ANDREW S. GROSS

The Pound Reaction

Liberalism and Lyricism in Midcentury American Literature

European Views of the United States Volume 7

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by HANS-JÜRGEN GRABBE

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For Mathilda and Naomi

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Preface

The Pound Reaction: Liberalism and Lyricism in Midcentury American Literature won the 2013 Rob Kroes Publication Award. Written by an American, it is a remarkably European book of American studies. In a day and age when many lament the standardization of the world under the influence of imperial academic and disciplinary monolingualism, Andrew Gross's learned and stimulating study takes the reader out of the academic rut.

The book has the qualities of a well-made object produced by an artisan who has refined and polished his gesture so that the erudition has lost much of its heaviness without losing the energy of a writing that is part of a thinking in progress. Thus, *The Pound Reaction* frees Ezra Pound from the closed circles of exegetes to astutely reposition him in the context of American studies. It does not propose an umpteenth "revaluation" or a would-be Pound revolution: Pound's "reaction" and the reaction to Pound are attentively contextualized, which enables the reader to break out of dichotomous debate that has divided the readership between scholars with an aesthetic reading from those with a moral and political reading. The book does not dodge difficult ethical or political questions, but refuses to be bound by them. This is not a study on Pound's poetry *per se*, nor is it another study of the Poundian influence on successive generations of poets. The book thus avoids the trap of presenting Pound as an origin and the followers as deflections of expressions of mourning for the lost voice. On the other hand, Pound scholars and aficionados will we rewarded by this book that takes on board the classic Pound scholarship and expands on it to extoll Pound's lyrical voice. As a result, we never lose sight of Pound's poetic persona, and, quite remarkably in a study in American studies, we never lose sight of the form of Pound's poetry. Andrew Gross never turns the poetry into a pre-text for more trendy considerations and Pound's sophisticated writing always remains the basis of his argument.

Where so many studies home in on one aspect of texts to push one agenda, this book of American studies echoes with the influences of its European multilingual and multicultural background and influences. It reminds us that poetry always speaks more than one language. The company poetry keeps with cultural politics, philosophy and history truly enables the reader to better read Pound. At the same time, the close reading of Pound's poetry is in itself a meta-critical statement and possibly a commentary or a reaction to

the disappearance of the literary text from American studies. Gross reinstates the powerful *poein* of the poetry; he shows how the performance of the poetry has triggered chain reactions that have contributed to producing the cultural world in which we live. We are reminded also that poetry is never merely *divertente* ("amusing") as Mussolini had it when he read Pound. Dictators would like poetry to remain a child's game, but Gross shows us how that poetry contributed to shaping the literary, academic, and political climate of the Cold War era. His fine reading, in particular, of Pound's receiving the 1949 Bollingen Prize enables us to see poetry in its cultural performance, and not simply as a symptom of the time when it was written.

The Pound Reaction book elegantly combines disciplinary discourses. It deploys the history of the writing and the reception of Pound's poetry, unravels the complexity of its style, extols its visionary qualities, problematizes its dark facets, and embeds it all in the cultural politics that extends from the Second World War to our contemporary world. A far more comprehensive reading of Pound and of his poetic and political aura thus appears. We get to better grasp the often tortured relations that poets such as Katherine Garrison Chapin, Karl Shapiro, T. S. Eliot, Conrad Aiken, W. H. Auden, Louise Bogan, Robert Lowell, Katherine Anne Porter, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Léonie Adams, Robert Frost and others entertained with Pound and with his œuvre. We finally get to better read the tensions between those who defended Pound on strictly aesthetic grounds by defending poetry as a form of free speech, New Critics who sought to read it according to objective values, and those who wished to stress its political—and therefore objectionable—nature. By reading Pound with the un-disciplined discipline of American studies Andrew Gross manages to combine these discourses, thus emulating the multifarious style of the poet whose work he enlightens. Few poets are as contradictory in their style and expression as Ezra Pound; reading the reaction generated by his poetry requires a response that is as economic in expression, precise in language and inspirational in style.

