CHAPTER 7

"From the dawn blaze to sunset"
The Languages of the Image

Question: does anyone UNDER 86, know any greek?[1]
(Ezra Pound to Richard Aldington, October 3, 1953)

In a notebook from 1966, Pound connects the success of his life's work, the by now very long, still unfinished, and all but abandoned *Cantos* to Sophocles' *Trachiniai*:

To pile up "cosmos"
the test: how far can you see.
or more deep,
. . . . . .
2/3 of poem senza gerusalemme.

but for the 3rd part –
that is the cohesion
συμβαιναι =
=
TraXis is [one word illegible] all of it
IF I have
done that.
one jot of emfasis [*sic*] –
=
Herc. never mentions
Daysair
after that line.
=
Eliot's wire.
one pt. worth all the rest of the play
—
if one have made the one pt.[2]

[1] RAP 5/8.
[2] Ezra Pound Papers Addition, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, YCAL MSS 53, Box 34, Folder 807.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

In referring to Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581) here and elsewhere in the notebook, Pound seems to be trying to find another example of a long poem where the cohesive note doesn't come until the end. The hope is, evidently, that the translation, reading, and use of *Women of Trachis* (*WT*) will provide that for *his* poem. Even more radically he may be suggesting that having gotten "that line" – the famous "What splendour it all coheres" as a translation of Ταῦτ᾽ οὖν ἐπειδὴ λαμπρὰ συμβαίνει [*Taut' oun epeidē lampra symbainei*], "since, then, … those words [= Zeus's earlier prophecy] are clearly finding their fulfillment"[3] – is enough of a contribution to poetry. As he had written fifty years earlier, it is better "to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works" (*LE* 4). That line and that moment in Sophocles' play come to signify many things for Pound, which we will be exploring in this chapter, but what seems important to him in this particular instance is Herakles' transformation. Not mentioning his wife Deianeira (whom Pound renamed "Daysair") after he understands his fated death means that he has changed. Pound had elaborated on this in a 1954 letter to Michael Reck: "They [= other translators] dont even understand that LAMPRA. After that phrase Herak who has been cursing D/ for a bitch never utters a reproach. THAT is like the transformation in Noh" (*EP&J* 237). Understanding this in turn, we may surmise, is Pound's fundamental contribution as translator and, the notebook implies, poet.

The early 1950s are a recapitulatory period for Pound. After the poetic and political collapse limned in the *Pisan Cantos*, he does not publish any poetry of his own until 1955, but instead translates, dividing his time between Confucius and Greek tragedy. On April 11, 1952, he reports to Aldington that he has been correcting galleys for a forthcoming collected volume of his translations, and singles out his Arnaut Daniel and Noh versions as "better than I had remembered."[4] Partly inspired by this reading – which brings Provençal and the Noh again to bear on his thinking about Greek – and by the fact that his own *Cathay* had been translated into Modern Greek by Zesimos Lorentzatos in 1950,[5] Pound translates Sophocles' *Trachiniai* as a Noh play. In 1916 Pound had suggested that for an imagist poem to "live" longer than a few lines it must be similar to the Japanese Noh plays, their coherence guaranteed by "one image"

[3] Soph., *Trach.*, line 1174. I use Storr's Loeb edition and Jebb's translation (both consulted by Pound) unless otherwise noted.

[4] RAP 5/7.

[5] See Reck, *Ezra Pound*, 145–55. Pound repeatedly brags about Lorentzatos's *Cathay* to Aldington (e.g., ibid., July 30, 1951 and April 11, 1952).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

just as Greek plays cohered "about a single moral conviction" (*GB* 94; *P&T* 368).[6] Pound's conjunction of Noh and tragedy evokes the East/West crossroads at which Pound's imagism had found itself at that time, after he had coopted and developed H.D.'s (supposed) "straight from the Greek" poetic technique into the ever shorter Chinese- or Japanese-inspired poems in *Lustra*. Moreover, as in the imagist poems and in the *Cantos*, this Noh image is not static, something to be recorded by the perceiver's eye and pen, but a montage: coming to be at the moment of its theatrical presentation. These currents of Pound's poetic thinking – East and West, tragedy and the Noh, imagism and theater – do not come together, however, in 1916. It is only in *WT* that they "cohere," συμβαίνουν 'stand with the feet together,' 'come to an agreement,' or 'come to pass,' united too with Pound's more recent preoccupations.

Pound's 1950s Greek trajectory is one of continuous correction or rectification as he once again attempts to digest and circumscribe, to finally translate Greek *glōssai* – the contradictory, ambivalent, often musical "tongues" that had proven so hard to capture – and to incorporate them into his own oeuvre. Unlike H.D., who shows her origin and original, the source of her inspiration to be always at a distance, always just beyond grasp and yet no less available for interrogation, Pound seeks to set his origins straight – for "if the root be in confusion, nothing will be well governed," according to one of his favorite Confucian precepts (*P&T* 619). To do so he attempts to re-found his long poem on the brilliant coherent image of Herakles that both combines many strands of his poetics and establishes the chain of paternity and of paternal law that his *Elektra* did not. Yet the character of Daysair is its obverse; aligned with misreadings and ambivalent messages already in Sophocles, and recalling multiple female Noh characters, she comes to represent the multiplicity of "tongues" that Pound has to excise in order for "it all" to cohere. Thus Daysair, and her silencing, holds the key to the project's success, as Pound's 1966 notebook implies, and it is unresolved motifs associated with her, including that of love, that the later *Cantos* aim to definitively address.

Pound's reconfiguration of Sophocles' *Trachiniai* into a Noh play, I claim, is, on the one hand, the realization of the dream of the long imagist poem that coheres, enabling him to return to the writing of the *Cantos* – much as H.D.'s translation of *Ion* in the 1930s had allowed her to return to writing and led to *Trilogy*, where some of its images and motifs are

[6] Preston, *Learning to Kneel*, 41–45, convincingly argues that Pound's ideas on the Noh image are erroneously based on a single play.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

embedded. On the other, the translation, bound as it is to the totality of Sophocles' text, which it almost always follows even if obliquely, also shows the undercutting of such a triumphant narrative that it then falls on the *Cantos* to refute. The second half of this chapter is devoted to the last completed installments of Pound's epic poem, the so-called "Washington Cantos": *Section: Rock-Drill de los Cantares* (1955) and *Thrones de los Cantares* (pub. 1959, but written in St. Elizabeths), with particular attention to Cantos 87, 95, and 102. *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones*, I argue, recruit first other tragedies (the *Eumenides* and the *Antigone*) to balance and further clarify the relation between poetics and politics that remains ambivalent in the Sophocles translations, and then pre- and post-Athenian Greek texts that, in Pound's excerpting, seem to harness the Greek language, ancient to modern, towards a monosemic vision. In the end, Herakles himself has to be further translated into other mythical figures (Odysseus, Digenis Akritis) in the *Cantos* in order for the promise of transcendence that he represents to be fulfilled.

"A current toward intercommunications"

In 1939 Pound appended to a short essay on the study of the Noh in the West a section titled "Background Necessary," which opens thus:

> When I quote Aeschylus, even if only to say "Thus was it" or "These are the facts," I do something more than state that certain things had occurred. It is that continual assertion of one set of acts in relation to a whole other set of acts, a whole series of backgrounds and memories, that enriches the Noh. (*EP&J* 157)[7]

Nowhere in the preceding essay has Aeschylus come up, but the note makes clear that Pound is continuing to think of Noh and tragedy together, and to do so in a very particular way. In Noh, facts, acts, and images are not symbolic but citational; they are what they are and something else, without one element being more important than the other. So, in the case of the *Trachiniai*, Herakles would be a man suffering and an earthly representative of divine order (albeit in a determinedly different way than in Eliot's Christian vision in "Little Gidding"): "'one tough guy' who is also a god."[8] But we can read this also as a proleptic comment on Pound's *WT* in its entirety: *It*, qua Greek tragedy translated by Ezra

[7] The Noh's reliance on "allusion" is frequently pointed out by Fenollosa/Pound (*P&T* 336).

[8] As Pound tells F. R. Earp on July 30, 1953. EPP 14/646. All subsequent letters to Earp I cite are found here.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

Pound ("when *I* quote Aeschylus") and put in dialogue with Japanese Noh, is a continual assertion of one set of acts in relation to a whole other set of acts. Nothing is simply as it is; we are instructed to read even a very basic assertion of fact – "thus was it" – as a quotation, to proceed comparatively in order to register the extent to which *WT* is "a current toward intercommunications," as Pound would call his play in 1956 (*EP&J* 136). Thus we may detect in *WT* Pound's earlier Greek translations, for example. In Sophocles Hyllos informs Herakles of his mother's suicide by saying, "She did it by her own hand, and no other's" (line 1132). Initially Pound stays quite close to the structure of the Greek: "She did it herself, it is suicide."[9] But the final, more succinct version opts for an allusion of the kind he praised in the Noh in 1939: "She did it" (*P&T* 1106). Daysair's death by her own hand is meant to distinguish her from the treacherous wife Klytemnestra who lived to say, "I did it. That's how it is" in her own person (*LE* 270). Since *Elektra* tried and failed to make up for *Agamemnon*, it is now *WT* – in some ways a closer repetition-with-a-difference of the Aeschylean story – that is called upon to complete the work. But, I argue, it also rewrites in reverse a very specific Noh play: *Kinuta*, in which the wandering husband remains of no repute, and his wife receives the divine law.

Though the link between Greek tragedy and the Noh had been proposed by Pound/Fenollosa, it was Eliot's Aristophanic *Sweeney Agonistes* that had received such a treatment onstage. In the early 1930s – the period of the poets' joint revisiting of Greek drama – Eliot had instructed an American director that the play should be "stylised as in the Noh drama – see Ezra Pound's book" (*L-TSE* 6, 566). But Eliot questions stylization already by the time of *The Family Reunion* a few years later, and almost entirely abandons it in *The Cocktail Party*. Pound's insistence on the significance of his Noh-inspired Sophocles may well be seen as an attempt to wrest tragedy back from Eliot and to pull it closer to their earlier shared ideas. Just before the play's 1954 publication in the *Hudson Review*, Pound tells Aldington, who had mentioned *The Cocktail Party*, that he read that Eliot "dun 'sauvé le theatre,' presumably by being a disciple du feu Ch/ MauRRRasssss."[10] He thus implicitly contrasts his own attempts at saving the theater through the "intercommunications" of Greek, Japanese, and Chinese with Eliot's turn to the religious nationalism exemplified by Charles Maurras. Certainly Pound

[9] EPP 140/6184. All further citations of the *WT* drafts are from this source unless otherwise noted.
[10] September 25, 1953. RAP 5/8.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

did not think Eliot was doing enough to promote "Hellenism" – "Yu doin anyfink fer revival of gk/ and latin stewdies?," he asks him from St. Elizabeths – even as Eliot continues to write his own plays based on Greek plots and, through Faber, to publish and blurb other translations.[11] The two poets' common turn to and similar use of Herakles, then, may be more a mark of distance than closeness, with Pound resisting Eliot's barely visible Greek appropriations and flaunting his own more textual *and* "modernist," experimental engagement. Just as Eliot's *Cocktail Party* may have been inspired by H.D.'s account of Freud (and acted as a response to it) and at the same time allowed Eliot to further develop ideas and motifs that were already latent in his work, *WT* both redeploys an image found in the pivotal section of Eliot's "Little Gidding" – which Pound seems to have read for the first time at St. Elizabeths in 1946[12] – and enables Pound to revisit forgotten or abandoned currents of his early career.

Pound performs Herakles' message of coherence in three ways. First, like Sophocles, literally or thematically: Herakles puts together two previously received prophecies at the moment of his death, and "it all coheres." Second, textually/dramatically: Pound highlights the fact that Sophocles' play already enacts the lesson Herakles learns at the end by underscoring the ways in which it is constructed to foreshadow Herakles' illumination. The play itself, that is, is built up as its own fulfillment, and Pound structures his version explicitly as a prophecy to be fulfilled, amplifying hints in Greek. As H.D. often minimizes the Euripidean skepticism towards the gods in her *Ion* in order to nudge the play towards her interpretation, so Pound here overemphasizes some imagistic elements (light, fire)[13] or thematic notes (Herakles as nonmortal, the passage of time), while downplaying other image clusters (e.g., those associated with Daysair). Third, coherence is present metapoetically. The climax of the play is a synthetic moment not just for Pound's (version of) *Trachiniai* but for his body of work, where the earliest elements – pre-1913 poems and early cantos, the theorization about Dante and Provence in *Spirit of Romance*, the promise of the theater as encapsulated by Sarah Bernhardt, as well as Noh elements and

[11] See, for example, Eliot's praise of Fitzgerald's *Oedipus Rex* (*L-TSE* 6, 162n1). Pound's letter is dated August 9, probably 1955. It is in a folder of letters with "unidentified" recipients (EPP 58/2625), but is addressed to "PSM," that is, "Possum." Pound had already accused Eliot of not actively promoting "the classics" in an undated letter returned by an incensed Eliot on August 13, 1954 (EPP 15/672).

[12] *L/E & DP* 255.

[13] See Liebregts, *Translations*, 223 and *passim*.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

individual Noh plays – meet the most recent (Confucius, Mussolini, and of course Sophocles). Pound's own work, across time, is here and now finding its fulfillment or coherence: Herakles on the pyre is a "radiant node … a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing," much as the burning Hercules in "Little Gidding" condensed and resolved many of the *Quartets*' primary motifs and questions (*GB* 92).

After some initial comments on Pound's translation approach as a whole, I show how the currents from Pound's earlier work help build up the Heraklean image. I next turn to its undercutting, evident both in the play's earlier scenes featuring Deianeira and in Herakles' exchange with his son Hyllos after the moment of coherence. As for Eliot, for Pound too Herakles becomes a figure for illumination that is portrayed as a singular (if not common) understanding arising out of textual law and that literally erases "many tongues" in the process. The competing tongues or images, the remainder that *WT* necessarily registers because it is a translation, are then more decisively argued against in the cantos that follow, as Pound finally tries to control the polysemy of Greek.

"I have invented nothing"

WT is for Pound the way towards a successful translation of "electricity" – a translation that would convey precisely the mutation of something dead into energy. Unlike in the multilingual jumble of *Elektra*, here Greek is wielded with control, setting the tone when it appears, and balanced by the Confucian values that Pound sees as underwriting the play. As in the 1910s Pound had gained control over the pull of Greek sounds by placing Greek texts in comparative contexts, so here he uses the Noh and Confucius to keep Sophocles in line and to produce a play that offers what Sarah Bernhardt did in the performance of *La Sorcière*. But, unlike in *Lustra*, now Pound doesn't look away from the Greek text.[14] Even as he proceeds by accretion or synthesis, his conception of the Noh, and thus of his Noh-inflected tragedy, as fundamentally citational allows him to claim he has "invented nothing."

It is to the aging F. R. Earp that Pound turns in the final stages of drafting his translation – he is presumably one of the people over 86 who knows some Greek. Earp does not play as critical a role in shaping the

[14] Indeed Pound may remain too much bound to it; Liebregts consistently notes, and sometimes bemoans, Pound's literal-mindedness (e.g., ibid., 224, 232, 239).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

translation as Rudd Fleming did for the *Elektra*, though Pound seems to have wanted him to.[15] Still, their correspondence throughout 1953 sheds light on the seriousness with which Pound took the process of translating and, despite the appearance of "freedom,"[16] of conveying what Sophocles said. After hearing a radio performance of the play on the BBC, Earp admits to Pound on May 2, 1954, that he "hardly noticed the slang" in Pound's version to which he had earlier vehemently objected; he explains that, "On the stage it is less startling than in the study. So in a way I feel you were right." This assessment garners a prompt and articulate response from a gratified Pound:

> I want a fly-swat for people who are, in TOTAL ignorance of even greek first declension, talking about "adaptation."
>
> My "Homage" to Propertius is a "persona" / not a translation.
>
> What I want now is a certificate that in Women of Trachis I have invented nothing, that there is not a shred of meaning in my 'slang' that is not there in Sophokles greek.[17]

Earp takes the certificate idea seriously, reporting back on July 7 that "I have now compared your translation with the Greek, not throughout, but in about half the play, in passages taken at random. I think I can give you the required guarantee that you have added nothing to Sophocles. In fact you have rather taken away, for you often omit," but even those omissions Earp finds justified by the nature of Pound's audience.[18] If part of Pound's attraction to Sophocles is the clarity and nuance of his language and the way in which it manages to engage the audience "through its intrinsic blend of saying one thing and at the same time pointing to another thing it does not say"[19] – that is, its combination of Confucian "right naming" and Noh citationality – it makes sense that Pound would be so invested in replicating these features precisely in his own translation. He has "invented nothing,"

[15] Earp marked up Pound's typescript, though not with comparison to the Greek (June 29, 1953), an omission for which he continues to apologize into early 1954. It is not clear if he sent the markups to Pound, but he mentions that Pound is "trying to carry out my suggestions" (November 18, 1953) and detects changes in the published version (February 28, 1954). See Liebregts, *Translations*, 157–62, for a fuller account of their correspondence and ibid., 155, for the (re)sources Pound consulted while translating.

[16] Together with the issue of slang, "freedom" is a much-discussed notion in the 1955 "Symposium" on the play, published in the *Ezra Pound Newsletter*. For a contemporary and incisive take on the use of slang/vernacular in *WT*, see Hart, *Nations of Nothing but Poetry*, 43–50.

[17] May 17, 1954.

[18] Still, in his contribution to the *WT* "Symposium" (see n. 16), Earp remains critical.

[19] As Budelmann, *Language of Sophocles*, 17, puts it.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

much as Cocteau's Antigone has not, in Pound's recollection, "invented justice." Both are re-transmitting and re-enacting something first articulated long before.

