalistic style of

brief citation of those principles in *The Adams Cantos* is in fact mirrored in Pound's advocacy of Mussolini over the 30s. This can be seen by turning to Pound's short prose work of 1935, *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*, and the various prefaces he added to it during the 30s.

In the opening section of *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*, Pound's interest in governmental machinery is already apparent, and is expressed in legal terminology. He states that contemporary America is:

...completely, absolutely, utterly, and possibly incurably, ignorant of Jefferson and nearly ignorant of the structure of American government, both *de jure* and *de facto*. (*Jefferson and/or Mussolini* 12)

It is the attempt to redress such ignorance of government which Pound sees evidenced by Mussolini, and which provides the underlying assumption of *The Adams Cantos*. Tracing the roots of this attempt to counter ignorance leads Pound towards the legalistic revisionism of Adams. The true line of descent from revolutionary America to Mussolini, Pound comes to believe, stems from Adams' constitutional speculations, conducted as they are in rationalist language of 'rights' and 'facts'. Pound seems to have been discovering this during the 30s. The first preface to *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* was written in September 1933, six months after the main body of the text was completed. In it Pound re-iterates the importance of 'facts':

I have never quarrelled with people when their deductions were based on fact, I have quarreled [sic] when they were based on ignorance, and my only arguments for 25 years have been the dragging up of facts, either of literature or of history. (*Jefferson and/or Mussolini* x)

Although this statement could carry equal weight for a consideration of Pound's presentation of Jefferson in Canto 31, and of Adams in *The Adams Cantos*, we can see it as an index of his move towards Adams' dealings with the legal bases of American rights. A further preface, this time from January 1935, continues this trend in Pound's thought. Mussolini, he states, has put "the dots on the 'i's" of "what had been sketchy and impressionistic and exaggerated in Thos. Jefferson's time and expression" (*Jefferson and/or Mussolini* vii). Pound believes he has found out the ancestry of what he takes to be Mussolini's act of rectification in Adams' speculations about an "honest economic legislation" that has a "legal and concrete existence" (*Jefferson and/or Mussolini* ix). Finally, therefore, we can see that such a notion of descent and ancestry is possibly the most important factor in determining Pound's shift from Jefferson to Adams. In *Guide to Kulchur*, published in 1938, Pound writes:

The tragedy of the U.S.A. over 160 years is the decline of Adamses. More and more we cd., if we examined events, see that John Adams had the corrective for Jefferson. (*Guide to Kulchur* 254)

Adams provides just such a corrective because of his role as father-figure, whose example is one of the line of descent from originating principles. His word is the law, and like his biblical namesake, his act of naming puts ideas into action, it establishes a legal, historic and constitutional heritage:

John Adams believed in heredity. Jefferson left no sons. Adams left the only line of descendents who have steadily and without a break felt their responsibility and persistently participated in American government throughout its 160 years. (*Jefferson and/or Mussolini* 19)

Adams' belief in heredity is apparent throughout *The Adams Cantos*. From the opening page's setting down of his ancestry to the closing page's comparison of him with Zeus, he remains a father-figure, who is depicted as "pater patriae" (Canto 62, 350). Such authority, though, I have argued in this paper, proves problematic in *The Adams Cantos*. It is embedded in the way in which Pound develops his poetic within a motto-like text which makes apparent his authoritative reading of the events of Adams' life; in the apparently authoritative legalistic style with which Adams' history is represented; and in the relationship between Adams and the Declaration of Independence. Furthermore, it is expressed in a language which appropriates the authoritarian discourses of fascism. What *The Adams Cantos* leave us with is a picture of an heroic father-figure, the founder of a nation, and author of constitutional law. This is encapsulated in the motto, which appears in Pound's text, with no further explanation, as "THEMIS CONDITOR" (Canto 71, 417). Here we encounter a language which collapses the terms of its historic analysis, finally to institute its own heroic father-figure, Mussolini, alongside that of Adams.

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