Unlike studies that seek to either charge or exonerate Pound, this book shows that the chain reaction started by the *Pisan Cantos* has not come to an end yet. The necessary historical reconstruction furthers our understanding, but most importantly the book projects us into the future of Pound's poetry, which is our present. We see poets of the successive generations, such as Elizabeth Bishop or Allen Ginsberg, come into the contested Pound heritage, but we also see how reading Pound's poetry has profoundly influenced the development of critical and academic discourses that extend beyond them. *The Pound Reaction* thus contributes to enriching the Pound scholarship even as it contributes to defining the field of American studies. It bridges

many gaps between ways of reading Pound and takes us a few steps further on Ezra Pound's tortuous path of an American poet in Europe.

Boris Vejdovsky
Chair of the Jury
Lausanne, May 2015

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Gross, Andrew S. *The Pound Reaction: Liberalism and Lyricism in Midcentury American Literature*, vol 7, 2015 (Rob Kroes Publication Award 2013).

The Health of the Nation, eds. Meldan Tanrısal and Tanfer Emin Tunç, vol 6, 2014 (Izmir Conference 2012).

Mehring, Frank. *The Democratic Gap: Transcultural Confrontations of German Immigrants and the Promiseof American Democracy,* vol. 5, 2014 (Rob Kroes Publication Award 2011).

Forever Young? The Changing Images of the United State, eds. Philip Coleman and Stephen Matterson, vol. 4, 2012 (Dublin Conference 2010).

E Pluribus Unum or E Pluribus Plura? Unity and Diversity in American Culture, eds. Hans-Jürgen Grabbe, David Mauk, and Ole Moen, vol. 3, 2011 (Oslo Conference 2008).

Franke, Astrid. *Pursue the Illusion: Ceremonies and Spectacles: Problems of Public Poetry in America*, vol. 2, 2010 (Rob Kroes Publication Award 2009).

Conformism, Non-Conformism, and Anti-Conformism in the Culture of the United States, eds. Antonis Balasopoulos, Gesa Mackenthun, and TheodoraTsimpouki, vol. 1, 2008 (Nicosia Conference 2006).

EAAS Publications in the Series *European Contributions to American Studies,* Rob Kroes, General Editor, Amsterdam: Amerika Instituut, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1980–1988; VU University Press, 1990–2006.

America in the Course of Human Events, eds. Josef Jařab, Marcel Arbeit, and Jenel Virden, vol. 63, 2006 (Prague Conference 2004).

The Cultural Shuttle: The United States of/in Europe, eds. Véronique Béghain and Marc Chénetier, vol. 57, 2004 (Bordeaux Conference 2002).

“Nature’s Nation” Revisited: American Concepts of Nature from Wonder to Ecological Crisis, eds. Hans Bak and Walter W. Hölbling, vol. 49, 2003 (Graz Conference 2000).

Ceremonies and Spectacles: Performing American Culture, eds. Teresa Alves, Teresa Cid, and Heinz Ickstadt, vol. 44, 2000 (Lisbon Conference 1998).

Living with America, 1946–1996, eds. Cristina Giorcelli and Rob Kroes, vol. 38, 1997 (Warsaw Conference 1996).

The Insular Dream: Obsession and Resistance, ed. Kristiaan Versluys, vol. 35, 1995 (Luxembourg Conference 1994).

The American Columbiad: "Discovering" America, Inventing the United States, eds. Mario Materassi and Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos, vol. 34, 1996 (Seville Conference 1992).

Victorianism in the United States: Its Era and Its Legacy, eds. Steve Ickringill and Stephen Mills, vol. 24, 1992 (London Conference 1990).

In the European Grain: American Studies from Central and Eastern Europe, ed. Orm Overland, vol. 19, 1990 (EAAS Translation Project).[1]

Looking Inward, Looking Outward: From the 1930s through the 1940s, ed. Steve Ickringill, vol. 18, 1990 (Berlin Conference 1988).

The Early Republic: The Making of a Nation—The Making of a Culture, eds. Steve Ickringill, Zoltan Abadi-Nagy, and Aladár Sarbu, vol. 14, 1988 (Budapest Conference 1986).

Social Change and New Modes of Expression: The United States, 1910–1930, eds. Rob Kroes and Alessandro Portelli, vol. 10, 1986 (Rome Conference 1984).

Cultural Change in the U.S. since World War II, eds. Maurice Gonnaud, Sergio Perosa, and Chris Bigsby, vol. 9, 1986 (EAAS Translation Project).*

Impressions of a Gilded Age: The American Fin de Siecle, eds. Marc Chénetier and Rob Kroes, vol. 6, 1983 (Paris Conference 1982).