Like H.D. in her *Ion*, Pound of course becomes interested in conveying just a little more strongly what Sophocles doesn't say. But beyond the larger interpretive scheme that necessitates modifications in the play à la H.D. (particularly in the choral songs), and which I will treat in full below, Pound is actually at pains in his translation to produce locally accurate readings that also make use of the *Elektra* sonic experiments.[20] Among the typewritten and handwritten drafts of the translation, there are apparently completed versions of passages that significantly differ from those published. The direction of the changes is almost always towards expansion and towards diminishing colloquialisms. For example, the speech in which Deianeira first mentions the prophecy concerning Herakles (36 lines in Sophocles: 141–77) initially spans a maximum of 16 lines, while the final translation is about 30. Elsewhere, colloquialisms like "Nobody with guts enough to finish me off" or "He's out of his head" become "no one to finish it off" and "The delirium's coming back" (*P&T* 1101). Odd or periphrastic choices are often sonically motivated: For instance, "I can't get at it" nicely echoes *apotibatos* 'inaccessible' (line 1030) syllabically and sonically, while "me blubbering like a flapper" (*P&T* 1104) is changed from the earlier "I'm snivveling like a girl" in order to replicate the consonantal and vocalic structure of the Greek words (albeit presented in different order) in *hōste parthenos* / *bebrycha klaiōn* (lines 1071–72; "moaning and weeping like a girl").

The drafting process and its priorities can be illustrated well through the opening of Herakles' second long speech after his entrance:

> I'm shrivveling, I cant breathe,
> blood's dried up
> The green blood is just clots, it dont move
>
> Its got me, I cant make it out
> like a lock.
> a gang of 'em couldn't do it
> a gang of giants cdn't/ or any wild animal
>
> or greeks or dumb savages. I cleaned up (for) the lot of 'em.
>
> but a she female, without even a sword[21]

[20] On Pound's sensitive registering of Sophoclean meter in *WT*, see Olcott, "Metre and Translation."
[21] I have silently erased a few further variants for ease of reading. Soph., *Trach.*, lines 1053–63.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

In the final version, Pound has translated previously omitted details and made the diction less colloquial:

> It sticks to my sides and
> has gnawed through to my furtherest in'nards.
> And now it's stopped the green blood,
> got into the lungs and dries up the tubes along with them,
> tears up all the rest of me.
> Holds me down, like in fetters. I can't explain it.
> No gang of plainsmen with spears,
> no army of giants come up out of the earth,
> no wild beast was strong enough. Nor Greeks,
> nor foreigners whose countries I had cleaned up,
> but a piddling female did it,
> not even a man with balls.
> Alone and without a sword. (*P&T* 1103)

Pound has added the specific bodily language describing Herakles' condition, choosing "tubes" for its alliteration with "tears," its sound then picked up in "fetters." In Greek there is a π and then a δ alliteration in these first lines, a repetition that feeds into πέδῃ [*pedēi*] 'fetter' and πεδιάς [*pedias*] 'plain,' words which sonically link Herakles' present "labor" with his former beatable enemies; Pound's "sp*ear*s" and "*ear*th" may perform a similar role, as do "ex*plain*" and "*plain*smen." Clearly "gangs" and "giants," hit upon in the earlier draft but less obtrusively used here, are meant to replicate the effect of *gēgenēs* / *stratos Gigantōn* ("earth-born army of the Giants" [trans. Lloyd-Jones]; lines 1058–59). Pound now also includes Herakles' pleonastic accusation of Deianeira. The Greek doubly emphasizes Deianeira's gender by, on the one hand, offering three synonyms for "woman" (γυνὴ, θῆλυς φῦσα, κοὐκ ἀνδρὸς φύσιν) and, on the other, by punningly connecting her gender and her act: θῆλυς [*thēlys*, woman] … καθεῖλε [*katheile*, slayed] (lines 1062–63). Pound attempts to convey the sound play through the repetition of *al* in each of the speech's last three lines, while semantically he fills in the specifics of a woman's and a man's *physis*. The one word Pound suppresses here, as he will its cognate later on in the play's climactic scene, is ἄγλωσσος (*aglōssos*, line 1060) 'tongueless' and by extension 'barbarian/not Greek-speaking,' which refers to the other lands where Herakles performed his labors. While originally he had translated it as "the savages," in the intermediate version cited above he adds the notion of language into the description ("dumb") only to finally tone it down with the neutral "foreigners." It may have been a matter of sound rather than meaning, for "foreigners" maintains the sonic backbone of "fetters," extending

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

the effect of the Greek play on πεδ; in any case, Pound's text admits neither the absence nor the multiplicity of language, just the cohering word.

On the whole, however, we see Pound's investment in his non-invention; his efforts as he drafts the translation are towards Sophocles rather than away.[22] Unlike Eliot, he is not interested in what Sophocles "might have been," proposing a new play that may yet reverberate out of the old; rather, Pound, like H.D., wants to see what *is* there, often with (many sets of) new eyes. Though his engagement with Sophocles' Greek is less visible in *WT* than in *Elektra* or even in the *Agamemnon* "Opening," that is no indication of its absence. It might be a lesson that Pound silently learned from H.D.'s "wheezing" palimpsests: The Greek prototype may yet have a potent shaping effect on and through the translation even if, or because, it remains under wraps.

Electrifying Herakles

Much as in Canto 1, Pound had wanted to re-center the *Odyssey* on its alleged oldest part, Book 11's *nekyia*, so in *WT* he refocuses tragedy on *its* origin: The *Trachiniai*, claims Pound in his introductory note, is "nearest the original form of the God-dance" (*P&T* 1066).[23] Hence his decision to turn Fenollosa's simile (the unity of the Noh is *like* the unity of tragedy) into a metaphor, a Greco-Japanese ideogram of (commemorated) divine appearance, held together by both "one image" and "a single moral conviction." As in Eliot's "Little Gidding," the "Unifying Image" is fire. As Pound puts it in the *Cantos*, the play is "shaped from φλογιζόμενον" (87/591), framed and given overarching form by two flashes of light: a pyre described in the opening chorus and the pyre on which Herakles is burned at the end. Both emblematize the intellectual pyre of what Pound called this play's "key phrase" – "What splendour it all coheres" – since Pound insists on reading the Greek λαμπρά not as the attenuated "clearly" or "manifestly" (the choice of most translators) but through its primary meanings of "brightly," "radiantly," "brilliantly."[24] The phrase also succinctly

[22] Liebregts, *Translations*, 192–93, makes a similar point; his detailed analysis of *WT* (ibid., ch. 8 and 9) is full of examples of how considered Pound's lexical choices are, aiming to capture Sophoclean sound and/or diction. Pound does sometimes move in the opposite direction, however; see ibid., 199.

[23] See also Bacigalupo, *Formed Trace*, 209–18.

[24] "Splendour" is a loaded term for Pound because of its Neoplatonic connotations; see Liebregts, *Translations*, 242–47, with citations of Liebregts's own further scholarship, and 167–68 on Neoplatonism and the image. "Splendor" appears in the paradisal moments of earlier cantos – for example, 17/79, 47/238 – and seems associated with the intertwining between the body and nature, caught in a metamorphic moment.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

encapsulates the play's "moral conviction," which can be translated into Confucian terms: sincerity (defined as "the precise definition of the word") leading to coherence ("the proper man's words must cohere to things, correspond to them (exactly) and no more fuss about it") and filial piety ("Filial piety is shown in the rectitude and precision wherewith one executes the will and completes the work of one's forebears"; *P&T* 615, 712, 645). Herakles thus emerges as the "unwobbling pivot": "the man of breed, in whom speaks the voice of his forebears, harmonizes these energies with no loss of his own direction; he stands firm in the middle of what whirls without leaning on anything either to one side or the other" (*P&T* 638). That is why Confucius appears on the title page, as it were, in the play's first publication in the *Hudson Review*: A footnote to "Sophokles," the text's very first word, lists the Greek playwright's dates together with those of the Chinese sage, suggesting that the latter is the play's other father (487).

The imagistic and moral unity, as well as the play's Sino-Japanese filiation, are already evident in Pound's literal rectification of names in the character list. Deianeira becomes "The Day's Air" aka "Daysair," Herakles the "Solar vitality," while Iole, Herakles' mistress, is "Tomorrow." On the one hand, the elevation of the characters into allegorical embodiments of natural forces brings the play close to the Noh and telegraphs its plot: As the day's air slowly turns into the night's air, so the solar vitality is perceived as decreasing, though it is known to be ever present to a transglobal eye. On the other, these names correct, or at least reorient, the Greek. Herakles no longer has to bear the *kleos* (glory) of Hera, his enemy, and Deianeira – whose name means "killer-of-men" – is already absolved of that burden. Since, too, in Pound's reading she doesn't *kill* deified Herakles, her name would actually be inaccurate. Moreover, unlike the solar vitality which by its essence grasps "Tomorrow," the day's air is transient, just as Daysair in the play cannot accurately read the future.

Thus, Greek and English may stand with feet together in the Trachinian songs, but the Greek "feet" that make it through do so already interpreted, transformed, cohering to the play's message of theophany. All other celebrated gods (Zeus, Apollo, Artemis, Zagreus, Aphrodite – a true pantheon) serve as a prelude to Herakles, whose arrival is repeatedly wished for, imagined, heralded, and, in the end, lamented. Instead of being repeated and analyzed as in *Elektra*, Greek sounds are used to enable or justify the verbal and theatrical manifestation of the divine, melopoeia both directing and serving phanopoeia. *WT*'s first choral song makes this clear. Though Noh spirits and gods always appear at night, Pound writes over both this

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

Noh custom and Sophocles' actual text in order to assert the possibility of divine appearance in the light:

> PHOEBUS, Phoebus, ere thou slay
> and lay flaked Night upon her blazing pyre,
> Say, ere the last star-shimmer is run:
> Where lies Alkmene's son, apart from me?
> Aye, thou art keen, as is the lightning blaze,
> Land way, sea ways,
> in these some slit hath he
> found to escape thy scrutiny? (*P&T* 1070)

In Pound, it is the sun/Phoebus[25] who slays the night; in Sophocles, it is the night that gives birth to the flaming (φλογιζόμενον, *phlogizomenon*) sun and then lulls him to sleep. *Tiktei* 'gives birth' (line 95) is a verb Pound intentionally avoids, as he does throughout *Elektra*, since it is the origin of *tokos* '(financial) interest.' Pound instead transforms the sun into a divine warrior, taking his cue from the passive participle ἐναριζομένα (*enarizomena*), which in Greek characterizes the night as a slain foe, stripped of her arms (line 94). The sun's brightness is metaphorical as well as literal; Pound describes him not as having the best sight (κρατιστεύων κατ' ὄμμα [line 101]), but as scrutinizing, keen, sharp. By presenting Phoebus as being on the attack, ready to come and strip the night of her "star-shimmer" (almost an anagram of ἐναριζομένα), Pound adds a temporal element and a sense of urgency to a Greek choral song that seems to merely state universal facts; this is also why later in the song he introduces the figure of "King Chronos," in an intentional misreading of the Greek "Kronides" signifying Zeus. In this way he forcefully sets into motion his reading of the play, suggesting that a process is about to begin. It will end when Herakles essentially becomes Phoebus, when he comes to visibly embody the solar vitality that is here associated with Apollo.

Because Pound wants to inscribe in this first "flash" the future development of the Heraklean image, he also gives up on the triply brilliant phrase ὦ λαμπρᾷ στεροπᾷ φλεγέθων (line 99) addressed to the sun, in order to bring in another god: Zeus, who is symbolized by the "lightning blaze" and whose name sonically resonates in these lines' prominent *z* sounds. He is the father whom "Alkmene's son" will also eventually come to resemble. Had Pound translated the Greek half-line

[25] Lattimore in the *WT* "Symposium," p. 5, faults Pound for confusing Helios with Phoebus, but using "Phoebus" here allows Pound to create greater consistency with the next choral song, which is addressed to Apollo.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

as "shining/blazing with the bright flash (of lightning)" (my trans., based on Jebb), the image would have clearly been that of the sun. Had he translated λαμπρᾷ as "splendid," he would have created an internal subject rhyme with the play's triumphant final image, but he would not have set up a correspondence between Herakles and Zeus; he would not have given us a lens through which to view that final image – namely that of paternal care. Herakles' development is figured also through the two pyres in this stanza. Though in Greek both images of fire refer to the sun, in Pound we move from the pyre on which the body of the vanquished night is burned ("her blazing pyre") to the intellectual – because tied to knowledge – lightning pyre of the all-seeing sun. The question raised – whether there might be a place, a "slit" (not there in Sophocles) that cannot be seen by sun, something that the detecting intellect cannot read – is exactly that which the play's climax will answer in the negative.

Pound differentiates his Herakles from Eliot's already at this early moment in the play. Though "the man who dies" cannot expect "unvaried happiness," Pound's chorus asks Daysair not to "choose despair" (*P&T* 1070–71).[26] The phrase inevitably brings "Little Gidding" to mind, as if Pound is about to provide an alternative to Eliot's proposal for the abandonment of despair. Indeed, he does not translate two lines that would more explicitly connect his play to Eliot, and Sophocles to the later traditions of Seneca and Chapman that Eliot is so interested in: "Sorrow and joy come round to all, as the Bear moves in his circling paths" (lines 129–30). Instead, to the endless churning of time, he retorts not with the Eliotic divine love but with the "daysair," the embrace of the impermanent – "Be swift to enjoy, what thou art swift to lose" (*P&T* 1070) – before returning to the discerning paternity of Zeus, now tied to language: "Hath Zeus no eye (who saith it?) / watching his progeny?" (*P&T* 1071).[27] Reassurance or providence is not based on love, but on securing a chain of linguistic transmission.

When the messenger first announces Herakles' impending return, the dominant images from this first choral song resurface: "You'll soon see him, the man you want, / crowned with Victory. He's looking splendid" (*P&T* 1072). Pound pleonastically adds to the messenger's last sentence, over-translating the Greek *phanenta* 'appearing,' and thus continuing to

[26] Sophocles formulates the same instruction positively: "always … hold to this in hope" (lines 136–37; trans. Lloyd-Jones).

[27] Soph., *Trach.*, lines 139–40.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

develop the ideogram of the (intellectually) bright and burning warrior meant to be looked at.[28] Daysair asks the chorus to "[t]une up," and what Jebb calls a "'lively dance-song'" (p. 34) begins. Pound's own tune is set to two Greek words, "Analolu" and "EUPHARETRON" ('with beautiful quiver'); they replicate the sonic key of the Sophoclean text, while their *l* and *r* are additionally echoed in Apollo and Artemis, the gods at the center of the song, and may even suggest Herakles.

APOLLO
and Artemis, analolu
Artemis,
Analolu,
Sun-bright Apollo, Saviour Apollo
analolu,
Artemis,
Sylvan Artemis,
Swift-arrowed Artemis, analolu
By the hearth-stone
brides to be
Shout in male company:
APOLLO EUPHARETRON.
Sylvan Artemis,
torch-lit Artemis
With thy Ortygian girls,
Analolu
Artemis,
Io Zagreus,
Join now, join with us
when the great stag is slain,
Lord of hearts, Artemis,
Ivied Zagreus,
Analolu,
Dancing maid and man,
Lady or Bacchanal
dancing toe to toe
By night
By light shall show
analolu
Paian. (*P&T* 1073)

[28] Soph., *Trach.*, lines 185–86. This "error" was pointed out by Earp on July 7, 1954. Pound originally had a less pleonastic reading, which further suggests the intentionality of his final version. This rendering, moreover, highlights both the Greek syntactic structure and sound, through the hard *c* and *r* alliterations in "crowned with Victory" (for κράτει νικηφόρῳ).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

Though Apollo and Artemis are the addressees of this paean (as gods associated with the sun and the moon respectively), they are only named once in the Greek; Apollo's sun-god qualities are, moreover, not mentioned. In Pound, however, the chorus begin with an adulation of Phoebus-turned-Apollo in his sun-brightness, seemingly continuing their previous song. Pound is also marking time: Apollo has now come, the time of "ere" has passed, and "light" not only supplements but also corrects "night" at song's end.

The song evokes several Poundian contexts. Formally, this is the most striking and unusual of Pound's choruses, since it is spaced out like a canto, perhaps prompted by Jebb's assessment that the verses were distributed between different singers/semichoruses. The Greek words intervene, but again as they do in the *Cantos* rather than in *Elektra*. Canto 4 in particular provides a guide for reading this song. The first canto to be completed, it was also the first canto to cohere, to produce an "image" through the newly discovered ideogrammatic method, or, as the canto puts it, the method of "ply over ply" (4/15).[29] As the chorus tunes itself up and expresses Daysair's (fleeting) joy, so Pound revives and commemorates his own "joy"; he brings in a snapshot of what he too had expected to come, splendid. The cohering image in Canto 4 is, fittingly for this play, metamorphosis: the liminal moment of dawning, of things or cities coming into being – metamorphosis, built out of the themes of cannibalism and love intertwined. The canto's mode is repetition, reflected on every level: semantically, in each myth of cannibalism it presents; intertextually, as the Ovidian tale of Diana and Acteon turns into an event in a troubadour *vida*; and formally, as the poem is recursive in almost every line, including one whose themes are echoed here: "Bathing the body of nymphs, of nymphs, and Diana, / Nymphs, white-gathered about her, and the air, air, / Shaking, air alight with the goddess" (4/14).

The specific repetitions in this song take us further back. First, the incantatory invocation of the divine names evokes the litany of names in the pre-imagist poem "The Alchemist" (1912). Subtitled "Chant for the Transmutation of Metals," the poem conjures a series of mythical and literary female figures "Out of Erebus" who will help the poet transform the base material of words into the gold standard of poetry (*P&T* 566). As its two refrains – "Remember this fire" and "Quiet this metal" – tell us, the transmutation involves first recording or remembering one's engagement with

[29] On the importance of Canto 4, see Bush, *Genesis*, 197–205, and Froula, *To Write Paradise*, 11–52, who notes that the earliest draft of the canto was typed on the versos of announcements of Japanese dancer Itô's program of dancing; this early version of the canto includes many references to Japanese subjects (63, 73).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

the past while burning (through) it, and then silencing its voice. So here the poet-translator, writing in his signature form, purges through fire both his received English idiom and "the external original" of Sophocles even as he reproduces it. Second, the mysteriously reverberating "analolu" recalls the exorcism we find in the Noh play *Awoi No Uye*, where the embodied evil spirit of a wife's jealousy is vanquished by the recitation of incomprehensible "scripture." Indeed, Pound may be undertaking some lexical exorcism of his own. "Analolu" is a variation of the word with which the Greek song begins: ἀνολολυξάτω (*anololyxatō*, line 205). Pound does not translate it, partly because he performs what it means: crying aloud with joy. But the word resonates in Pound's Greek work. In the opening of *Agamemnon* its nominal form ὀλολυγμός designates the messenger's cry upon seeing the chain of lights that announces Agamemnon's imminent return (line 27); Pound, keeping the sound, had translated it as "hullabaloo" ("Opening," 119). In *Elektra* the verb is unusually deployed in the Tutor's false account of Orestes' death in a chariot race; rather than expressing joy in a ritual context, it describes the crowd's "cry of pity" in response to Orestes' fall (line 750; per Jebb). In Pound's Greek reading, then, ἀνολολύζω seems to be the deceptive word par excellence: expressing joy when tragedy will follow the hero's return in *Agamemnon*, and horror at the hero's fake non-return in *Elektra*. In his rendering of the Trachinian song, however, the word is transparent. It does what it says: heralds the god who *will* actually appear and who, despite appearances, will neither betray nor be betrayed.

It is a similar hope that "the proper man's words" will "cohere to things, correspond to them (exactly) and no more fuss about it" (*P&T* 712), that brings Zagreus into the picture. Quite significantly in the context of this choral song but also of Canto 4, Zagreus was the son of Zeus by Persephone. He was slain and dismembered by the Titans, but his immortal heart survived and he was eventually reborn as Iacchus/Dionysus. Though the word βακχίαν (*bakchian*) 'bacchic' appears here (Soph., *Trach.*, line 219), and Pound translates it by "Bacchanal," Zagreus is not mentioned. At the end of the song, however, we have the lines: ἰὼ ἰὼ Παιάν· / ἴδ', ὦ φίλα γύναι. / τάδ' ἀντίπρῳρα δή σοι / βλέπειν πάρεστ' ἐναργῆ, "Oh, oh, Paean! See, dear lady, see! Behold, these tidings are taking shape before thy gaze" (ibid., 220–23; trans. Jebb, modified). If we read as though we were listening to music – per Fenollosa's instructions for the Noh (*P&T* 336) – Pound's "io" is presumably the exclamation ἰώ, and his "Z**agre**us" must be the Greek ἐν**αργῆ** (*enargē*) 'visible, palpable, in bodily form.' What assumes bodily form in Pound is the very sound of the word; the repeated invocations, then, are intended to bring about

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

the transmutation of word into god. Indeed, we could even punningly read "Io" as the Italian "I," the god asserting his presence. The presence of "Zagreus" here forges a link between this translation, the Noh God-dance, the first successful canto (with further echoes of Canto 17, where, after the Hell Cantos, Zagreus again emerges out of sound), and the myth of Osiris, whose limbs or luminous details Pound was gathering forty years before. The hope is that out of dismemberment may come regeneration, coherence – not in the form of Bacchus in the case of this play, but through another son of Zeus. Zagreus/Herakles will appear and say "Io" not at night, as with the Noh gods, but in the light, and Greek tragedy will return to its origin in Dionysian dance.

After Apollo, Zeus, and Zagreus, the fourth divine manifestation produced by the transmutation of Greek sound is a proper *dea ex machina*. After Hyllos has described Herakles' suffering upon putting on the poisoned robe, Pound's chorus accuses Aphrodite of standing by while "bright Herakles in his shining" took a new bride: "Attest / That / Kypris stood by and never said a word, / Who now flares here the contriver / manifest … / and indifferent" (*P&T* 1096). Here Pound picks up on the Greek alliteration of φ and replicates it.[30] By additionally emphasizing Sophocles' pleonasm of φανερά–ἐφάνη (*phanera–ephanē*, visibly–made visible) in "flares" and "manifest," he again links fire with divine appearance and thus casts in new light the chorus's earlier characterization of Herakles; only in Pound is he said to be "bright" and "burn[ing] out" (*P&T* 1096). At this moment, Pound's stage directions instruct,

> The dea ex machina, hidden behind a grey gauze in her niche, is lit up strongly so that the gauze is transparent. The apparition is fairly sudden, the fade-out slightly slower: the audience is almost in doubt that she has appeared. (*P&T* 1096)

The theatrical convention of the *deus ex machina* was introduced by Euripides, to show the end of the "organic relationship" between gods and humans.[31] Pound, on the contrary, inserts Aphrodite here (as Kypris, a local deity) to suggest both the possibility of transition from the divine to the human world and the magical power of names – note that her appearance is occasioned by an act of "attestation." To paraphrase *Spirit of Romance*, by naming over the most beautiful thing (Aphrodite), the chorus has brought to earth a vestige of the heavenly splendor.

[30] Soph., *Trach*., lines 860–61.
[31] Taxidou, *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning*, 134.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

As Herakles' appearance nears, Pound brazenly manipulates the variables of sound and vision, obscuring one god while hinting at another, in order to prepare for his play's climactic moment. When the fourth stasimon announces the hero's arrival yet again, the emphasis is on his suffering, which is paradoxically "said" to be an "unspeakable wonder."[32] Pound corrects this inconsistency, removing the other voices and calling Herakles a "**spl**end**ou**r of r**uin**" (*P&T* 1100) – the phrase is a montaged sonic X-ray of **λέγουσιν** (*legousin*, they say) and **ἄσπετον** (*aspeton*, unspeakable). Eliding the actual presence in the line of the Greek *thauma* 'wonder' (etymologically linked to vocabularies of seeing), he once again converts concrete Greek sounds into luminous vision and, in this case, the unspeakable into a splendor that will soon be spoken. When he finally appears, already "in the mask of divine agony" (*P&T* 1101) – an indication to the Noh initiate that he is a god, since in Noh the god always wears a mask[33] – Herakles invokes Zeus's altar and echoes the Noh:

> Holy Kanea, where they build holy altars,
> done yourself proud, you have,
> nice return for a sacrifice
> messing me up.
> I could have done without these advantages
> And the spectacle of madness in flower,
> incurable, oh yes.
> Get someone to make a song for it,
> Or some chiropractor to cure it.
> A dirty pest,
> take God a'mighty to cure it and
> I'd be surprised to see Him coming this far … (*P&T* 1101)

In Sophocles there is a new *thauma* here (line 1003), which Pound leaves untranslated. The Greek Herakles claims that the coming of Zeus would be wondrous, but Pound, not wanting to associate *thauma* or splendor with Zeus, completely trivializes it in the last line cited above, just as he had done earlier when the key word *lampra* 'brightly' referred to Iole.[34] The possible connection between the words' recurrences in Sophocles is not a current that he lets pass through. Moreover, while in Greek the address is eventually aimed at Zeus, who is named, this Herakles snipes at the vague and almost rote "God a'mighty"; that is, both praise and blame of the divine father are

[32] Soph., *Trach.*, lines 963–64: λέγουσιν / ἄσπετόν τι θαῦμα.
[33] *P&T* 392.
[34] Soph., *Trach.*, line 379 vs. *P&T* 1078.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

toned down. Pound also does not make it clear that Kanea should indicate Zeus; the repetition of "holy" suggests a holiness of place (or place spirit) separate from that of the altar. Though the place-name has reappeared in other adjectival variants in connection with the altar of Zeus, Pound, following the Greek suffix changes, had spelled it "Kaenean" (*P&T* 1074) and "Kenaion" (*P&T* 1092). In these variations he at least preserves the quality of the Greek η in Κήναιον; in "Kanea," however, the *e*/*ae* becomes an *a* perhaps in order to echo the name of the Japanese goddess Kwannon/Kuanon, frequently referred to in the *Cantos*. In the Noh play *Tamura* Kwannon permits the appearance of Tamura in his true guise after the "dron[ing] … over" of Scripture (*P&T* 381). Here, then, this goddess of ghostly returns replaces and takes the blame for the Zeus who does not right the wrong that neither poet nor chiropractor[35] could fix. Herakles is left to achieve his speakable "splendour" alone because, for Pound, wondrous sight involves erring; one is not given a complete text to read from the start, but from "ruin" has to make the fragments cohere.

As occurs in the Noh spirit dances, the past needs to be summed up, re-enacted for the unsuspecting wandering priest, who will from that point on remember and continue to tell the story. So Herakles asks Hyllos to "Listen first" – and by listening properly, to "show what you're made of, / my stock" – as he retells and finally comprehends the two prophecies (*P&T* 1107). The first, which "my father told me long ago," was that someone dead would kill Herakles: that is, the centaur Nessus (*P&T* 1107). The second was "breathed out at the Selloi's oak" in the sanctuary of Dodona, where Herakles "heard it and wrote it down / under my Father's tree"; it predicted his release from "trouble" – that is, he now realizes, his death (*P&T* 1108).

> Come at it that way, my boy, what
>
> SPLENDOUR,
>
> IT ALL COHERES.
>
> [*He turns his face from the audience, then sits erect, facing them without the mask of agony; the revealed make-up is that of solar serenity. The hair golden and as electrified as possible.]*
>
> But you must help me
> and don't make me lose my temper,
> don't dither, and don't ask me why.
> This is the great rule: Filial Obedience. (*P&T* 1108)

[35] Pound's sonic X-ray for χειροτέχνης / ἰατορίας (*cheirotechnēs* / *iatorias*) "cunning healer" (Jebb) or "surgeon" (Lloyd-Jones) (Soph., *Trach.*, lines 1000–01).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

There is a contrast at the end of Sophocles' play between "an audience's traditional knowledge of Heracles' apotheosis and the lack of an explicit pointer in the play to this compensation."[36] This is what Pound sets out to correct through the Noh, by building the play around an image. Unlike Sarah Bernhardt in *La Sorcière*, whose Noh-like transformation onstage from old woman to young Pound had admired in the early 1900s and recalled in the 1910s, Herakles cannot take off his (poisoned) cloak. But he trades the deadly adherence of the cloak to his body for the coherence and rejuvenation of his mind; he takes off his mask of agony to reveal, like Bernhardt, a revived, golden image, "an image" that Pound might hope would be "as durable as that of any piece of sculpture that I have seen" (*L/JJ* 53).[37] The typographically distinct key phrase, its long/heavy syllables corresponding to those in Greek, functions as the caption of the image whose description follows; its sonic coherence both shows Pound's own filial obedience to father Sophocles and supplements the image just as the cadence of Bernhardt's alexandrines had, "stir[ring] up an emotion in the audience … the source of which [in this case, the accord between Greek and English prosody] they will be unable to determine" (*L/JJ* 53). At last the electrical circuit has been set right, and electrified Herakles can now receive messages from the "air" and transmit them; to paraphrase 1915's "Affirmations," he starts up his own machinery, withstands the highest voltage, and records, with reserve, precision, and harshness, the currents that are passing through him (*SP* 376). Droning over the scripture turns what might have been ἄσπετον 'unspeakable' into audiovisual splendor – and *Elektra*'s capitalized, only partially digested Greek into a capitalized English translation – just like the one outlined in that 1915–16 essay on Joyce and the modern stage, and reveals not the altar we see in Greek tragedies, but the god dancing alone. "Intellectual vision," Pound had written to Dorothy Shakespear some forty years before, is the "surest cure for ghosts" (*L/DS* 276) – the ghosts of the Noh and tragedy, and of history – and allows the haunted poet to return to the writing of his *magnum opus*.

So, the "body of light" has indeed "come forth / from the body of fire," as Pound puts it in Canto 91 (630). The "make it new" ideogram precedes

[36] Mastronarde, "The Gods," 323. Fitch, *Seneca's Hercules Furens*, 15–16, sees the Sophoclean portrayal of Herakles as entirely negative.

[37] A further Noh connection may be to *Hagoromo*, in which Hagoromo's mantle functions as the "image" and indeed occasions Pound's entire theory (Preston, *Learning to Kneel*, 41). The challenge for Pound in *WT*, then, is how to transform Deianeira's poisonous robe into a good one like Hagoromo's.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

the Trachinian key phrase (*lampra symbainei*) when it first appears in Canto 87/591, in order to emphasize that this is not a return like the one in *Tamura* or in Pound's *Elektra*, where we see Agamemnon's bloody hand appear, ready to kill Klytemnestra. Herakles is not a ghost; he is exposed in this guise for the first time. He emerges out of the dark pangs of divine agony (during which he blindly accused everyone for his misfortune, though Pound has cut some of his complaints), through the binding memory of both the Father's speech ("My father told me") and the Father's tree whose "scripture" he drones over (and which allows him to "quiet this metal," and then shed the negative mask), and into something new, solar serenity, understood not only as peacefulness but also in its etymological sense of clarity, transparency. Canto 100 provides a gloss and links this moment to Dante's *Paradiso*: "Lume non è, se non dal sereno [there is no light, if not from the serene; my trans.] / stone to stone, as a river descending / the sound a gemmed light" (100/736; *Paradiso* 19.64). Sound turns into light, Elektra into Herakles, as the poison ("veleno") of the flesh is left behind for the sake of living Justice ("giustizia viva") – as Dante puts it in the lines following the one quoted (19.66, 68). Having clarified his beliefs in *WT*, Pound readies himself for the return to his own writing of the *paradiso*, as he had told Eliot almost fifteen years before.

If flaming Herakles provides the image around which the Noh facet of this play is built, the obedience to paternal law would be the "single moral conviction" that unifies its Greek elements. Remembering the paternal legacy, purged through the fire of error sent by the father/Master of the Soul in order to find his own language (to paraphrase 1908's "Histrion"), the "God's son"[38] is alchemically transformed and revealed to be a divine father himself. Coherence of past and present is not enough; someone must "copy this palimpsest" and carry the message registered into the future (*Cantos* 96/817).[39] So, as Zeus has proved that he is Herakles' father through the fulfillment of his prophecies, Hyllos must prove that he is his son, that the paternal lineage will continue. Even before realizing the paternal law, Herakles had asked Hyllos to "start showing whose son you are. I.e. mine," by renouncing his mother and – in an echo of Pound's rhetoric around Klytemnestra – getting "that producer out of her house" (*P&T* 1103–04). After the key phrase, Herakles enjoins him

[38] As Pound sometimes translates Sophocles' reference to "son of Zeus"; for example, *P&T* 1084 vs. Soph., *Trach*., line 513.

[39] Consistent with the Confucian statement that "To know what precedes and what follows, is nearly as good as having a head and feet" (*P&T* 618).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

to carry the weight of his name and resolve the family crisis by marrying the substitute mother Iole and killing the father: "And put me onto the pyre / … Show that you are my son" (1109). These are his "orders," and Hyllos has to "Do 'em, / or change your name" (1110).

Pound himself seems intent on performing his filial duties. The key phrase is supplemented by a footnote, another caption for its image, which suggests that "thus was *not* it," and that there is "a whole other set of acts" to consider. It is there that we find the "orders" that Pound is trying to enact:

> This is the phrase, for which the play exists, as in the *Elektra:* "Need we add cowardice to all the rest of these ills" or the "T'as inventé la justice" in Cocteau's *Antigone*. And, later: "Tutto quello che è accaduto doveva accadere." (*P&T* 1108)

Pound traces a transnational lineage for this translation – the intellectual paternity of Cocteau (actually Pound) as reviver of Greek tragedy, the error of Elektra's incoherent mourning and excess of ills – and concludes with an impersonal voice, as impersonal as that of the divine Herakles. But the voice does allegedly belong to Mussolini, who is supposed to have written this statement in reference to his ouster from office in a 1944 memoir. "What has been, should have" is how Pound translates it in Canto 87, right after the lines: "Δηάνειρα, λαμπρὰ συμβαίνει / From the dawn blaze to sunset" (591–92). No longer grieving for the father, Pound burns him in and through *WT* and moves on with his law.

Some Other Tongues: Daysair

In a draft for "How to Read," while Pound is testing out formulations for his poetic categories of phanopoeia, melopoeia, and logopoeia, we find a question that disappears from the published version:

> CATEGORIES:
>
> Why languages in the plural.
>
> immediate perception …
> argue that I have to see <u>via</u>; val. of correlation.[40]

In many ways, Pound's whole body of work is about "seeing <u>via</u>" – and, as I have been arguing, the fact that *WT* allows him to bring together so many parallel fields of interest, is the reason why he esteemed it so highly, and why it catalyzed his return to the *Cantos*. The long "poem" which

[40] EPP 106/4464; typographical error corrected.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

coheres in and as the perfectly constructed image, the Noh fantasy that has been with Pound for forty years, the legitimation of the ghostly fathers that haunt him more than ever after the war, step together – συμ-βαίνουν – in this luminous detail of the *Trachiniai* that also happens to be actually incandescent. The image of Herakles' electrified and convulsing body that is simultaneously dead and alive, citational (recalling Mussolini, Gaudier-Brzeska,[41] Zeus, Agamemnon, the poet himself) and uniquely present on a theatrical stage, functions then also as the most "faithful" image of Ezra Pound's body of work. But in the process of forging such correlations and discerning the common denominator – which appears as the word or the image "beyond formulated language" in the complex audiovisual ideogram of Herakles – some languages go unheeded, as we have already begun to see. For the sake of the totalized image – Herakles no longer in his "mask of agony," but in that of "solar serenity" – a crucial word designating the paternal tree has to remain untranslated: πολυγλώσσου (*polyglōssou*), many-tongued, multilingual (line 1168).

As with many other elements in *WT*'s climax, a slight change in the reading of the Greek earlier in the play prepares for this. In narrating his father's actions after sacking Iole's native city, Pound's Hyllos says that "He orientated the altars, to the gods, our own. / Fixed the lay-out, cutting the leaves" (*P&T* 1092). As Earp tells Pound, "There is nothing about cutting grass here."[42] Both Jebb's and Storr's versions indicate the same: for example "he marked the bounds / Of altars and a sacred grove to Zeus, / His father" (trans. Storr, *Trach.* 753–54). Pound's translation is again uncharacteristically pleonastic. The Greek Herakles *horizei* 'defines' or 'delimits,' but the Confucian–imagist one must be more precise: He has to find the right orientation, decide on the structure, and cut what is superfluous – a foreshadowing that the many speaking leaves of Zeus's oak at Dodona will be silenced by the translator later on.