The American Identity: Fusion and Fragmentation, ed. Rob Kroes, vol. 3, 1980 (Amsterdam Conference 1980).

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[1] Books resulting from an EAAS Board decision to sponsor and finance volumes containing essays produced by European scholars in languages other than English. The selected contributions were translated and published to give the authors a wider audience.

Individual Conference Volumes Published before 1980

Vistas of a Continent: Concepts of Nature in America, ed. on behalf of the European Association for American Studies by Teut Andreas Riese, Anglistische Forschungen 136, Heidelberg: Winter, 1979 (Heidelberg Conference 1976).

Contagious Conflict: The Impact of American Dissent on European Life, ed. A. N. J. den Hollander, Leiden: Brill, 1973 (Geneva Conference 1972).

Diverging Parallels: A Comparison of American and European Thought and Action, ed. A. N. J. den Hollander, Leiden: Brill, 1971 (Rome Conference 1967 and Brussels Conference 1970).

The Role of Universities in the Modern World: A Transatlantic Dialogue, Bonn: Cultural Affairs and Educational Exchange Unit, United States Information Service, 1965 (Aarhus Conference 1965).

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Introduction: Ezra Pound and the Liberal Aesthetic

Ezra Pound won the first Bollingen Award in 1949 for *The Pisan Cantos*, the book of poems he wrote while imprisoned in a U.S. military disciplinary training center in Italy. He had been arrested for making pro-Mussolini broadcasts for Rome radio during the war—the official charge was treason—and confined in the kind of outdoor cage more recently used at Guantanamo Bay. By all accounts the harsh conditions unbalanced the nearly 60-year-old poet. When Pound was flown back to the United States to stand trial, his attorney pleaded insanity on his behalf. The plea allowed Pound to avoid conviction at a time when other propagandists who broadcast for the enemy were receiving harsh sentences. Pound could not, however, avoid incarceration. The poet was remanded to a federal mental hospital, St. Elizabeths, where he was in the second year of what would prove to be a 13-year internment when the Library of Congress announced him the Bollingen winner.

The announcement caused a scandal. How could Pound be honored by one branch of government while facing indictment by another? Pound's supporters argued that the award proved artistic freedom was alive and well in the United States; only totalitarian regimes forced artists to tow the party line. This free speech defense of poetry made lyricism the proof positive of liberalism. The argument proved influential, but it had the ironic effect of making a fascist poet the symbol of democratic culture, a prisoner the spokesman for free speech.

This book, *The Pound Reaction*, explores how a number of writers struggled with the uncomfortable paradoxes stemming from the liberal defense of lyricism. Those discussed include Karl Shapiro, one of two dissenting members of the Bollingen committee who believed that his vote against Pound ruined his career; W. H. Auden, who supported the prize but suggested Pound's work should be suppressed; Peter Viereck, the poet and conservative thinker who was scandalized by Pound's accolades, in part because Viereck's own father served time in prison for disseminating Nazi propaganda; John Berryman, who struggled with Pound's anti-Semitism in an introduction intended for—but never published with—Pound's *Selected Poems*; and Katherine Anne Porter, the only prose writer on the Bollingen committee, whose *Ship of Fools*, resembling *The Cantos* in its sprawling

form, attempts to come to terms with the kind of unreason she saw embodied in Pound. Other writers discussed in relation to the Pound controversy include Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath, Allen Ginsberg, Leslie Fiedler, and several midcentury philosophers and political thinkers. *The Pound Reaction* aims to highlight the changing relation of poetry to politics during the Cold War, and to explore the special significance of the lyric for liberals committed to free speech.

Ezra Pound settled in Rapallo, Italy in 1924.[2] It was partly for the swimming, his publisher and friend James Laughlin would later recall, and partly because the picturesque seashore community was on the main rail-line between Rome and Paris, making it an easy stopover for friends (Laughlin 9). However whimsical Pound's initial reasons for choosing Italy, they rapidly assumed shape and purpose.[3] By 1925 Pound was defending Mussolini in letters, which "were now invariably dated Fascist style, from the 'March on Rome' in late October 1922," as one of his biographers puts it; "His letterhead bore a cubist pen-and-ink drawing of him by Gaudier-Brzeska and a motto by Mussolini: 'Liberty is a duty not a right'" (Heymann 57).[4]

The letterhead's pairing of image and motto suggests one of Pound's motivations for turning to fascism. The sculptor Henri Gaudier had been Pound's friend and collaborator in London. He was killed in World War I, a conflict that shocked and sickened Pound: "There died a myriad, / And of the best, among them, / For an old bitch gone in the teeth, / For a botched civilization" (Pound, *New Selected* 113). Pound was convinced that unsound economic policies led to war. By the 1930s he was dedicating much of his energy to making this argument in verse and prose. Canto 38, written in 1933, paraphrases a key economic concept Pound took over from C. H. Douglas, the advocate of social credit: "The power to purchase can never / (under the present system) catch up with / prices at large" (38/190; Kenner, *Pound Era* 307). The next few lines go on to demonstrate how armament

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2 All references to *The Cantos* are to the New Directions 1996 edition and provide first the canto number followed by page number(s).

3 "The Rapallesi loved him […]. They harbored no resentment about his pro-fascist leanings" because they were all fascists, as Laughlin quotes a local newspaper editor as saying (Laughlin 9–10).

4 From Pound's letter to Harriet Monroe, dated Rapallo, 30 November, 1926: "I personally think extremely well of Mussolini. If one compares him to American presidents (the last three) or British premiers, etc., in fact one can NOT without insulting him. If the intelligentsia don't think well of him, it is because they know nothing about 'the state,' and government, and have no particularly large sense of values" (Pound, *Selected Letters* 205).

companies like Krupp and Schneider—Pound describes them as "Twin arse with one belly"—circumvented the cash-strapped public sector by selling weapons directly to governments, indeed to governments on opposing sides of conflicts in order to stimulate demand (38/187–92; 191). Pound argued governments should lend money for useful projects—the basic principle of social credit—rather than wasting it on war. However, lending was in the hands of private financiers or "usurers" as Pound insisted on calling them; he defined usury as "a charge for the use of purchasing power, levied without regard to production" and criticized the practice for generating profits "CONTRA NATURAM" (45/230). Driven by his grief over the First World War, and perhaps by his growing fear that another war could not be avoided, Pound became obsessed with the "unnatural" consequences of usury (see Sieburth, "In Pound We Trust" 159). Canto 45, which contains an oblique reference to Gaudier—"Stonecutter is kept from his stone"—revels in abject descriptions of the perversion, poverty, barrenness, and destruction allegedly resulting from usury (45/229–30; see also "Addendum" to Canto 100/818).

Pound thought that fascism could solve the linked problems of usury and war. He believed that Mussolini had the power to implement a system of social credit, or state lending, that would do away with unsound financial practices and encourage traditional craftsmanship, agriculture, and art (Canto 41). Pound met Mussolini in 1933 and presented him with a vellum edition of *A Draft of XXX Cantos* along with a plan for political and economic reform. Mussolini apparently did not have much use for the plan, but "insisting that he found what he had seen of Pound's poetry 'divertente' (entertaining), 'the Boss,' as the poet called him in Canto 41, made an instant and lifelong believer out of Pound," as David Heymann put it (Heymann 58). Canto 41, which begins with the "divertente" remark, goes on to show Mussolini draining swamps and unfair profit margins. The penultimate lines quote Jefferson on money (41/206). This surprising conclusion to a poem dedicated to the fascist leader was reaffirmed in the 1935 title of Pound's *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*, a book that attempted to show how Mussolini's innovations were consistent with American principles. Pound seems to have believed—and this is something he had in common with many thinkers on the left—that a certain amount of economic planning, along with the suppression of private money-lending, would provide the security necessary for basic American (Jeffersonian) freedoms.[5]

[5] In spite of his support of fascism, Pound was an individualist. He argued that "Liberty is not defendable on a static theory" and explained the threats to liberty in terms of modern bureaucratization: "One has only to consider the enormous and hardly conscious sacrifices of long held immunities made during and since the war [World