In an early, undated typescript πολυγλώσσου is actually translated, but it is then left out of the setting copy:[43]

> mid the leaves of my father's oak tree
> I heard it, with many toungues [*sic*],
> and I wrote down the words, of my doom
> now come upon me

[41] Pound's "electrified" arguments with Gaudier not only led him to think of him as a "Greek God in a vision," but also almost placed him in a Noh play (*GB* 46, 76).
[42] July 7, 1954.
[43] Both this TS and the setting copy are in EPP 140/6184.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

At this stage of composition, Pound has not yet come upon his translation for λαμπρὰ συμβαίνει, trying out various versions, the final of which is: "what splendour, my boy / Dont [*sic*] you see how it all works out." In the rough drafts of the typed manuscript,[44] Pound leaves a blank before "oak tree," as well as after (wrote it) "down." It is not clear if the blanks are for words he has not yet translated or just pauses. Pound writes and crosses out various translations for "tree," adding and deleting other words in the speech as well, but πολυγλώσσου is conspicuously absent. Though he initially translates it, then, Pound does not admit this word into his text after he has hit upon the translation of Herakles' dying cry, as if it is this multiplicity of tongues that threatens coherence.[45] The word resurfaces in Canto 95/664, both in Greek and in Pound's translation – obviously he did not think it unimportant – in a moment when he seeks to circumscribe the meaning of *polis*, and which I will further discuss below. The other tongues in the *Trachiniai* that Pound erased or corrected to form his Heraklean image offer alternative, more ambiguous "unifying images" that may come closer to those of the Noh but are less easily tied to "moral convictions."

That an oracle came true would have been no surprise for Sophocles' audience; what Pound emphasizes to such a degree is not especially marked in the original.[46] The Poundian Herakles' intense intellectual light is nonetheless justified by the many sounds or voices vanquished by it; the play until this moment has been full of rumors, false evidence, misreadings, tellings and retellings. While Herakles' (and Pound's play's) imagistic coherence relies on meaningfully recalling and re-citing only well-defined *right* facts or the *right* names – much as only select Greek words make it into the translation – Daysair's interactions and scenes are filled with uncertainties and unverified *logoi*, their ambiguity highlighted by their frequent formal construction as binary statements, especially in Pound's version. For example, Daysair speculates "That [Herakles]'s sitting around / somewhere or other," to which Hyllos responds with one of his characteristic hedges: "they *say* he's in Euboea, / besieging Eurytusville / or on the way to it" (*P&T* 1068–69). Then, the messenger Likhas offers a "double account" of the quarrels that have delayed Herakles' arrival, a rearrangement of the Greek narrative that is otherwise inexplicable.[47] Moreover, Pound's Likhas repeatedly emphasizes that his story reflects

[44] Located in Ezra Pound Translations of Greek Drama, C0301 (Box 1, Folder 13), Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

[45] As Kindellan, *Late Cantos*, 33, argues more broadly, "What the text includes and what it excludes are part of the same interpretive continuum."

[46] As Jankowski points out in the introductory essay for *WT*'s 1957 publication (xx).

[47] See Liebregts, *Translations*, 197–98.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

"what he [= Herakles] says" (*P&T* 1075). A second, unnamed Messenger later says of Likhas, with respect to a different inaccuracy, that "That fellow was lying, one time or the other, / one heck of a messenger!" while of course it is now he who bears the title and is not delivering a firm message (*P&T* 1078). When Daysair asks the lying Likhas to "remember a messenger's first job is / to do what he's told, not more, not less, / but just what he is told," he responds equivocally, "Properly trained in Hermes' messenger-service" (*P&T* 1087–88). We recall that in the parodos even Zeus's providence was tied to rumor ("Who said it?"), and that rumor (λέγουσιν 'they say') was suppressed to produce the "splendour" of Herakles. It is ambiguities such as these that Herakles'/Pound's clear messaging aims to eradicate.

The unwitting source of the play's major misreadings is Daysair. From the very first line the play hints at the uncertain ground on which it stands, for it opens not with the Phoebus-dawn chorus but with Daysair quoting: "'No man knows his luck 'til he's dead.' / They've been saying that for a long time" (*P&T* 1067). Tradition seems disproved; she (wrongly) closes her ears.[48] What she does not know is revealed – to us, but not to her – in another piece of received wisdom she recalls in Pound's version: "'Don't get sun-burnt.' / 'Don't get wet in the rain. Keep out of draughts,' / that's a girl's life till she's married" (*P&T* 1071). Sophocles says exactly the opposite – namely that in youth one doesn't care about such things – and, unlike in the earlier passage, we do not get the sense of, or even a reference to, other voices or *logoi*. Pound intentionally translates the Greek *theou* 'of the god' (Soph., *Trach.*, line 145) as "sun," not only to once again suggest that Herakles is a god or even God, but also to unite the three natural elements in a synthetic vision: the sun that Daysair eventually will get metaphorically burned by, the water she was saved from by Herakles (namely the river Akheloös, whom Pound has elevated to a character in the play though he does not appear), and the draught (air) that she is. The future, the past, and the present are thus also united in this memory of past speech, but Daysair disqualifies it all, unable to see its relevance to her predicament.

In *Sotoba Komachi* the ghost of Komachi appears as an old woman, symbolized and doubled by the *sotoba*, the stump on which she sits; that *sotoba* is for Pound the play's unifying image. Though she was a "bright flower," Komachi is now a "ruin"; similarly, though the *sotoba* used to be a "carved wooden devotional stick, or shrine," it no longer has letters on

[48] See ibid., 173–75, for an astute reading of how Pound brings this speech to life.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

it that would betray its holy function (*P&T* 345–46). Daysair too finds herself with an unreadable stump, an "old slab of wood with sign writing on it" that Herakles left behind (*P&T* 1071). Their lovers are the reason for both women's troubles: Shosho's resistance to Buddhism kept him and Komachi apart, so now his ghost haunts her, "driving me on with the madness," while Daysair will be driven to extreme actions because of Herakles' neglect of his marital vows (*P&T* 346). In *Kayoi Komachi*, the play that follows *Sotoba*, the lovers are reconciled, Shosho dropping his anti-Buddhist "idée fixe"; like Herakles in his climactic moment, he appears "in a garment with many folds" and "a light shows in his spirit" (*P&T* 349, 353). The transformation is facilitated by a waki; by merely naming the ghosts of the separated lovers, this wandering priest challenges them to reproduce a condensed image of their story in the form of a dance, as if to prove that their names are right (*P&T* 351). So in *WT*, for Herakles to drop *his* idée fixe – namely, that he is a victim of Daysair's murderous jealousy – a story has to be repeated and righted, and that story was originally told by Daysair. *She* first provides the account of unenlightened Herakles, perhaps further distorted through her own telling, that will be rectified in his moment of enlightenment.

Daysair introduces the Dodona oracle and sets up the play as a challenge to see if it will come true. Her recollection of Herakles' account differs significantly from his own later in the play. Daysair's version, narrated separately to Hyllos and to the chorus, is expressed as a binary – "either he would be dead, or come back" from his last labor – whereas Herakles only records one message which he had misinterpreted and now understands correctly: "I am released from trouble. / I thought it meant life in comfort. / It doesn't. It means that I die" (*P&T* 1071, 1108; see also 1069). Even her description of Dodona contradicts his: She speaks of a "beech-tree" not an oak, and of the deliverers of the divine message being "a pair of doves" not the Selloi (*P&T* 1071).[49] Sophocles himself connects Deianeira and Herakles' accounts by using συμβαίνει in similar formulations (Soph., *Trach.*, lines 173, 1174); they both say that the time has "come to pass" for the fulfillment of the prophecy. The first step taken here is to be completed later on, when Herakles puts this writing together with what "my father told me long ago" and "it all coheres" (*P&T* 1107). In an earlier draft, Pound had tried to keep this echo, translating "the time fits = now / truth

[49] It is an oak in Greek: φηγόν (Soph., *Trach.*, line 171). Pound may be going through the cognate Latin *fagus* 'beech.' But Jebb and Storr have "oak," so it is possible that Pound meant to change this in order to emphasize that this version of the story gets the details wrong. The Selloi vs. doves inconsistency is in Sophocles; see Dillon, *Omens and Oracles*, 324–26.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

is the foresay was," just as Herakles says that the two prophecies "fi[t]," and that "Time lives, and it's going on now" (*P&T* 1108). But in the end Pound diminishes Daysair's insight and has her skeptically up the stakes: "Time up, / see how much truth was in it" (*P&T* 1071).[50] It is as if in reference to *this* speech that Canto 87 tells her "Δηάνειρα, λαμπρὰ συμβαίνει," giving her the answer: There was bright coherence in it (591).

The play's plot – and Herakles' eventual apotheosis – hinges on Daysair's most fateful misreading: that of her interaction with the centaur Nessus. It is there that we find the concrete images that underlie and enable Herakles' flaming coherence. After the string of false messages that have put into question the very task of the messenger, the chorus comments on Daysair's decision to use the alleged love-potion given to her by Nessus, putting her again in the position of the (bad) listener:

> TO PORT, to port.
> Boat is still now;
> The many oars move not.
> By island shrine ere he [= Herakles] come to the town
> Day long, day long
> If the charm of the gown prove not?
> 'Tis dipped, aye in the unguent
> drenched through it, in every fold.
> Told, told
> in all as she had been told. (*P&T* 1089)[51]

Pound struggled with the translation of this antistrophe, coming to the final triple rhyme late in the drafting process. In the stanza's final form, Pound has added an emphasis on telling absent in Sophocles, whose chorus refers only to the rumor that Herakles is performing sacrifices elsewhere (κλήζεται θυτήρ). It may be prompted by the use of ἀμείψας (*ameipsas*), copied in its present form ἀμείβω multiple times in Pound's draft. The participle here refers to Herakles' "leaving" the shrine where he is sacrificing and returning to Trachis, but the verb's primary meaning is "exchange" or "change," often used to introduce dialogue in Homer. Thus, given too the presence of other "language" words such as *klēizetai* 'said to be,' *peithous*

[50] Liebregts, *Translations*, 189, notes Pound's confounding translation error regarding the length of Herakles' absence foretold in the prophecy; it may be intentional, to highlight Daysair's unreliability in this speech full of other errors.

[51] Soph., *Trach.*, lines 655–62. Lloyd-Jones prints the more traditional reading θηρός 'of the beast' rather than φάρους 'of the cloak' in the last line (Pound's "of the gown," moved up in the stanza); Jebb, whom Storr and Pound follow, defends the latter, glossing it as "on the pretext of the robe," and comments heavily on this concluding couplet, linking it to the later description of the poisoned peplos adhering to Herakles' body.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

'persuasion,' and *prophasei* 'pretext,'[52] Pound feels justified in converting the song into one about exchanged words, especially because – as he tries to convey with his tight rhyming – its last three lines are densely alliterative and sonically repetitive in Greek, as if they themselves are exchanging phonemes. When Daysair realizes what she has done and emerges from the house "in the tragic mask," she continues in the same vein:

> he [Nessus] told me – and I can remember it
> as if it were engraved on a brass plate –
> and I did just what he told me (*P&T* 1090)

She remembers what was not written and seemed univocal, while of course no one had paid much attention to the prophecy that was written on the oak wood and seemed (but was not) ambiguous. The word used by Deianeira in Greek for both the actual and the imaginary surface of writing is the same, *delton* (lines 157 and 683), though Pound obscures this imagistic echo by translating the former as "slab of wood" and the latter as "brass plate." It is also this scene of memory and listening that Herakles' later successful reading corrects and overwrites, replacing the unnatural beast with the divine father. The untranslated repetition of *delton*, however – which links the contrasting true (divine) and false (beastly) messages but which is suppressed in *WT* because it would reorient the play's imagistic coherence away from Herakles and towards Deianeira – allows for the rewriting of this scene in Canto 101 as a parable for usury. There the centaur is presented as the emblem of corrupt banks and is then contrasted with the French farmer Elzéard who "has made the forest at Vergons / under Kuanon's eye there is oak-wood" (744–45), his brass "engraving" once again overwritten by wood.[53]

At the same time, the "fold" identified with "told" in the choral song recalls Pound's "ply over ply" method. The gown, woven and then unwittingly poisoned by Daysair, comes into its text-uality: It is folded in and by what was told, assuming a relation not with carefully constructed language, but with a false *logos*, a *logos* lacking *sinceritas*. Woven and clamped on, gnawing Herakles from the inside out, it is the gown that first kills, then saves him, and it is a fabric in some sense figured by Pound as his cantos.[54] That is perhaps why Pound's Hyllos calls it

[52] See also Liebregts, *Translations*, 213.

[53] The river Akheloös, Herakles' other rival, also appears in this passage (101/745).

[54] Cf. Rabaté, *Language, Sexuality, and Ideology*, 294, who likens the poisoned robe to "the poison of Usura." The two readings need not be incompatible given the alignment of linguistic and monetary excess in the late cantos, or the fetishization of money that paradoxically underwrites Pound's fervent hatred of it (see Nicholls, *Politics, Economics and Writing*, 214).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

a "marvellous peplon," instead of a "deadly" one (*thanasimon peplon* [Soph., *Trach.*, line 758]); its splendor unfolds as one keeps looking.[55] Sticking to Herakles' body, the textual folds of the gown-poem become indissociable from their subject and, hopefully, are themselves transformed; the imagist "God in a vision" literally is the play.[56] But this is only possible after "that producer" Daysair is out of the house, because in Pound she had been allowing other currents to pass through, whereas Herakles wants to cut through the fold. Tellingly, he asks Hyllos not to *poikilleis palai* (Soph., *Trach.*, line 1121). Initially Pound had translated the phrase as "I'm too far gone to guess riddles," but in the final version he elaborates on it in order to get at the specifically literary sense of *poikilia* as 'variety, intricacy, ornamentation' (*LSJ* II.3): "I'm too sick to be pestered with double-talk and nuances" (*P&T* 1105).

Indeed, after the moment of coherence, Herakles himself is more concise and, as Pound notes, "Herc. never mentions / Days air / after that line." Liebregts has argued that, for Pound, this is because Herakles realizes that *erōs* was "the driving force behind the entire chain of events," and that both he and Daysair fell victim to his power.[57] A close reading of the fold–told stanza, however, suggests that Herakles' coherence is literally predicated on the *absence* of love. Pound replaces erotic desire with language – a process he will reverse in Canto 102 (see below). The "told" and "fold" repetitions, then transformed by Herakles into Zeus's "law," substitute for the Greek chorus's emphasis on passion: the consuming passion Daysair feels and wishes Herakles would feel for her when she hopes he will arrive πανίμερος (*panimeros* [Soph., *Trach.*, line 660]). Jebb comments on this word extensively, noting it can have two contradictory meanings, both "all-desiring" and "all-desired." Pound again cuts through the linguistic fold and, as Liebregts rightly observes,[58] opts for an alternative reading of the line altogether, translating the (now preferred) variant πανάμερος 'all day long' with his performatively repetitive "Day long, day long" – a phrase that additionally keeps the focus on the temporal unfolding of the play. Pound's decision to look away from the Greek text printed in both of his main sources is all the more noteworthy because of the resonances πανίμερος would have had for him; the word is related to the Sapphic ἰμέρρω 'I long for' that Pound had used as a title for his version

[55] Cf. Liebregts, *Translations*, 214.
[56] See n. 41 above.
[57] *Translations*, 154; see also 236. He doesn't reconcile how both Zeus and *erōs* are found to be responsible for the play's events.
[58] *Translations*, 213.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

of Fragment 96 almost forty years before. Just as there he had ignored the erotic triangulation Sappho presents in favor of a more straightforward poem of longing, so here he writes over love in order to emphasize the supersession of the centaur's false and deception-inducing act of telling by Zeus's true one. Desire misleads, especially if women are involved; the word of the father does not.

Pound had written in 1916 that Dante's "Paradiso" "is the most wonderful *image*," but had clarified that it is not "a perseveringly imagistic performance. The permanent part is Imagisme, the rest … are philology" (*GB* 86). It is this kind of philology that departs with Daysair in *WT*, this love of *logoi* expressed in the proliferation of imprecise speech, rumors, and misreadings that may have obscured the image. Pound is still or again performing the purifying rituals of imagism, trying to shape up his poem and extract the voices – the tongues of the *Pisan Cantos*, *Elektra*'s Babel, Sapphic yearning, and, as we will see, the Noh cricket's purely onomatopoetic cry – that do not stick with, do not adequately "give" the desired body in its moment of transformation. For the image to be, there could not have been many sounds or tongues in that oak wood, and the most surprisingly excised one is Japanese.

Noh Sounds in the Cloth of Beauty

Massimo Bacigalupo comments in passing that, as Daysair exits and the chorus remarks on her quiet departure, it is "one of the delicate Japanese characters Pound has in mind."[59] In fact, I would argue it is a very specific Japanese character. Not Komachi, who in the end reconciles with Shosho once he has a change of heart, but the abandoned wife in *Kinuta*, who ends her life with the "whispering lamentation, hera, hera" (*P&T* 423).[60] From her death Pound's *WT* is called into being – "hera, hera" – as if to amend the plays' crucial difference: Though the nameless Japanese wife is a "good" wife like Daysair and not like the murdering Klytemnestra, the husband who has been "loitering on in the capital entangled in many litigations" is, unlike the equally litigating Herakles, "unknown and of no repute" (*P&T* 418). "All sunk into the river of three currents," sent there by "the great, false bird called 'Taking-care,'" the Noh wife has the chorus on her side: "Who will call him a true man – the

[59] *Forméd Trace*, 215.
[60] *Kinuta* was first published together with the all-important *Hagoromo* in October 1914. See also *L/DS* 293.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

wandering husband – when even the plants know their season" (*P&T* 424, 425). These are precisely the images that Pound's Daysair starts with: for Akheloös, the "three-twisted river," and for her husband who "never gets sight of his children, / like a farmer who sows a crop and doesn't / look at it again till harvest" (*P&T* 1067). Pound amplifies the citationality associated with Daysair, by adding another layer of quotation or "double-talk," and putting her very words in direct relation to the play's other, "eastern" origin.

Both plays open with laments for the abandoned women, which rely on similar images from the natural world. The "sorrow" of the Japanese wife "is in the twigs of the duck's nest," just as Daysair "left alone" is "so sorry a bird" (*P&T* 419, 1070). The former also compares her sorrow to that of fish "held apart in the waves," while her "tears are a rain in the silence" (419). The Greek chorus too conclude their song about Daysair's sadness on a watery note as the wind blows "tireless / wave over wave to flood" (1070). Like Daysair, the Noh wife manipulates a cloth in order to call back her husband, inspired by something she has been told: She beats a silk-board every night "for that far-murmuring cloth could move his sleep – that is the tale – though he were leagues away" (420). Though she doesn't make a tragic mistake, this action does not "ease [her] heart"; the cloth fails her, as it does Daysair, and she eventually gives up and dies (420). Both women are presented as entangled: Daysair "hark'd to reason in a foreign voice / Entangling her in ravage out of choice," while the Noh wife's heart is "entangled in the threads," the threads of hearsay perhaps (1095, 424). Both cloths turn into flame, Daysair's because of the centaur's potion, the Noh wife's because of her tears: "Her tears are shed on the silk-board, / Tears fall and turn into flame" (424). Finally, as Daysair's "Tears green the cheek with bright dews / pouring down," so the Noh wife becomes a "flower-heart of the grass [that] is blown on by a wind-like madness" (1096, 423).

But while Daysair's "redemption" and the play's intellectual/spiritual resolutions come through Herakles, who finally appears onstage once she has died (and who indeed would have been played by the same actor in the ancient performances), in *Kinuta* it is the ghost of the wife and not the living husband who is consumed by flame. It is she who could not escape from the "flaming of Karma" and who finally receives the illuminating law and is transformed:

> She recites the Flower of Law; the ghost is received into Butsu; the road has become enlightened. Her constant beating of silk has opened the flower, even so lightly she has entered the seed-pod of Butsu. (*P&T* 425)

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

The Japanese play doesn't redeem the in any case unknown husband, but rewards the wife's persistently reaffirmed ("constant beating") Penelopean patience. Through this act, moreover, she has aligned sound and image, touching the heart of others and producing out of many elements singular beauty:

> A time that brings awe to the heart, a sound of beaten cloths … crying in the storm, a sad sound of the crickets, make one sound in the falling dew, a whispering lamentation, hera, hera, a sound in the cloth of beauty. (*P&T* 423)

Even more than Daysair, then, the Noh wife is figured as a kind of artist, and her eventual reward is enlightenment. It was, we recall, another such onomatopoetic cricket song that Eliot had singled out in his 1917 review of Pound's Noh plays, claiming its ingenious linguistic mixing as "a remarkable triumph of translator's skill: it is certainly English, and it is certainly new in English" (*CP* 1, 567). Perhaps remembering Eliot's praise, Pound is inspired in the early 1950s to try his hand again at Greek, at having Sophocles' language, as x-rayed by his own, make the "one sound" of Hera(kles). He certainly considered the *WT* choruses to be his crowning achievement in form.[61]

Though Pound told Michael Reck that he didn't recall any lines "in particular" from the Noh that the latter could use in his Japanese translation of the *WT* choruses, it is hard not to think about the play as a rectification of *Kinuta* (perhaps further inspired by the resolution of the *Komachi* plays), with Herakles usurping the function of the wife's spirit in the Japanese play (*EP&J* 236). If so, it would be a woman generating the arch-father after all – or it is perhaps to suppress her image that he is generated, substituting for her ghost and instituting a male lineage, just as Daysair's telling folds are replaced by what "My father told me." The departure of Daysair coincides with the disappearance of the chorus in Pound's play, further indicating the erasure of the multiplicity of voice, of echoes that might be less coherent or well aligned with the message or "key phrase." Indeed, the last choral song consists in the final heralding of Herakles' appearance, while the chorus's last words in Pound's version, but not Sophocles', put the burden of carrying Herakles on the whole of "Greece," pitying the land and all of us for "the troubles coming / if you let such a man down" (*P&T* 1105),[62] if we fail to carry

[61] "The Art of Poetry," 25.
[62] Soph., *Trach.*, lines 1112–13.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

forward the message. For the Greco-Sino-Japanese ideogram of filiality to work, even the play's titular chorus of women – who in Sophocles foresee mourning (*penthos* [Soph., *Trach.*, line 1112]) and not troubles at the *death* and not the disappointment of Herakles – is pushed to the side, just as the Japanese wife who may well have called Pound's play into being is exchanged for her husband.

Hyllos: Letting the Man Down

But *WT* does not end with the God-dance or with the law of Filial Obedience. If the image of fire, with its many imagist and pre-imagist echoes, becomes the "unifying Image" by beginning and closing the play, overwriting other potentially resonant images (such as the *delton*/*sotoba*/ slab of wood or the woven gown), and presumably assuring its coherence, then we should also pay attention to that final fire Hyllos is supposed to light in order to earn his name. It is, however, the play's other strand – the one that negotiates the meaning of evidence, of reading, witnessing, of the whole process of transmission – that becomes tied to handling the circulation and legacy of the Heraklean image. The play culminates in a sort of trial, which undermines its overall triumphant tone,[63] much as the second stanza of "Little Gidding" IV qualifies the first.

Herakles' injunction bears on something to be done, not read or written – *res non verba*: The "deep-rooted oaks" are to be "lopped off" and burnt by Hyllos; they do not speak to him. But Hyllos is a stickler for detail. Transporting us suddenly into an American courtroom, he agrees at first to obey Herakles – "I swear, so help me God" – and even repeats his father's curse against "perjurers" (*P&T* 1109).[64] When, however, he discovers what exactly he has to do in order not to "let such a man down," he attributes the injunction to Herakles' "delirium" and imagines himself in a transcendental court of justice, having to defend his actions. Pound consistently translates Sophoclean Hyllos's concern with divine/moral right into more mundane legal concerns: *Dyssebeia* 'impiety' becomes "crime," *pandikōs* 'all-righteously' is split into "legal" and "Perfectly all right" (*P&T* 1112; Soph., *Trach.*, lines 1246–47). Though Hyllos is finally convinced that he "can't be blamed for obeying" Herakles, his father does acquiesce and excuse him from having to light the fire that will burn him, showing

[63] Cf. Liebregts, *Translations*, 238, who argues for Pound's essentially optimistic understanding of the play nonetheless.

[64] Initially, and more accurately, "so help me Zeus" for Soph., *Trach.*, line 1188.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

essentially what Hyllos's name had been telling us from the beginning: that the son is a lesser version of the father (*P&T* 1112).

Pound even rearranges the final scene to convey this turn for the worse. In his last speech in Sophocles, Herakles asks his soul to lead and be strong. Pound's Herakles addresses these lines to Hyllos, who is still telling Herakles "You're the driver" (*P&T* 1112). Hyllos instructs others to hoist Herakles onto the pyre and interprets the coherent Heraklean image as "the gods' great unreason," revealing that he has in fact seen and understood nothing of the coherent divine plan: "Gods! / Our present miseries, their shame," he exclaims (*P&T* 1113). Pound even has Hyllos end the play instead of the Sophoclean chorus; declaring that "And all of this is from Zeus," he may display the paternal lineage but it is as a degenerating one insofar as he hasn't received the message. Rather than the glorious realization of an oracle, which happens for the most part through the "poetry" in the choruses, we have a court drama ending in a kind of betrayal, which is then followed by the realization that there is Tomorrow and that it is worse. There is no one there to "wr[i]te it down" or to sing, as Pound suggests by abolishing the chorus.

It falls to the *Cantos* to correct Sophocles, restoring the order that the translation couldn't quite control. For at the end of *WT* we are far from the definition of "filial piety," as expressed, for example, in Canto 98: "Filial piety is very inclusive: it does not include / Family squabbles over / land money, etcetera / Or pretendings" (711).[65] Here filial piety *is* squabbles, even if not over land money. The next canto draws a sharp contrast to the Herakles–Hyllos "trial": "To trace out and to bind together / From sonship this goes to clan / and to avoid litigations / out of the field, from the trees" (99/715). The Hyllos–Herakles relationship is key in this set of cantos because of their emphasis on "volgar' eloquio taking the sense down to the people" (98/708). They focus on making Confucian teachings public and easily understandable – that is, passing them down – and so on the transmission of the solar vitality to the less-than-understanding son.

> The business of relatives is filiality,
> a gentleman's job is his sincerity.
> Build pen yeh
> the family profession
> It will bring luck out of the air (99/717)

[65] Omitting the two ideograms Pound uses here.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

"Pen yeh" was glossed earlier as root and *technē* (706–07), whereas "volgar' eloquio" can be analyzed into common/people and *technē*. What is done and the means of doing it have a craft, a *technē*, in common, but only if son and father work together. Concerned already at the end of *WT* about whether the ideogram he has presented has gotten off "the dead and desensitized surface of the reader's mind, onto a part that will register," Pound takes up the drill (*GK* 51).[66]

"I shall have to learn a little greek to keep up with this / but so will you": The Lessons of Tragedy in the Later Cantos

Throughout their correspondence, Earp insists on the main point of his book on the language of Sophocles that had so intrigued Pound: "Nearly all the language of classical Greek verse is an artificial compound of dialects."[67] He thus emboldens the writer of the *Cantos* to proceed with his own version of that project: dialects and idiolects pushing against each other but ultimately cohering as a single body of work. Though the Sophoclean plays form only a small visible part of the complex texture of the late cantos, they are essential to both the conception and articulation of their mission.[68] For one, the tension between singularity and multiplicity, coherence and divergence, that is at the heart of Pound's Sophocles is also one of the underlying structures of these cantos, where, as Peter Nicholls suggests, Pound attempts "to reduce everything to 'one principle'" or measure – one language we might say – but runs against another, more "'musical'" one "which assert[s] diversity and difference in the face of abstraction and merely quantitative identity."[69] Jean-Michel Rabaté has argued that *WT* "is such an important key to the understanding of the later Cantos" because it provides "the other side of the idealised order of Chinese dynasties: another pastoralism is inhabited by jealous gods and vengeful demigods, by tragic heroes who must die in order that they may see the light."[70] While this may be true,

[66] See Bernstein, *Tale of the Tribe*, 148–49, 153–57, on Pound's anxiety about, and shifting sense of, his audience in the Washington Cantos, and Whittier-Ferguson, *Framing Pieces*, 119, on Pound's sense of failure as underlying his frequent emphasis on clarity.

[67] August 24, 1953.

[68] Scholars have long noted this for *WT* (see, e.g., Kenner, *Pound Era*, and Bacigalupo, *Forméd Trace*, 240), but without closely examining the contexts into which the Sophoclean phrases are placed in the *Cantos* or the relationships between them; even Liebregts, *Translations*, 244–46, treats the *Cantos* passages only briefly.

[69] "Reckoning with *Thrones*," 242, 244.

[70] *Language, Sexuality, and Ideology*, 292, 291.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

the way that Pound deploys both this play and the *Elektra* actually ends up assimilating or aligning Greek tragedy, and the much-vaunted Greek musicality, with the monolithic edificatory rhetorical program of the late cantos, especially in *Rock-Drill*, despite his recognition of and struggle with tragedy's errant energies in translation.

The link between tragedy and civic politics is clear:[71] Pound and Eliot discussed it in the 1910s and 20s, Cocteau proved the relevance of that ancient articulation in the 1930s, Eliot then transposed it to the religious realm, while Pound attempted to reinstate it first through Agamemnon in the *Pisan Cantos* and then through Herakles. But the two tragedies that Pound chooses to translate are not as expressive of or as focused on those civic stakes except through their dissolution (or at least the dissolution of a pre-democratic model), which is followed by no clear path forward. The way Pound translates the *Elektra* only exacerbates this, which is what *WT* can correct by excising the possibility of many voices in its climactic moment even if Pound's translation as a whole – because of its commitment to Sophocles' text and to "non-invention" – acknowledges them. So, the late cantos admit two more tragedies – the *Eumenides* and *Antigone* – as bulwarks against the more muddled oppositions and resolutions in *Elektra* and *Trachiniai* and as a way of reframing Pound's earlier translations and more clearly realigning the poetic and the political in the poem. These tragedies, together with the Byzantine Eparch's Book and the *Odyssey* in *Thrones*, allow Pound to deflect Greek into the service of a coherent sociopolitical program, subjugating the translingual to the monolingual and language itself to action.

Rock-Drill*: Confirming Tragic Coherence*

Pound's return to the *Cantos* begins with what eventually became the end of Canto 86 and Cantos 87 and 88, and not with the lengthy Chinese-filled Canto 85.[72] That these sections include the bulk of the Sophoclean references suggests the significance of the latter in the restarting of the project. There are three tragic motifs in *Rock-Drill*, with a fourth appearing at two crucial moments. The first two are the ones identified in the *WT* note: *Elektra*'s οὐ ταῦτα … κακοῖσι (*ou tauta … kakoisi*; Soph., *El.*, line 351,

[71] My reading here has been informed by but diverges from that of Rabaté, *Language, Sexuality, and Ideology*, 293.

[72] Kindellan, *Late Cantos*, 69.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

translated by Pound as "need we add cowardice to all the rest of these ills") and the Heraklean λαμπρὰ συμβαίνει (or related moments). While the Trachinian phrase makes sense as a motto, especially given all the currents gathered in that play, the *Elektra* line is a more peculiar choice, particularly in light of Pound's additive mode of translation there. By re-centering *Elektra* on that line, Pound belies his own translation of the play; he uses the phrase to resolve or obscure the issues the translation had raised and instead fully aligns its mourned figure with Mussolini qua righteous ruler, while specifically eliding the faultier Agamemnon – who does make several appearances in Pound's composition notebooks of this period.[73] It is perhaps in order to more fully overwrite those *Elektran* echoes that Pound uses the *Eumenides* here (instead of resorting to the *Agamemnon* as previously), admitting that he needs the neat Aeschylean conclusion to get out of the indeterminacy of the Sophoclean version of the myth. So, without recourse to Greek, except occasionally to name Ἀθάνα 'Athena,' we find in *Rock-Drill* frequent mentions of "the jury trial at Athens."[74] Finally, Pound twice quotes from *Antigone*'s famous first stasimon on the wondrousness of humankind, as if to provide a complement to Cocteau's key phrase and show the non-"invented" justice of the earth as against the perverted new justice of Kreon. In contrast to the relatively open-ended treatment of Aeschylus in the *Pisan Cantos* and to the ambiguities of the Sophocles translations, it is a more directional and explicitly political reading that is proposed through these plays in the late cantos[75] as Pound attempts to rebuild the foundation both of his poem and of a loosely conceived *polis* on the basis of the following elements: links to the earth (*Antigone*), courage of action (*Elektra*), intellectual illumination (*Trachiniai*), justice (*Eumenides*). By acting in accordance with the "root," one suffers but achieves divine-ordered coherence (Herakles/Orestes), and that gives rise (or could) to a well-run *polis*, the specifics of whose governance *Thrones* will address.

The three main plays all appear together in the opening pages of Canto 87:

[73] See, for example, Notebook 90, p. 38 (EPP 120/4958), dated to late 1954–early 1955 and reviewed in 1957; the comments on Agamemnon appear in the context of Pound's reading commentary to *Odyssey* 11.

[74] Cf. 78/499 ("Pallas *Δίκη* sustain me"), where we may locate a similar allusion, in completely different terms: the goddess anglicized, justice not, the appeal more desperate and personal. Note too the marked difference from Eliot's use of the *Eumenides*, which sidelines the actual human/institution-founding component of the play.

[75] On this feature of *Rock-Drill* more broadly, see Kindellan, *Late Cantos*, 74, 71n52.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

… between the usurer and any man who
wants to do a good job
(perenne)
without regard to production –
a charge
for the use of money or credit.
"Why do you want to
"– perché si vuol mettere –
your ideas in order?"
Date '32 (87/589, ellipses in the original)

The canto begins *in medias res*, ostensibly picking up from the last line of the preceding poem – "Bellum cano perenne …" (86/588; 'I sing perennial war'). Such an opening together with its programmatic introductory phrase is no doubt meant to echo the incompletion at the beginning and end of the very first canto ("And then," "So that:"; 1/3, 5) and signify the whole project's reorientation. Eliot's "Hollow Men" v is faintly recalled through the startling "between,"[76] an echo that may have passed unnoticed if not for the almost direct quotation from "The Music of Poetry" ("no verse is free for the man who wants to do a good job"; *CP* 6, 320), highlighted too by the Italian "mettere" 'put,' punning on "meter." The careful reader of the *Cantos* knows that the missing answer to Mussolini's half-quoted/half-translated question to Pound in 1932 is "pel mio poema" 'for my poem' (recalled again in 93/646). The absent referent is in any case filled in contextually through the other metapoetic clues, making clear the kind of process that the poet is engaged in in *Rock-Drill*. He casts himself as another Herakles who will not add cowardice but will instead finally reveal the coherence, the ordering of the parts. But the canto's first two lines also alert us to a different context, for the other performer of "a good job" is of course the "usuress" Klytemnestra (82/543); it is her ambiguous ghost, her "good job" from the *Pisan Cantos*, that is exorcised throughout this canto. As we read a few lines below, "attention to outlet, no attention to source, / That is: the problem of issue" (87/589).

On the next page, two more tragic women speak, this time in Greek:

Vlaminck: "… is local." "Art is."
The pusillanimous wanting all men cut down to worm size.
Wops, maggots, crumbled from simple dishonesty.
διάβορον … ἐδεστὸν ἐξ αὑτοῦ φθίνει πρὸς κακοῖσι …
quia impossibile est.
Ver novum (87/590; Pound's ellipses throughout)

[76] "Between the idea / and the reality / Between the motion / And the act / Falls the Shadow," etc. (*P* 83).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

The Greek line combines *WT* with *Elektra*. The first segment is taken from Deianeira's description of the effects of Nessus's poison on the wool with which she daubed Herakles' peplos: τοῦτ' ἠφάνισται **διάβορον** πρὸς οὐδενὸς / τῶν ἔνδον, ἀλλ' **ἐδεστὸν ἐξ αὑτοῦ φθίνει** (Soph., *Trach.*, lines 676–77); "just disappeared. / Nobody touched it. / Seemed to **corrode** of itself. / **Ate itself up**" (*P&T* 1090). Pound splices it together with Elektra's πρὸς κακοῖσι '[adding] to ills' in order to suggest moral in addition to material decay. The centaur Nessus becomes a figure both for "the pusillanimous" and for those who "crumbl[e] from simple dishonesty," those who destroy others but also themselves in the process. But this heightened descent is stemmed through Latin, which denies it ("impossibile") by proposing a "ver novum," a new spring.[77] This refrain from the *Pervigilium Veneris* echoes a prescient poem of that title in *Hilda's Book*, which centers on being reborn in/through the beloved, who, unlike Daysair, "spellest ever gold from out my dross / Mage powerful and subtly sweet / Gathering fragments that there be no loss" (5).[78] Such an alternative, out of a despairing Greek vision, is emphasized by the ideogram that follows and that signifies "rest" (87/591).