Pound's economic obsession, his out-of-the-way location, and his even more out-of-the-way claim that Mussolini was heir to the political wisdom of Jefferson (and John Adams and Martin Van Buren) cost him much of his audience. As World War II approached he made up for his diminishing influence with increased vehemence, tapping into a long tradition of anti-Semitism to blame usury and its alleged results—poverty, social disintegration, perversion, bad art, war—on Jews (Pound, *Selected Prose* 269). Pound began delivering regular, mainly pre-recorded broadcasts for Rome Radio before the United States entered the war and continued until 1943, the year Mussolini was deposed and briefly imprisoned, then installed by the German army as nominal head of the Salò Republic. The broadcasts were often indecipherable, partly because of Pound's idiosyncratic blend of monetary theory and modernist aesthetics, and partly because he delivered his theories in a strange "cracker barrel" dialect that he believed would appeal to American listeners (Sieburth, *Pisan* xvi). Apparently the incoherence led some Italian authorities to conclude that Pound must have been smuggling out state secrets in code (Sieburth, *Pisan* xi). However, American monitors had no trouble deciphering the criticism of Roosevelt's fiscal and foreign policy, the encomiums for Hitler and Mussolini, and the often savage attacks on Jews. Several of the broadcasts made after 1941 were judged to be treasonous. In 1943 a grand jury indicted the poet on federal charges.

Since Pound never stood trial, the question of treason cannot be settled. However, the transcripts of the radio broadcasts, compiled by the U.S. government for purposes of prosecution, reveal how Pound's economic

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War I], the depredations of bureaucracies, passport idiocies etc. When constitutions are not violated by legislature they are quietly subverted by departmental orders and the only defence [*sic*] against such pervasive tyranny lies in the education and discrimination of the individual. To be free he must know his law, that is his own law, the law of his country or countries, he must know his history, the supposed principles underlying it and he must fight every encroachment with every legal and ethical means his knowledge provides" (*Selected Prose 275*). However, these same state institutions must play a role in defending the economic conditions that allow individuals to work in the ways they want to: "When the state understands its duties and powers it does not leave its sovereignty in the hands of private interests that are irresponsible or arrogate to themselves unwarranted responsibilities. It is not right to say that 'work-money' is a 'symbol of work.' More exactly, it is a symbol of a collaboration between nature, the state, and an industrious population" (*Selected Prose* 297; see also 182, 184, 266). Here, for the sake of comparison, is John Dewey on the need to control the economy for the purposes of individual liberty: "Earlier liberalism regarded the separate and competing economic action of individuals as the means to social well-being as the end. We must reverse the perspective and see that socialized economy is the means of free individual development as the end" (*Liberalism and Social Action* 90).

obsessions repeatedly gave way to full-blown racist paranoia. The broadcast from March 8, 1942 is a fair example. It begins, "The ENEMY is Das Leihkapital [loan agencies and capital]. They're working day and night, pickin' your pockets." A few paragraphs later, Pound makes clear who he means by "[t]hey": "DO YOU think that there is any basic, essential difference between a committee of kikes in LONDON betraying the United States of America and a gang of kikes in New York selling up England […] ?" (Doob 55–56). The examples could be easily multiplied, but I think these suffice to show that the broadcasts show a disturbing penchant to reduce politics to economics and economics to racialized greed. Thus, Pound's early enthusiasm for Mussolini as a peacemaker mutated into a fascist argument for waging war against the phantasm of a Jewish world conspiracy.

In May 1945 Italian partisans captured Pound at his desk translating *The Book of Mencius*. He had time to pocket two books—Confucius and a Chinese dictionary—before they took him away (Heymann 154). There was apparently some confusion about what to do with the American poet. The partisans released Pound who, fearing for his safety, immediately gave himself up to American military authorities. He was interrogated about the radio broadcasts and then transferred to a Disciplinary Training Center outside of Pisa—a prison camp "for convicted rapists, murderers, and traitors who had been members of our Armed Forces," as one contemporary observer remarked (Allen 33). For three weeks he was held in an open air cage called a "death cell," resembling those more recently used in Guantanamo. The canto he first began composing in captivity would later represent the death cell as the culmination of failed efforts to quell usury, up to and including the Soviet experiment: "But in Russia they bungled […] / and went in for dumping in order to trouble the waters / in the usurers' hell-a-dice / all of which leads to the death-cells" (74/461).

Pound was in no position to write during the first three weeks of his internment. Exposed to the sun all day, the glare of spot lights all night, and unprotected from inclement weather, he slept on a bare concrete floor. Eventually he was given a pup tent to rig at night between the bars. He was allowed no contact with fellow prisoners (Allen 33–34; Wilhelm 217–18). By all accounts, the elderly prisoner suffered a mental breakdown. On the recommendation of two military psychiatrists, he was confined under better conditions in the medical section of the prison camp. It is probably at this point that he acquired the bare necessities for writing: pad, pencil, and a desk that a fellow prisoner made for him—against regulations—out of a medical

crate: “and the greatest is charity / to be found among those who have not observed / regulations” (74/454).[6]

Uncertainty about his fate spurred Pound on to feverish productivity. He took up work on the next ten cantos, 74 through 84. According to his loose plan, modeled on Dante, he should have been entering the *Paradiso* section of the work in progress (Sieburth, *Pisan* xvii; Kenner, “Rose in Steel Dust” 122). Life in the detention center, however, was purgatory, which Pound (surrounded by mainly African American detainees) describes as a slave ship: “in limbo no victories, there, are no victories— / between the decks of the slaver” (77/490). Deprived of all reading material except the two books he had slipped in his pocket when the partisans came for him, a stray copy of *Time* magazine, and M. E. Speare’s *Pocket Book of Verse* fortuitously “found on the jo-house seat,” he concentrated on his surroundings and his memory (80/533). The conditions of confinement gave *The Pisan Cantos* the intense, lyrical quality that many contemporary critics believe represents Pound at his poetic best. The nostalgia for fascism and the anti-Semitism, evident in several passages, also suggest Pound at his political worst.

In 1945 Pound was flown back to the United States to stand trial for treason. The press was comparing him to William Joyce, alias Lord Haw Haw, who in 1946 would be executed in England for treasonous radio broadcasts made from Germany during the war.[7] A technicality may have prevented the death penalty in Pound’s case, since U.S. constitutional law requires two eye-witnesses for a treason conviction, and it is unclear if any of the six Italian radio technicians flown to the United States to testify understood enough English to confirm what he had said. Nevertheless, under advice from his attorney Julien Cornell, retained through the offices of his publisher James Laughlin, Pound pleaded incompetent to stand trial by reason of insanity (Torrey 183, 185). A board of prominent psychiatrists supported the plea. The federal jury found Pound to be “mentally unsound.

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[6] Sieburth points to the importance of African American interlocutors in *The Pisan Cantos*: “All of these Africanist elements converge in what is perhaps the single most moving passage of the first Canto of the Pisans, which gratefully celebrates the *humanitas* and *caritas* of a certain Mr. Edwards, the black soldier who, in violation of camp regulations, provided Pound with a table (fashioned from a packing crate) to write on in his tent. Amid the mnemonic Babel of ghostly voices besieging the poet’s consciousness in his solitary confinement, this is virtually the sole recorded occasion in the entire text when he is actually addressed, in the present tense of Pisa, by another living human being” (Sieburth, *Pisan* xxi).

[7] William Joyce, alias Lord Haw-Haw, was executed in England, and Mildred Elizabeth Gillers, alias Axis Sally, served a long prison sentence in the United States (Wilhelm 265).

The verdict saved Pound from standing trial on treason charges arising out of his wartime writings and broadcasts in Italy," as *The New York Times* put it in February 1946 (O'Connor 22).

Pound was remanded to St. Elizabeths, a federal clinic overseen by one of Pound's psychiatric evaluators, Dr. Winfred Overholser. He spent his first year in the criminal ward, but Overholser was sympathetic to his plight, and with the encouragement of Pound's many supporters he extended his privileges to include a private room in a better ward, generous visitation rights, and access to books from the Library of Congress (Torrey 220). The nearly thirteen years Pound would eventually spend at St. Elizabeths, deprived of his liberty but for the first time in his life free from financial worries, were productive. In 1948, Laughlin's New Directions published the poetic record of his captivity in the prison camp, *The Pisan Cantos*.