It is now that Pound reaches further back than the Sophoclean tragedies – after all, this is the moment in *WT* when Deianeira in her "tragic mask" finally realizes her misunderstanding of Nessus's imaginary *delton* – and finds the Eumenides:

> Was not unanimous
> Ἀθάνα broke tie,
> That is 6 jurors against 6 jurors
> needed Ἀθάνα.
> Right, all of it, was under Shang
> save what came in Athens.
> Y Yin, Ocellus, Erigena:
> "All things are lights."
> Greek tags in Erigena's verses.
> And when they bumped off Alexander in Babylon
> that wrecked, said Gollievski "a good deal."
> Greece had no Quattrocento.
> Justinian's codes inefficient
> "abbiamo fatto un muchio … [Pound's ellipses]
> (a haystack of laws on paper)
> Mus. viva voce:

[77] See also Nicholls, *Politics, Economics and Writing*, 184–85.

[78] The handbound 1907 booklet had recently resurfaced and is discussed in Pound and H.D.'s correspondence.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

"We ask 'em to settle between 'em.
If they can't, the State intervenes."
. . . . . .
the faint green in spring time.
The play shaped from *φλογιζόμενον*
gospoda *Δηάνειρα, λαμπρὰ συμβαίνει*
From the dawn blaze to sunset
"What has been, should have
"All metal as barter" (87/591–92, italics in original)

What "Athens" recognized was the need for a principle of order that is outside the system and that underlies it – a way to make the many languages cohere, or the many local customs come together at the root, as Canto 99 in *Thrones* will suggest. Right and light are aligned, reaching a presumed apex in Alexander – who, in Pound's mind, is also responsible for sound economic policy – before collapsing, leaving Greece permanently in the dark ages, and bequeathing to the West a proliferation of statutes that "Mus." like a new Athena proposed to sort out. The section's conclusion returns to Deianeira to clarify the tenor in which she was quoted before: not as one of the pusillanimous usurers (like, we presume, Klytemnestra), but as a lady[79] who performed a necessary act. Unconsciously attuned to the rhythms of the earth and for the good of the state, she enabled the building of light (and, as I suggested in my reading above, it is she herself who must be seen and exorcised by this light). Mussolini, in his unattributed "key phrase," provides the final seal of approval, and allows Pound to return to the economic theme of issue. The canto suggests that any possibility of renewal (the make-it-new ideogram has also appeared) depends on the ability to return to or reuse raw materials – just as Pound himself does here with Athenian tragedy, as well as with the many light motifs that he presents – whose value hasn't been perverted or artificially inflated/deflated ("Pity to stamp save by weight" [87/592]) and can thus be used "as barter" rather than hoarded. Later on the same page Cocteau appears, with his telltale social commentary ("'A few' said Jean C. / 'gros legumes.'" [87/592]), completing the Poundian canon of tragic references, now fully integrated into the political/economic program of the poem.

The identification between the order of the city and the order of the poem, as well as between Athena, Mussolini, and the poet himself, recurs near the end of Canto 89:

[79] Hence the incorrectly declined "gospoda," which, *pace* Terrell, *Companion*, actually means "gentlemen," but which is nonetheless presumably intended as a link to Pound's Russian informant on Alexander above.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

"Neither by force nor by fraud, that there be
no coercion, either by force or by fraud,
That is the law's purpose, or should be.
Ἀθήνη swung the hung jury
. . . . . .
"Perché in ordine?" (vuol metter le sue idee)
said Mussolini.
. . . . . .
This section is labled: Rock Drill. (89/621)

Canto 89's stated aim has been "to know the histories" (610), and so, having named his poem ("Rock Drill") and slant-rhymed two of its current pillars (Ἀθήνη [*Athēnē*]–Mussolini, bound by the "ordine" that combines their vowel sounds), Pound moves through his own prehistory, even surreptitiously laying claim to the dissemination of the telegraph by ventriloquizing[80] Thomas Benton's granddaughter to write, without quotation marks, "My grandfather boosted Morse' telegraph" (89/621). He recalls his forerunners both in recording the "tale of the tribe" through word and image – by quoting "old Image (Selwyn)" on the importance of Ruskin "'to *us*,'" then "old Gustav [Flaubert]," then "Henry J.[ames] [who] had Coburn take photographs" – and in fighting a "bellum perenne" against corrupt enemies ("Tasso, Kidd [Kyd], Raleigh, all jailed") (89/621, 622). But he also returns to the prehistory of Athena's hung jury: "Agamemnon killed that stag, against hunting rites," and so became a "father of war" (89/622).[81] This different shading of Agamemnon – not present in the *Pisan Cantos* nor emphasized in *Elektra* and closer to the attitude displayed in Pound's early engagement with Aeschylus's play – allows Pound to subsume him into the pattern of necessary disorder/suffering that will produce order. At the same time, Agamemnon's alignment with "Judge Marshall" (89/622), who ratified the second U.S. Bank, suggests his crime too might have been one of usury ("contra naturam") and his war a civil war, and thus separates him from the transcendental authority that Mussolini becomes in these cantos.

Given these resonances, it should come as less of a surprise that the end of Canto 85, placed first in *Rock-Drill* but written after the passages above, programmatically hits the same notes, and offers a reprise of the *Pisan Cantos* opening:

[80] Incorrectly; see Terrell, *Companion*, 534.
[81] Pound had used the "hunting rites" line in *Elektra* as a translation of line 568, and had been told by Earp that it was incorrect (May 11, 1953). See also Reid on its repurposing here (*Elek* xiv–xv).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

Dead in the Piazzale Loreto,
In Holohan's case, murder protected.
Jury trial was in Athens.
Tyrants resisted
οὐ ταῦτα … κακοῖσι δειλίαν
. . . . . .
Sagetrieb
as the hand grips the wheat, 秉
Risked the smoke to go forward (85/579)

The Athenian jury trial – sans Athena – is presented as a counterexample to the Mussolini–Agamemnon murder in the Piazzale Loreto and to Mary Surratt's questionable trial by military court for Lincoln's murder (Holohan was a potential witness). Both leader and female maybe-murderer were hanged (unjustly in Pound's eyes) because the Athenian precedent, developed to respond to an even worse murderous predicament, was not heeded. The first item of business – evidenced by the ostentatious self-naming of the poem in Canto 89 above – is to close out the Sophoclean play through Aeschylus, and thus the foundation of the Areopagus is placed at the heart of this Poundian rock (that the original "father of war," namely Ares, was legendarily acquitted on the Athenian rock does not seem to figure in Pound's calculus, though it may be why he never names it). But now, the poet, like Herakles, has to "ris[k] the smoke to go forward," not adding cowardice (δειλίαν) and attempting to disseminate the Athenian *Sagetrieb*. An unusual note appended to the end of this canto rhymes nicely with the *Elektra* quote in its refusal of addition: "Kung said he had added nothing" (85/579). The note, moreover, tells us how we should then take this whole set of cantos: not as addition or invention, but as "confirmation," and, as the word implies, that is both an empirical and a religious process (579).

"get yr ear full of greek": Politics, or the Sounds in the Oak Wood

Once the poem's political-didactic program has been established, with all the tragedies put in their proper place, *Rock-Drill* can tackle what for Pound had always been the most unruly element of Greek: its sound and, by extension, its voices, which had been erased yet still registered in the *WT* translation. Canto 86 seems to admit the play's polylingual tree as a deterrent to war, but only in order to again prune it down to one sound.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

"No wars after '70."
"Nicht Bosheit, Dummheit!"
"Sono tutti eretici, Santo Padre,
ma non sono cattivi."
It can't be all in one language"
"They are all prots YR HOLINESS,
but not bad.["] (86/583)

In the first line Pound silently translates a remark by Bismarck, then in the third and fourth quotes the Italian queen Margherita's plea before translating it in the last two lines of the passage. The unattributed quotation (?) in English in the middle seems to suggest the importance of intercultural communication, cutting across both religious and linguistic lines, in the avoidance of war. Still, the languages chosen here (German and Italian, in addition to English) cannot be taken innocently, especially as the canto then modulates towards Mussolini and an attack on the British government. Indeed, perhaps "it can't be all in one language," but as the continuation of the passage suggests, all the languages point to the same conclusion:

"Alla non della", in the Verona statement
οὐ ταῦτα … κακοῖσι
Section Rock Drill.
Alexander paid the debts of his soldiery. (86/584)

Mussolini's statement regarding the right *to* ("alla") rather than *of* ("della") property was already praised in the *Pisan Cantos* as showing "the old hand as stylist still holding its cunning" when daring to "dream the Republic" of Salò (78/498). Here, Mussolini's insistence on such linguistic precision becomes an exemplar of not piling up the ills, of taking action to cut through them. Hence the way Pound cuts the *Elektra* quote here – "not these … [to] ills" – so that it becomes a statement rather than a question, and also excludes in advance the "ill" Elektra most fears at that moment: cowardice.

The linguistic alignment Pound effects in this passage is carefully plotted; the three languages, Italian, Greek, and English, all make the same sound and move to the same rhythm. Pound elides two words from this Greek quotation:[82] πρός 'to,' which will be supplied a few pages below (87/590), and δειλίαν 'cowardice,' which has been supplied a few pages above (85/579). Δειλίαν is the more notable semantic absence and, as I

[82] Three, if taking the line as a whole. But Pound never uses the verb ἔχει 'has' (translated idiomatically as 'add') at its end.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

have suggested, may be intentionally omitted. It is not wholly absent, however, since it sonically echoes in the lines above and below: rejected in the form of the Italian "della" (thus δειλίαν, *deilian* is identified with the idea of the right *of* property), modified and accepted in "Drill" (in its meaning of repetitive exercise, drill is the opposite of cowardice-inaction), which is visually aligned with the ellipses in the Greek line.[83] The Mussolinian "alla" is then taken up in "*Al*exander," *Rock-Drill*'s other favorite model leader, the *d*s and *l*s of *deilian* now exorcised and tying Alexander not to coward*d*ice but instead to the "*d*ebts" of his "so*l-d*iery" which he "pai*d*." Prosodically, the Italian phrase is in Pound's favorite stress-based adonic foot (dactyl + trochee), while the three-word announcement of the section's name – here given for the first time within the body of the poem – falls one syllable short (hence the indent) of the adonic, but gestures towards its alternate realization as dactyl (here trochee) + spondee. Temporally, then, or quantitatively speaking, the lines are equivalent, each having seven positions. The Greek line as presented could be parsed into an opening spondee and closing trochee as well. The renewed poetic, political, and (non-)translation projects are thus inextricably tied, with three languages all saying one thing: "R**ock Dr**ill," coming out of "alla non della," is essentially the positive translation of "**οὐ κ**(ακοῖσι) **δειλ**ίαν." "**Sect**ion" itself picks up the remaining Greek sounds.

In a draft notebook passage with related *Rock-Drill* materials, Pound had scribbled the injunction "get yr ear full of greek,"[84] but as we have seen, Greek sonorities are deployed differently here, correcting the *Elektra*. In the speech from which the Sophoclean line is taken, Elektra berates her sister Chrysothemis for forgetting their father and for speaking the mother tongue: "YOU didn't think of any of that / it's just what she told you" (*Elek*, lines 392–93).[85] She also insists on the efficacy of her own mourning, on her lament as action, in which Chrysothemis doesn't participate: "but when I'm all out to do right by my father, / will you come in on it? No. You try to put me off it" (*Elek*, lines 398–99).[86] While Pound in 1949 had translated the line and the whole exchange into his own mother tongue

[83] As Kindellan, *Late Cantos*, 117, reports, Pound "wanted exactly three dots placed as ellipses points" between the Greek words, one of few corrections he made in the Canto 86 proofs. The reason is unclear – perhaps the three dots match the three words in Italian, Greek, and English that form the core of the translation operation here – but it confirms his particular attention to presentation in this passage.

[84] The excerpt, from Notebook 75, is cited in Kindellan, *Late Cantos*, 89.

[85] Sophocles, *Electra,* lines 343–44.

[86] Sophocles, *Electra,* lines 349–50.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

without much issue, like another Chrysothemis, he now doubly translates it into the Italian father tongue: first sonically and second through the alignment between Elektra's word-actions and Mussolini's, whose celebrated act here is, we recall, linguistic in nature. The latter could be said for the poet too, insofar as his borrowed title "Rock Drill" comes from the masculinist ethos of vorticism and a 1913 Jacob Epstein sculpture by this name. Greek sound becomes sculpture, not simply written down under the father's tree, but now firmly cut in rock.

Rock-Drill concludes with a final clarification of the relationship between language and politics as Pound in Canto 95 addresses and implicitly argues for his treatment of the Sophoclean πολυγλώσσου. It is a complex maneuver that relies on the philosophical-political articulation of human society by Aristotle and Dante as well as on the *Antigone* as a correction or complement to the moment of coherence in *WT*. In both cases, it is defining humanity's proper connection to nature that is at stake, and thus also separating out the right from the wrong "sounds in that oak-wood."

> "Not political", Dante says, a
> "compagnevole animale"
> Even if some do coagulate into cities
> πόλις, πολιτική
> reproducteur,
> contribuable. Paradis peint
> but πολεύω meaning to plough
> πολύγλωσσος
> There were many sounds in that oak-wood.
>
> (95/663–64)

The passage draws a distinction between the "political" and the "compagnevole" (social, company-seeking): Which is to be preferred as a translation of Aristotle's definition of the human as a **πολιτικὸν** ζῷον (*politikon zōon* 'animal')?[87] The former is identified with Rémy de Gourmont's understanding of the bourgeoisie as reproducing ("reproducteur"), tax-paying, voting animals, the latter presumably refers to individuals seeking each other's company because of "love" (the canto's first word, a few lines above this passage) – love of each other or of what they have in common.[88] In the chapter of the *Convivio* quoted here Dante himself is concerned with the building of cities and with the avoidance of war. He argues that

[87] *Politics* 1.1.9, my emphasis.

[88] In a foreshadowing of the Eparch's Book that will feature prominently in *Thrones*, the line preceding this passage has referred to "guilds in Byzantium" (95/663).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

a monarchy over the whole earth is necessary to stem humanity's ever acquisitive nature and allow humans to live in a society of love and happiness and not of war. For Dante this state is equally natural, or at least "that for which" ("quello per esso") humans are born.[89]

In addition to preferring or even defending Dante's "mistranslation" of Aristotle's πολιτικόν over the word's seemingly transparent translation into "political," Pound also attempts to retrieve, à la Heidegger, a different strand in the potential meaning of πόλις (*polis*) through the verb πολεύω (*poleuō*) 'to turn up the soil with the plough' (*LSJ* II). Thus he would again contrast to the infinitely reproducing (*tekousa*/*tokos*) painted paradise of the modern capitalist bourgeoisie an organic, natural vision. This meaning of πολεύω – rather than *LSJ* I 'turn or go about' the city or the firmament – is best exemplified, including in *LSJ*, by the first stasimon in *Antigone*, which memorably opens, "Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man." But Pound is interested in its end:

> Γᾶν
> ἄφθιτον, ἀκαμάταν, ἀποτρύεται
> ἰλλομένων ἀρότρων ἔτος εἰς ἔτος
> ἱππείῳ γένει **πολεύων**. (337–40, my emphasis)[90]
>
> Earth, … the immortal, the unwearied, doth he wear [away], **turning the soil** with the offspring of horses, as the ploughs go to and fro from year to year. (trans. Jebb, my emphasis)

Pound has already quoted lines 337–38 (underlined above) in Canto 88 in reference to Nathaniel Macon, "an ardent Jeffersonian and an opponent of the reestablishment of the Bank of the United States."[91] As described by that canto's main historical source, Thomas Benton's *Thirty Years' View* (wr. 1854–56), Macon

> Used plough and hoe until he was sixty
> Γᾶν ἄφθιτον ἀκαμάταν ἀποτρύεται
> And to receive all guests in his house,
> Drew a knife to defend Mr. Randolph. (88/604)

Macon is attuned both to the earth's plenty, its Sophoclean unwearying productivity (and not to the banks), and to other people ("compagnevole"). He is thus exemplary of the human *deinotēs* (wonderfulness or formidableness) praised in *Antigone*'s stasimon.