Pound's internment in the Pisan prison camp had deprived him of a microphone, but many of the uglier sentiments expressed in the radio broadcasts spill over into *The Pisan Cantos*. Thus an early section of the opening canto quickly moves from praise of John Adams to criticism of the Jewish founder of the banking house of Rothschild to the claim that

> the yidd is a stimulant, and the goyim are cattle
> in gt/ proportion and go to saleable slaughter
> with the maximum of docility. (74/459)

The anti-Semitism rears its ugly head again in a Vichy libel in Canto 80:

> Pétain defended Verdun while Blum
>   Was defending a bidet (80/514)

The examples could be easily multiplied, but I think these suffice to show that the poetry shares with the broadcasts a disturbing penchant to reduce politics to economics and economics to racialized greed.[8]

However, *The Pisan Cantos* also strike a different note: passages depicting intense personal suffering and regret provide a counterpoint to the paranoid accusations. "When the raft broke and the waters went over me" is how Pound describes the experience of imprisonment, drawing on the Odysseus leitmotif that runs throughout *The Cantos* to depict his personality on the verge of drowning (80/533; Sieburth, *Pisan* xiv).He turned to lyrical reflection as his life raft. He had no other choice.[9] As Richard Sieburth points out,

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[8] See also pp. 449, 460, 463 for other anti-Semitic references.

[9] Even the lyrical turn can be seen as making a distinct political and historical critique. The famous passage—"As a lone ant from a broken ant-hill / from the wreckage of

for the first time in years Pound was forced to write without the compendious research materials that had provided the numerous citations from Jefferson and others (*Pisan* xxiv; see also Wilhelm 221).

Pound's (partial) return to a more personal form of poetry had a number of contributing factors, but in 1949 the members of the Bollingen committee were nearly unanimous about its significance. Those voting for Pound included T. S. Eliot, Conrad Aiken, W. H. Auden, Louise Bogan, Robert Lowell, Katherine Anne Porter, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Léonie Adams. Statements issued jointly and separately defended the Bollingen Prize on two related grounds: 1) Pound's return to more personal or lyrical poetry was understood as a retreat from or even apology for his fascist politics, and 2) poetry was understood to be primarily personal or lyrical anyway, which meant the more poetic the writing, the less propagandistic its meaning.

The committee, as I said, was nearly unanimous. There were two dissenting members. One was Katherine Garrison Chapin, the wife of Francis Biddle, the U.S. Attorney General who issued the indictment against Pound in 1943. The other was Karl Shapiro, the Pulitzer Prize-winning war poet who, as poetry consultant to the Library of Congress—a position now called Poet Laureate—had an automatic seat on the committee. In his autobiography Shapiro describes being approached by a conspiratorial figure from *The Saturday Review of Literature* to write an exposé critical of the Bollingen decision (*Reports of My Death* 44). He refused, so *The Saturday Review* turned to former Pulitzer Prize winner Robert Hillyer, who wrote a scathing two-part essay attacking what he saw as a New Critical plot against American democracy. Paul Mellon, who provided money for the prize, had asked that it be named Bollingen in honor of Carl Jung, who in later years spent much of his time in the Swiss village by that name. Making much of this fact, Hillyer claimed that members of the Bollingen committee, led by T. S. Eliot and in secret sympathy with Carl Jung's alleged Nazism, had conspired to honor a fascist poet with a crypto-fascist prize.[10]

The members of the committee issued a joint statement published by the Library of Congress and *Poetry* magazine in which they denied being influenced by Eliot (O'Connor 5–7). They had known that the decision would be controversial but insisted that aesthetic decisions must be made independently of political considerations. Judging art by political criteria, as

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Europe, ego scriptor"—immediately follows a passage criticizing the BBC for its lies (76/478).

[10] See both of Hillyer's articles on the Pound award, "Treason's Strange Fruit" and "Poetry's New Priesthood," and also the follow-up editorial by Norman Cousins and Harrison Smith, all in *The Saturday Review of Literature*.

Hillyer demanded, "would destroy the significance of the award and would in principle deny the validity of that objective perception of value on which any civilized society must rest" (O'Connor 29–30).

In an editorial that kicked off a *Partisan Review* symposium on the Bollingen Prize, William Barrett assumed that the judges had endorsed Pound on purely aesthetic grounds, identifying the crux of the issue as follows: "How far is it possible, in a lyric poem, for technical embellishments to transform vicious and ugly matter into beautiful poetry?" ("A Prize" 347). Most of the contributors to the symposium agreed that Barrett's formulation of the issue was a fair one. Even Dwight Macdonald, whom the editors of *Partisan Review* were beginning to accuse of "ultra-leftism" (Rahv, "Disillusionment" 524), agreed with the distinction between poetry and politics, arguing that the ability "to evaluate each sphere of human activity separate from the rest instead of enslaving them all to one great reductive tyrant, whether it be The Church, The Proletariat, People's Democracy, The Master Race or American Patriotism" is what distinguished democracy from totalitarianism and gave Americans the "right to oppose Soviet totalitarianism in the name of freedom" ("Twelve Judges" 48).

Barrett would ultimately distance himself from this extreme formulation of the liberal aesthetic, which he termed "liberalism for liberalism's sake" ("Further Comment" 522). However, the basic principle of the liberal aesthetic—the separation of art from politics in the name of political freedom—was to prove decisive in a range of conflicts and issues extending far beyond the Bollingen controversy. Pound became the primary test case for those interested in defining the relation of art to politics at a critical juncture of history: at the end of WWII, in the aftermath of genocide, on the eve of the Cold War and during the great postwar expansion of mass culture in the public sphere and literary criticism in the universities (cf. Schwartz, "Our Country" III, 595). Other defining controversies would follow in rapid succession: the Rosenbergs, Hiss and Chambers, McCarthy, Korea, Vietnam. However, the Pound award was the decisive moment in the crystallization of a liberal aesthetic that would play a brief but important role in postwar culture, especially in American universities, through the late 1960s.

Why was defending Pound a liberal cause? The reactionary opinions that Pound shared with some of the committee members were clearly evident in *The Pisan Cantos*. Pound frames the poem as an apocalyptic response to Eliot's "The Hollow Men": "yet say this to the Possum: a bang, not a whimper, / with a bang not with a whimper" (74/445). Eliot had just won the Nobel Prize in Literature (1948), and he was being celebrated as a moderating voice. However, anyone who had attended his Page-Barbour lectures at the University of Virginia in 1933 or read the published version *After*

Strange Gods (1934), knew that his views could be extremely right-wing and anti-Semitic:

> The population should be homogeneous; where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely either to be fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterate. What is still more important is unity of religious background; and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable. (20)

Hillyer's paranoid style made it easy to ignore that he had a valid point. Eliot and Tate may not have been conspiring on Pound's behalf—whatever conspiracy might mean on a committee—but Eliot's arguments did indeed bear affinities to Pound's and Tate's. Indeed, Eliot introduces his Page-Barbour lectures as an addendum to "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in the spirit of *I'll Take My Stand*. He declares himself a partisan of Southern Agrarianism because "I think that the chances for the re-establishment of a native culture are perhaps better here than in New England. You are farther away from New York; you have been less industrialised [*sic*] and less invaded by foreign races; and you have a more opulent soil" (15–17).

Karl Shapiro may have heard Eliot take his stand south of the Mason-Dixon Line. The aspiring poet dropped out of the University of Virginia the same year Eliot delivered his lectures there. Recalling his undergraduate studies in "University," published in the volume that won him the Pulitzer Prize and effectively placed him on the Bollingen committee, Shapiro wrote "To hurt the Negro and avoid the Jew / Is the curriculum" (*Selected* 17). The arguments Shapiro mustered to support his dissenting vote—as a Jew he could not vote to honor anti-Semites, and there could be no absolute distinction between poetry and politics—were more reasoned than Hillyer's conspiracy theory, but his polemic cuts in the same direction ("The Question" 518–19). Barrett, for his part, eventually endorsed Shapiro's argument that anti-Semitism was not irrelevant to *The Pisan Cantos* but central to the complex of themes or "myths" galvanizing their particular form ("Further Comment" 522). Robert Gorham Davis, who contributed to the *Partisan Review* symposium and also wrote a longer article in *The American Scholar*, made a similar argument about "a complex of ideas" which he linked to Pound and Eliot and "which made poetic sensibility, purity of language, and the integrity of art inextricably involved with ideas of authority, aristocracy and reaction, and at odds with the ethos of a liberal democracy" ("The New Criticism" 12).

Liberal critics such as Macdonald were not ignorant of the political content of Pound's verse—or Eliot's and Tate's arguments—but considered it out of bounds to factor this into aesthetic considerations. By evaluating