[89] *Convivio* 4.IV.4, trans. Lansing; Italian edition by Busnelli and Vandelli.
[90] I use the older Loeb edition by Storr.
[91] Terrell, *Companion*, 502.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

Canto 88 connects to our passage in 95 not only through *Antigone* but also through Aristotle. Earlier in that poem, another series of Greek privative α-adjectives has been quoted:

> Mencius on tithing,
> PERENNE.
> Cano perenne,
> . . . . . .
> a "throne," something God can sit on
> without having it sqush [*sic*];
> With greek tags in his excellent verses,
> Erigena,
> In reign of Carolus Calvus.
> . . . . . .
> "Hoggers of harvest!" Delcroix (properly):
> "always the same."
> Get the meaning across and then quit.
> Said Baccin: "That tree, and that tree,
> "Yes, I planted that tree …"
> . . . . . .
> *altro che tacita*
> ἀφρήτωρ, ἀθέμιστος, ἀνέστιος
> To the all-men as to the Emperor. (88/600–01)

There is an intertwining here between the usual terms of the *bellum perenne* (tithing and planting vs. indiscriminately hogging the harvest) and Pound's metapoetics, as introduced by "cano" 'I sing.' Most obviously he suggests through Erigena that it is the Greek correlation that will provide the firm foundation for God's "throne" – and this should come as no surprise given the treatment of such tags earlier in *Rock-Drill*. The requisite "greek tag" follows to confirm Delcroix:[92] ἀφρήτωρ, ἀθέμιστος, ἀνέστιος ("clanless, lawless, hearthless"),[93] which Terrell's *Companion* rightly identifies as *Iliad* 9.63. However, the real source for Pound here is, I believe, the same Aristotle passage referred to by Dante in the *Convivio* quote used in Canto 95: *Politics* 1.1.9. There the philosopher cites Homer's condemnation of such a "clanless, lawless, hearthless" man as support for his own point that "man is by nature a political animal [*physei politikon zōon*], and a man that is by nature and not merely by fortune citiless [*apolis*] is either low in the scale of humanity or above it."[94] Homer also allows Aristotle

[92] Fascist hero, much admired by Mussolini; see Nicholls, "Late Pound," 11–12.
[93] In A. T. Murray's wonderfully succinct translation for the Loeb.
[94] Trans. Rackham here and below.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

to make the connection to war; after the Iliadic quotation, he comments that a man who is by nature like the one described by Homer will also be desirous of war. The way to avoid war lies in a particular feature of human society; for this is the very same section of the *Politics* in which Aristotle links humanity's essential "political" nature to *logos*:

> And why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech [*logon*].[95]

He proceeds to distinguish between *phōnē* 'voice' and *logos*: The former is capable of giving signs (*sēmeia*) for sensations and is shared by animals, while the latter "is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right [*dikaion*] and the wrong [*adikon*]" (1.1.10). This human ability to both perceive and communicate justice is what allows the making (*poiei*) of a "household [*oikian*] and a city-state [*polis*]" (1.1.11). The full Aristotelian reference illuminates Pound's heavy reliance on quotations in setting up this section of Canto 88 as an antidote to the "bellum perenne": He allows his speakers themselves to *say* what is just and what is unjust, and it is on that basis that he will build his own *polis*.

Thus we return full circle to Canto 95's πολεύω. The link between the *polis* and speech in *Politics* (and actually later on in the *Antigone* stasimon as well)[96] prompts Pound to finally recall the Sophoclean πολυγλώσσου here, and to do so in order to implicitly justify its exclusion from the play. That is, the move between πολεύω and πολύγλωσσος may obviously be a homophonic pun, but it is exactly the kind of move Pound in theory wants to limit. In the earlier passage from Canto 88 the farmer's simplicity of action (planting his trees) is accompanied by a simplicity of language – language reduced to a repetitive deictic ("That tree, and that tree," etc.), consisting only in the link between word and referent, plus memory. Such simplicity is endorsed by the poet: "Get the meaning across and then quit," the prescribed silence reinforced in the Italian "*altro che tacita* [another who quiets (himself)]" as well. So, here, Pound sonically attempts to enact what for Aristotle is the unique human capacity: to discern which of the natural voices or sounds (in the "oak-wood") should be followed, which are harmful and which advantageous – to untangle πολιτικός from the similar-sounding *political*, *reproducteur*, *paradis peint*,

[95] *Politics* 1.1.10.

[96] Jebb's commentary on *Antigone* links the first stasimon to the Aristotelian passage in *Politics* 1.1.10 cited above, specifically through the relation proposed between *polis* and speech in the opening lines of its second strophe.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

and πολύγλωσσος (and perhaps also the Aristotelian πόλεμος 'war'), and to "rectify" it into *compagn**evol**e*, π**ολεύ**ω, and *plough.*[97]

In a section that didn't make into the *Cantos*, the same closeness between language and order is registered: "illustrates speech – / (also) / as a medium / the problem of order. / (rock-drill) / + Earp has made a few remarks about / Σοφοκλες."[98] As discussed, what interested Pound most in Earp's remarks was the scholar's highlighting of Sophocles' use of different dialects and registers ("speech"), and his suggestion that, despite this local variation, the plays displayed "order" – that is the business of "rock-drill." Having first delimited the oak-tree's sounds, Pound then uses Canto 95 to supplement the political order hinted at but at the same time doubted at the end of *WT*. So, how do now we get from a *glōssa*, reduced by Pound to "sound" rather than 'tongue' or 'language,' to the *logos* (speech and ratio)[99] that conveys what is just and allows for the building of a city that is beneficial to all, and is based on the natural turnings of the inexhaustible earth? It is history that comes in to further clarify sound in a way it could not in the translation of the play: "Benton: when there was plenty of metal, / Van Buren already desmearing Talleyrand / J.A. 'the whole people (devaluation).' / Alexander paid the debts of his soldiery" (95/664). From these historical examples of true political action, the canto turns to the question of lineage and continuing tradition, negative and positive – another one of the loose ends in *WT*. Pound sympathetically recalls the fascist Admiral Uberti, who wondered whether he too, "six centuries after" his ancestor Lapo degli Uberti, would die in exile "also from some vento di siepe" (i.e., shot in ambush; 664). Further down, we read of "YAO's worry: to find a successor," which led him to skip his own son in favor of someone else whom he thought to be the "one man" for the job (664) – unlike, it is perhaps implied, Herakles, who focused on the apparently less competent Hyllos. A similar case of mismatch between power, position, and lineage follows: "& the three years peace we owe Windsor / '36–'39" (665). England's Edward VIII had of course abdicated at the end of 1936, and so his supposedly great act wasn't "political" in the official narrow sense, but was, in Pound's mistaken estimation, more fundamentally "compagnevole" in its goal of peace.[100] Armed thus with Aristotle and Dante, but also with the divine

[97] *Pace* Rabaté, *Language, Sexuality, and Ideology*, 292.
[98] EPP 119/4949; Notebook 81, p. 43. The last two lines are then crossed out.
[99] Economic ratios rise to prominence in *Thrones*; see, for example, Canto 97.
[100] This is a repeated motif in *Rock-Drill* and, like much else, dangerously misguided.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

and earthly ethical-political programs detected in the *Eumenides* and the *Antigone*, Pound concludes *Rock-Drill* having successfully re-founded his poem on the Greek rock and tightly re-aligned its sounds with its politics.

The Common Greek of Thrones*: From Odysseus to Digenis*

The conclusion of *Rock-Drill* in Canto 95 prepares for and clarifies Pound's linguistic and lexicographical program in *Thrones*.[101] In this last finished section of the *Cantos*, the excess of language is constantly condemned and becomes aligned with excessive luxury in the poem's persistent critique of "Taozers" and Buddhists:

> and as for those who deform thought with iambics … / ten billion wordings / and destroy the five human relations (98/707)

> Does god need a clay model? gilded? / … these tongue words! / The maker of words ascending, / whiteness of bones beneath (98/708)

> Tinkle, tinkle, two tongues? No. (99/722)

> nor has one seen taozers ascending in pai jih / in the white light / the pai jih / with ten billion wordings (100/738)

In contrast, the Confucian Salt Commissioner is recorded as "in volgar' eloquio taking the sense down to the people" (98/708), while Ford Madox Ford is recalled urging that we "get a dictionary / and learn the meaning of words" (98/709; more stridently at 100/739), and thus not over- or mis-use them. "State the laws in clear language" (98/712), "Illumine the words of procedure" (98/718), we keep reading. Appropriately, there is more explication and apparent dictionary use for Greek words in *Thrones* than anywhere else in the poem – and there are more Greek words here than anywhere else. The goal is likewise coherence; the word συμβαίνει appears even in the context of Coke's *Institutes* to refer to the "concord" achieved in a properly functioning court of law. Coke thus offers another contrast with the "court" of *WT*, consonant with the "Jury trial … in Athens" that is again recalled on the very last page of *Thrones* (109/792, 109/794). As Kindellan shows through his careful reading of the figure of Leucothea/Leucothoe, Pound performs a "twining of previously discrete entities."[102]

[101] On this foregrounding of linguistic operations see Bernstein, *Tale of the Tribe*, 153–61, and more recently Dowthwaite, *Theories of Language*, ch. 5. For a more critical take, see Marsh, *Washington Cantos*, 34–35.

[102] *Late Cantos*, 134.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

That is, "rather than a single word meaning different things, different words mean the *same* thing."[103] After the lesson of Canto 95, there is now only one sound in that oak wood.

Unlike Eliot's common *logos*, which must remain obscure, untranslatable, even if its tolling is heard, Pound's "one" language relies on transparency, on "philological" demonstrability, on translatability. On the formal level we see this in Pound's treatment of the written form of Greek. He alternates between quoting in Greek characters, in an English transcription, and in a translation proper, the latter either presented immediately as in a dictionary entry or, unlike in earlier cantos, far from the immediate vicinity of the citation. For example, Athena's words about Nestor in *Odyssey* 3.20 (ψεῦδος δ' οὐκ ἐρέει: μάλα γὰρ πεπνυμένος ἐστί) appear in these different forms in 98/706 (Greek), 99/717 (translation: "Nestor 'too intelligent to prevaricate.'"), 102/749 (transcription). Unlike in *Elektra* or in the *Pisan Cantos*, the three renderings are not made to interact and are thus not probed or questioned, but are treated as interchangeable; it is no accident that the statement reiterated is that Nestor tells the truth. This process, so necessary to these late cantos, is conceived quite consciously through the non-reading of Sophocles' πολυγλώσσου outlined above, while both earlier (*Odyssey*) and later (Eparch's Book, *Digenis Akritis*) Greek texts are made to conform to the one "right" sound until language is potentially overcome altogether.

Explicit references to tragedy are few in *Thrones*, except for the luminous details of "splendour" (which in any case is not exclusive to *WT* in Pound's oeuvre) and συμβαίνει, and the positive and negative examples drawn through the filiality and centaur motifs already highlighted. Canto 99 implicitly picks up many of the resonances and leftovers from *WT* and tries to bring *them* together in an attempt to have "all converge as the root" (99/714):

> To see the light pour,
> that is, toward sinceritas
> of the word, comprehensive
> KOINE ENNOIA
> all astute men can see it encircling.
> Chou saw it, my SIRE also,
> With splendour,
> Catholicity,
> Woven in order
> as on cords in the loom (99/714–15)

[103] Ibid.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

"Splendour" is consistently linked in *Thrones* with the ideograms for *hsien* and *ming*, which Pound understands as "manifest intelligence" (intelligence itself is "the total light process");[104] equally consistently, though, he glosses these ideograms as "the *silk* cords of the sunlight," which "non si disuna" 'doesn't disunite itself' (98/713, 99/714, my emphasis and translation). This image is echoed in the passage above and recalls both Daysair's woven gown and *Kinuta*'s cloth and weaving loom, as if Pound is again tying up that loose end, reabsorbing the women into the texture of his poem as the other side of the Heraklean illumination of the intellect. This is consistent with later developments in the canto. There seems to be room for some accounting for local difference, an attempt to build in heterogeneity, to in some ways acknowledge the potential of a multilingual tree: "the sages of Han" say that "Manners are from earth and from water / They arise out of hills and streams" so "The spirit of air is of the country" and "Men's manners cannot be one / (same, identical)" (99/718). But the door only opens to be shut, as Pound demonstrates on the next page. Having referred to the Crusaders, to his own grandfather, to Khati and Al Kindi, Synesius and H. L. Mencken, he writes:

> Han (IX, i.e. nine) believed in the peoples,
> Different each, different customs
> but one root in the equities,
> One in acumen,
> with the sun (chih)
> under it all
> & faith with the word
> Hills and streams colour the air,
> vigour, tranquility, not one set of rules. (719)

The sets of rules may vary in accordance to the "air," but they are underwritten by the catholic or "koine" values of vigour and tranquility which arise from "faith with the word." Even the gesture of "IX, i.e. nine" depicts on a small scale the "one root," the translatability that is guaranteed by the "word" as an object of divine worship – or, as a token with credit to back it up. "All must die, but if the people be without faith (fail of their word) nothing stands," Pound translates in the *Analects* (*P&T* 708).

In this section of the poem Pound expands his linguistic-cum-political Greek inquiries to Homeric vocabulary and to the tenth-century Eparch's Book. The latter is the main topic of the first *Thrones* canto, whose preoccupations follow directly from the linguistic-delimitation program

[104] See Terrell, *Companion*, 636–37.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

outlined in Canto 95. The transition between Cantos 95 and 96 occurs through the nymph Leucothea appearing with "pity" at the end of the former (95/667), and disappearing in the beginning of the latter, just as she does near the end of *Odyssey* 5, where she offers Odysseus her veil. *Thrones* and especially the Byzantine society depicted in the section's first text is thus introduced as if it is the nostalgically re-approached, well-functioning land of the Phaeacians – "νόστου / γαίης Φαιήκων, …" concludes Canto 95 (667; *Odyssey* 5.344–45)[105] – and seems to live up to that characterization: "Here, surely, is a refinement of language" (96/679). Canto 96 is consumed with lexicography. It contains an indented, italicized note defending Pound's choice to tackle such obscure material; it includes lengthy quotations in Greek and English, snide remarks against the editor of the Eparch's Book and against the *LSJ*; and finally it incorporates a four-column table mapping Greek words onto what looks like their English definitions and then onto ideograms, which are further accompanied by their English transliteration. Linguistic transparency is the order of the day.[106]

In Canto 96 Pound writes in what at first may appear as his Elektran Anglo-Greek idiom. But whereas in his version of the tragedy the principle of linguistic equivalence in translation was put into question, here Pound records his own process of decipherment, gets it across, and then *basta*:

> emphorio, to be borne about, to be filled with
> oinos, the fermented
> katakremnízo, to throw down or headlong
> diaphora, variance
> bias, vigors
> and if wine-seller be found with false measures
> & not bearing the proper seals
> shall be smacked, cropped and
> put out of the sunthema ἐκδιωκέσθωσαν
> ΠΕΡΙ ΛΕΓΑΤΑΡΙΟΥ
> seem to be foreign importers (96/681)

The Greek words are transcribed and selectively though not incorrectly interpreted; unsurprisingly, Pound's focus is on "the root," on etymological readings, as it will be in his reading of Chinese later in *Thrones*. Then

[105] While *nostos* usually refers to the return journey or the journey *home*, in this particular passage its meaning is more general: Leucothea tells Odysseus to *journey to* the land of the Phaeacians. But in excerpting *nostos* as he does, Pound doubtless intends to summon its more familiar meaning.

[106] Parker, "Some Contexts for Canto XCVI," offers an astute account of Pound's use of the Eparch's Book.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

their meaning is forcefully brought together in several complete English phrases before the passage concludes emphatically with two Greek words – one wrongly transcribed but potentially readable in English (sun 'with' + them[e]), the other presumably too difficult to transcribe – and Pound moves on to the next section of the book, marked by capitalization.[107] When the Eparch's Book's editor Jules Nicole seems to have inadvertently engaged in interlingual wordplay, something Pound himself might have done in his more playful modes,[108] he is mocked for it:

> And no one to be brought into the guild without notice
> (aveu du prefet) What was the greek for aveu
> in this instance? εἰδήσεως τοῦ ἐπάρχου
> rather nice use of *aveu*, Professor,
> though you were looking at ἄνευ. (96/687)

Pound implies that Nicole is seduced by the visual similarity of the Greek preposition ἄνευ 'without' (in the phrase ἄνευ εἰδήσεως 'without notice') to the French noun *aveu* 'confession, admission' and fails to translate εἰδήσεως with attention to linguistic nicety, opting instead for a stronger rendering. Like another Deianeira, he pays attention to the wrong "tongue" of the Greek tree. Canto 97 clarifies the stakes of this kind of lexicography, identifying terminological precision with equity, and the metaphysical with the physical.

> an interest in equity
> not in mere terminology
> μετά τά φυσικά
> metah, not so extraneous, possibly not so extraneous
> most "*metas*" seem to be in with. (97/700)

The three "metas" in this passage – Greek, English phonetic transcription, English grammatical appropriation – are equated, "in with" each other regardless of their material representation on the page. And so something presumably metaphysical – for example, equity – can be forced to inhere in the physical, while at the same time helping elevate "mere terminology" into a world-governing principle.

After Pound has examined the well-governed tenth-century Phaeacia of Leo VI's Byzantine court, he must return, like Odysseus, to Ithaca itself. The unfinished business of the *Trachiniai* (and the Sophoclean *Elektra*)

[107] Pound creates a misleading impression of the text. The initial list of Greek words belongs to the paragraph before the one containing the meaning he translates into English.

[108] For example, two cantos later: "*Thin*ning their oar-blades / θῖνα θαλάσσης" (98/704, my emphasis), which echoes the Pindar pun in *Mauberley* (*P&T* 551).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

may explain Pound's newfound interest not in Odysseus's adventures (beyond the Leucothea moment), but in those he left behind: Penelope and Telemachus. Bringing the *Odyssey* back into the poem is another way to exorcise *Kinuta*'s wife, by proving that her Penelopean patience was warranted since, Pound wants to claim, Odysseus was both a good husband and a great ruler, not one who "mete[s] and dole[s] / Unequal laws unto a savage race," as Tennyson would have it. Pound's notebooks clearly indicate that he is closely reading through the first books of the *Odyssey*.[109] Only a handful of moments make it into the *Cantos*, but the fact that *Confucius to Cummings* anthologizes mostly passages from Books 4 and 14 strongly conveys his interest in them at this time. As he writes in the introductory note to that last anthology, Homer "showed interest in practical affairs…. Various dimensions of his writing have received inadequate publicity" (ix), and it is those that Pound is publicizing now. His review entails a rereading of Odysseus as a man of action and governance, not of words, even if we are parenthetically told that "Odysseus' old ma missed his conversation" (99/714, 717) in an instance of Pound himself filling in a translation gap left in Canto 1.

Canto 102 reorients Odysseus away from language and towards action, first quite literally by changing the *Odyssey*'s words. But Pound also shows Odysseus evolve as it were historically from the rumorological universe of the Homeric epic through Sappho, Ovid, and Plotinus into the Byzantine borderlands of the ninth-/tenth-century Greek vernacular epic *Digenis Akritis* – essentially planting him into the period of the Eparch's Book. The dictionary procedure of Canto 96 works less efficiently in the case of Homer; for example, Pound returns multiple times to the explication of "the colour as *aithiops*" (102/750, 97/695).[110] Still, here too the poet willfully excises language in order to have "ground to stand on":

> This I had from Kalupso
> who had it from Hermes
> . . . . . .
> "A cargo of Iron"
> lied Pallas
> and as to why Penelope waited
> keinas … e Orgei. line 639. Leucothoe
> rose as an incense bush,
> resisting Apollo

[109] Especially Notebooks 90 and 91; 90 also contains notes on Book 10, with Greek phrases that do not appear in *Thrones*. EPP 120/4958 and 4959.

[110] See Bacigalupo, *Formèd Trace*, 351–53 and 412–13, on this supposed mistake.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

. . . . . .
But the lot of 'em, Yeats, Possum, Old Wyndham
had no ground to stand on
Black shawls still worn for Demeter
in Venice,
in my time,
my young time
OIOS TELESAI ERGON … EROS TE
The cat talks μάω
(mao) with a greek inflection.
Barley is the marrow of men (102/748–49, longer ellipses mine)

In *Odyssey* 2.272, Athena in the guise of Mentor praises Odysseus: **οἷος** κεῖνος ἔην **τελέσαι ἔργον** τε **ἔπος τε** ("**such a man** was he to **fulfill** both **deed and word**"; my emphasis on the words used by Pound).[111] Evidently the transcription in Canto 102 above is incorrect, Pound having substituted "EROS" 'love' for "EPOS" 'word' some time during the drafting process.[112] As in the Heraklean moment of *WT*, the polysemic *epos* (word–epic) is left out – potentially too engaged with the Taozers' billion wordings. But now Pound is trying to bring the similarly excised *erōs* back in. The key word here is "TELESAI" 'complete, fulfill, do': An "ERGON" and "EROS" can be finished or perfected, while words seem to continue, especially those of Odysseus. He is the man who quintessentially does *not* stand by his word, spinning a new story every time he has a new audience – even, cruelly, to his aged father in *Odyssey* 24. Odysseus's reliance on word rather than "fact" is suggested by the Kalypso–Hermes rumor mill outlined in the canto's opening lines, with Pallas's "lie" quickly following in order to help us appropriately color the nature of the information provided by the aforementioned gods.[113] Pound is, however, quick to pivot to Odysseus's more desirable qualities with his first, also inaccurately transcribed, quotation from Homer: "keinas … e Orgei." In *Odyssey* 4.693 (not 639), we hear Penelope herself praising Odysseus: **κεῖνος** δ' οὔ ποτε πάμπαν ἀτάσθαλον ἄνδρα **ἐώργει** ("yet **he** never **dealt** intemperately at all with any man"; my emphasis on the words used by Pound). It is a remarkable passage in Greek, for three consecutive lines end with a version of *ergon*: ἐώργει 'did, wrought' (translated as "dealt with" above), ἔργα 'works, deeds,' ἐυεργέων 'well-done [deeds]' (693–95).

[111] Here and below I am using A. T. Murray's *Odyssey* translation, as recently revised for the Loeb.
[112] Kindellan, *Late Cantos*, 185–89, offers an illuminating analysis of these textual vagaries. See also Bacigalupo, *Forméd Trace*, 408, and Marsh, *Washington Cantos*, 120–21.
[113] Cf. Bacigalupo, *Forméd Trace*, 404–05.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

This recurrence provides the justification for Pound's condensation of the first line into simply "e Orgei." While Penelope suggests Odysseus didn't do anything bad to anyone, in Canto 102 we are supposed to read only that "he does." That is, the poem wants to praise the man of action no matter the result (*Analects* 12.21.3: "Put first the action, second the success" [*P&T* 710]).

Pound's transliteration (beyond the clear error of "kein*a*s" instead of "kein*o*s") allows him to integrate the Odyssean quotation into a larger pattern set up in the canto. In "e Orgei" (for ἐώργει), the freestanding "e" may be read as an emphatic Italian "and" or as a shortened "eu" 'good' (present in Penelope's subsequent **ἐυ**εργέων); more likely, it is separated out in order to show that "orgy" is part of this lexical family too.[114] Pound would have also seen in *LSJ* that the verb ἔρδω itself (of which ἐώργει is a form) has a specific secondary meaning of "offer a sacrifice." He is, then, already orienting the canto towards Demeter, and towards his obsession with the productivity of the earth, seen clearly on the next page when he translates two separate references to barley in the *Odyssey* (2.290 translated in the last line quoted above and 4.761). Through the action of ritual Pound connects this newly interesting part of the *Odyssey* to the *Cantos*' earlier uses of Books 10 and 11: "AISSOUSIN [dart], / the spirits," Circe tells Odysseus when describing the underworld, to which she sends him and which we had visited in Canto 1 (102/750; *Odyssey* 10.495). And so the poet, "lit by the torch-flare" like another Odysseus-cum-Herakles, lets select "dead words out of fashion" into his poem:

> the colour as *aithiops*
> the gloss probably
> *oinops*
> as lacquer in sunlight
> haliporphuros,
> russet-gold (102/750)

We are back to the Trachinian image, the moment of visible intelligibility: "gloss" as *shine* and "gloss" as *explanation* become one, the physical "in with" the metaphysical. Glowing, electrified Odysseus, the just ruler and worker of the rites of the earth, continues the paradigm set down through the four tragedies in *Rock-Drill*, turning into Antigone and Herakles, Elektra and Athena all at once and letting only the right dead words through.

[114] For the use of "orgy" in *WT*, see Liebregts, *Translations*, 213. I disagree with his suggestion that it is the product of Pound's occasional carelessness; especially given that Earp had pointed it out as an "error," it strikes me as quite intentional and functional in the passage.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

The other ancient texts Pound interweaves into the opening of Canto 102 provide implicit support for his slanted reading of the *Odyssey* and begin to clarify the relation between language and love that was suppressed in *WT*. Leucothoe's resistance to Apollo fits in well with the anti-rhetorical thrust of the passage; Apollo *Loxias* 'crooked' is the god who doesn't speak straight. Even more relevant here, Ovid recounts that Venus made Apollo/Helios fall in love with Leucothoe as a punishment for his gossiping: for revealing her affair with Mars to Vulcan.[115] *Erōs* in exchange for *epos* indeed. This is a story already sung by the Phaeacian bard Demodokos in the *Odyssey* itself, but with a crucial difference: In Homer there is no punishment for Helios's tattling (and thus no Leucothoe). In Pound's mind, then, Ovid may well have been correcting his predecessor.[116] So Pound himself corrects the variously "ungrounded" Apollonian writers named: Yeats with his oracular/mediumistic fascination, Eliot with his fastidiousness, Lewis with his hyper-masculine austerity. He recalls and identifies with the earthly/Dionysian Demeter instead, whose mourning was, at least in Ovid, also explicitly caused by Venus (*Metamorphoses* 5.365–79); Canto 106 will pick up this Eleusinian motif. On the flipside, the potentially positive relation between love and language is also highlighted here, in the line that follows the Homeric misquotation: "The cat talks μάω / (mao) with a greek inflection." This is another reversal of a Trachinian elision; whereas there Sapphic desire had been suppressed, here Sappho's Fragment 36 (καὶ ποθήω καὶ **μάο**μαι ["I long and **yearn**"; trans. Campbell]) is evoked. Terrell suggests that the "Greek root [is] used here only for sound."[117] Actually, this morpheme of desire provides "confirmation" for the substitution of *erōs* for *epos*, leaving no gap between them; it exemplifies a natural language which, like barley, is the "*mar*r*ow* of *m*en" (my emphasis). That Pound may have intentionally altered the Homeric line to write in "EROS" is finally suggested by Pound's admission later on the same page that "Eva has improved that line about Freiheit" (102/749). Referring to

[115] *Metamorphoses* 4.190–96. The god named in Ovid is "Sol," again conflated by Pound with Apollo.

[116] It is exactly these two elements – the Odysseus–Kalypso–Hermes chain and the *Odyssey* line – that are newly introduced into this particular "ideogram" of Apollo–Leucothoe that had previously reappeared almost identically in Canto 98/705–06. Pound *was* reading *Odyssey* 8 at this time; indeed he both cites lines and transcribes phrases from it in the notebook drafts of these passages. Line 8.329, exactly in the middle of Demodokos's song about Aphrodite, is copied on the back cover of Notebook 90 (EPP 120/4958); see also Notebook 91, p. 23, (EPP 120/4959). This intertextual connection between the stories of Leucothea (who leads Odysseus to the Phaeacians) and Leucothoe (who, in *Ovid*, is involved in the fallout from the conflict described in the Phaeacian bard's song) is doubtless another reason why Pound tends to conflate them.

[117] *Companion*, 659. The word appears also in *Odyssey* 13.367 (μαιομένη) in the sense of "seeking after," again a book from which Pound quotes passages in Notebook 91 (e.g., p. 35).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

his German translator Eva Hesse's version of a line about free radio speech from Canto 74,[118] Pound is perhaps giving himself permission to do the same with Homer, the line about "Eva" serving as his roundabout confession ("*aveu*") to us.

The rest of Canto 102 seems devoted to the naturalization of linguistic signs – "From the nature, the sign" (102/750).[119] First we have the isolated Homeric words cited above, whose common denominator seems to be that the colors they designate are linked to specific tangible objects: *aith[i]ops* 'dark-glinting' to a flame (*aithō* = burn), *oinops* 'wine-colored' to wine (*oinos*), *haliporphuros* 'sea-purple' to both the sea *(hals)* and the murex (*porphura*) mollusks. Pound hits the same note through a quotation from Plotinus, drawn from a passage that specifically comments on nature's ability to produce beings with *theōria* (contemplation) while it itself, some argue, does not have it and is, per Pound's quote, "without *logos* and without *phantasia*."[120]

> Wild goose follows the sun-bird,
> in mountains; salt, copper, coral,
> dead words out of fashion
> KAI ALOGA,
> nature APHANASTON
> the pine needles glow as red wire
> OU THELEI EAEAN EIS KOSMOU
> they want to burst out of the universe (102/750–51)

The "dead words" the poet brings back into fashion refer both to the Plotinian adjectives (and the Homeric ones earlier), and also, I would argue, to the nouns that immediately precede them – that is, to the natural world. The point seems to be that these elements are *not* "aloga," without *logos* in the sense of "irrational," but that they do not need human speech (though, as Canto 95 had suggested, they may or should be read with a discerning eye and ear). Nature itself becomes the Aeschylean telegraph ("red wire"), replacing the initial Hermes–Kalypso–Odysseus gossip chain in the process. As Pound would later write in the "notes" for Canto 117 "et seq.," "Let the wind speak / that is paradise"; the natural exceeds whatever "paradise" he himself may "have tried to write" (822).[121]

[118] Bacigalupo, *Formèd Trace*, 409. Steven, "Shipwrecks and Mountaintops," 200, supports this point.

[119] Liebregts, *Translations*, 234–35, astutely connects to *WT* a similar passage in Canto 87 (which also mentions the Selloi at Dodona) and outlines Pound's Plotinian inflections in more detail.

[120] *Enneads* 3.8.1.

[121] See also Dowthwaite, *Theories of Language*, 204–05.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

Unsurprisingly, the blazing red wire delivers a vowel-rich Greek message, which is, moreover, immediately translated. In Pound's particular transcription, we might not be surprised to find such a line in *Elektra*, in both sentiment and appearance. But in this canto Pound is chronologically proceeding forward through Greek, from antiquity (Homer, Sappho) through Late Antiquity (Plotinus) to the Middle Ages. This previously unidentified phrase is a mis-transcribed line from the Byzantine vernacular epic *Digenis Akritis* (hailed as the first text of *modern* Greek literature), where it refers to the intensity of positive erotic emotion rather than to Elektran despair. Pound's notebook from late 1955–early 1956 contains notes on *Digenis*, including the line cited above, correctly copied in Greek:

> but of Διγενὲς + Ευδοκια –
> they are in love.
> οὐ θέλει ζῆν εἰς κόσμον
> they want to bust out of the universe[122]

Pound is hyperbolic but not incorrect in his translation. His source for *Digenis*, the Oxford Byzantinist and erstwhile *English Review* assistant editor John Mavrogordato, translates the full line as "[his heart is tamed], he would not live on earth" (4.258).[123] The hero who speaks it, the half-Greek/Christian, half-Arab/Muslim Digenis, is likened by the anonymous Greek poet to a Siren, captivating the audience – who are in turn explicitly compared to Odysseus (4.260) – with his "*melos*" (4.261). Digenis's song transmits to his beloved Eudokia the sentiment expressed in the phrase singled out by Pound; the line is repeated as a description of *her* reaction upon hearing and seeing him (4.274) – a fact registered by the "they" in Pound's translation. Digenis and Eudokia's musical and emotional reciprocity leads Pound to a vision of love qua transport or transcendence that is conspicuously absent in *WT*. Through the mediation of the deceptive song par excellence – that of the Sirens – the deceptions of that play, and

[122] Notebook 96 in YCAL MSS 43, Box 120, Folder 4964. The Greek quotation is marked with a red bracket. Obviously at some point during the transcription/editing process the *zeta* of ζῆν turned into an *epsilon*. David Gordon, in a letter to the editor in *Paideuma* 3.3, takes the quotation to be Plotinian, relating it to the lines above – and indeed, Pound's "translation" of the phrase as it stands has been taken as incorrect (Terrell, *Companion*, 661). Most recently, Steven, "Shipwrecks and Mountaintops," 207–08, calls the words "Homeric" and "mistranslated."

[123] Pound's correspondence with Mavrogordato begins in summer 1953. Mavrogordato was completing a bilingual edition of *Digenis Akritis* and had contributed an article about it in *Byzantium: An Introduction to East Roman Civilization* (ed. by Baynes and Moss, 1948), which Pound was reading in 1954 (see letter of October 26; YCAL MSS 43, Box 33, Folder 1409). Mavrogordato sends his edition to Pound once it's published, and Pound recommends it to H.D. on April 10, 1956 (HDP 14/488).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

even of the *Odyssey* itself (commemorated in the canto's opening) are exorcised; a new Odysseus takes over and reaches love or, literally, "contentment" or "good will"– Eu-dokia.

More than Herakles or Odysseus, Digenis, whose name Mavrogordato translates as "Twyborn Borderer," *is* the comparative hero whom Pound has sought: He combines East and West and, in this moment of singing, the human and the monstrous, the masculine and the feminine, and metatextually, the archaic and the medieval, the epic and the lyric, the learned and the vernacular, the historical and the mythic. Like Odysseus, he wants to go beyond the limiting confines of the known world, but perhaps unlike him, he is able, at least at this moment, to transfigure the deceptive and threatening Siren voice into one of mutual fulfillment, while Pound uses his favorite Greek vowels to (mis-)follow along. This small-scale harmony translates into a larger-scale one; for Digenis is also a man of action who, per Mavrogordato, is interested in and praised for his good government and whose great achievement is bringing peace to the Byzantine borderlands. Digenis and Eudokia, then, his song and their *erōs*, form the counterparts to the Eparch's Book, the human and artistic side to its economic regulations; they offer proof of cosmic concord during that time period of the ninth/tenth centuries CE.[124] *Digenis Akritis* is Odysseus's path into historical modernity and thus represents for Pound the "volgar' eloquio": evidence of a living Greek tradition that he aspires to tap into so that his own epic can "bust out of the kosmos" that it has "pile[d] up" (to quote from the 1966 notebook with which I began) and into its long-forecast *paradiso*.

For it is *this* Greek, vernacular medieval Greek – the more immediate precursor of the modern Greek of Lorentzatos's *Cathay*, which sparked, through *WT*, the renaissance of Pound's poetic project – that the poet now feels he needs to learn:

> Fragmentary:
> (Maverick repeating this queery dogmaticly.
> mosaic? any mosaic.
> You cannot leave these things out.
> οὐ θέλει ἔην εἰς κόσμον
> but from at least here is the Charta Magna
> I shall have to learn a little greek to keep up with this
> but so will you, drratt you.
> "They want to bust out of the kosmos"
> accensio (105/770)

[124] On dating, see Jeffreys, ed. and trans., *Digenis Akritis*, xli, and Mavrogordato, ed. and trans., *Digenes Akrites*, lxvii, lxxxiv.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

This Greek is the "spark" of "accensio," the thing that cannot be left out, the missing historical link between antiquity and modernity. From something like Digenis's peaceful mediation of geographical, political, cultural, and temporal borders "is the Charta Magna" (1215) and its conciliatory statutes, which then inform Coke's *Institutes of the Laws of England* (1628–44), examined in detail by Pound in the final *Thrones* cantos (107–09). But, unlike H.D., Pound doesn't want to learn Greek enough. His *Digenis* quotation, as recorded here, reveals that he is once again writing in one language. For the correct and not particularly obscure **ζῆν** (*zēn*) 'live' copied in his notebook, he writes **ἔην** (*eēn*), transcribed in Canto 102 as "EAEAN." The form is doubly Homeric. ἔην 'was' appears in the very line from Book 2 excerpted in Canto 102's beginning, where it had been elided by Pound: οἷος κεῖνος **ἔην** τελέσαι … (2.272; such a man **was** he to fulfill …). "EAEAN" is close to a transcription of ἐάαν, derived from ἐάω 'suffer, permit, let,' a form which appears in *Odyssey* 8.509, in the context of Demodokos's song.[125] If this change is intentional, Pound would be literally creating a twyborn epic language – a "mosaic," to use Canto 105's terms. He puts Homer's words into the medieval epic and translates both at once. "Was" and "live" are roughly synonyms, while "suffer" could be the source of Pound's hyperbole in "bu(r)st": Digenis and Eudokia do not want to "suffer" the universe = they do not want to "be/live" in it = they want to bust out of it. (In neither case would the syntax and grammar work in Greek, but as Hugh Kenner first noted, Pound is always more interested in the Greek word rather than the phrase – "any mosaic.") Two originals, one translation; this is the exact opposite of *Elektra*'s doubling. While H.D. will review her own life's (Greek) work in *Helen in Egypt* in ways that recall Pound's gathered currents in *WT*, and, like Pound, do so with dictionary in hand, the challenge she will set for herself is the opposite of that discernible in Pound's late cantos: not coherence, not the one word, but the embrace of proliferating images.

[125] This derivation for "EAEAN" was first proposed by Bacigalupo, *Forméd Trace*, 416n26, though not in connection to the *Odyssey*. On Pound and *Od.* 8, see n. 116 above.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 05:28:04, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009371469.011