

Caged verses: some new notes on the politics of *The Pisan Cantos*

Andrea Rinaldi
University of Bergen
Department of Foreign Languages
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2605-8078>
andrea.rinaldi@uib.no

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Abstract

The Pisan Cantos is the most notorious section of Pound's masterpiece *The Cantos*, which was named after the concentration camp of Coltano, near Pisa, where Pound was imprisoned by the US army after the fall of Italian Fascism. There, the exiled American poet was detained in the infamous 'gorilla cage' because of his propagandist activity in favour of Mussolini and his regime, for which he was indicted for treason against his own homeland. Despite his inhuman treatment, Pound wrote there some of the most renowned and appreciated verses of the twentieth century, worthy of the first Bollingen Prize as awarded to him in 1949 by the Fellows in American Letters of the Library of Congress. Apart from their undisputable artistic value, praised for decades by critics, these verses also attained an important political function, inspiring generations of fascist intellectuals and activists. This article aims to shed further light on this political relevance by uncovering archival material not yet analysed by scholars.¹

Keywords: Ezra Pound, *The Cantos*, Fascism, Exile, WWMI, Political Religion.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ezra Pound is one of the most controversial intellectual of the past century. He has been vastly admired for his verse and harshly criticised for his anti-Semitism and for his compromise with Fascism. Pound's masterpiece, *The Cantos*, are an extensive, dense and uneven composition drawn up as an epic poem of modern times. This is one of the most notable modernist texts, that still puzzles literary critics because of the unprecedented mixture of styles, themes and languages. To have an idea of the complexity and the refinement of *The Cantos*, we may think that Jan de Jager, who just published the latest translation to Spanish, admitted

¹ In this article I quote and mention documents under the Copyright © 1926, 1934, 1968 and 1991 by the Trustees of the Ezra Pound Literary Property Trust. Copyright © (2019) by Mary de Rachewiltz and the Estate of Omar S. Pound. Used by permission. I thank Declan Spring and New Direction for this. I am grateful to Robert Stark for reading the draft of this article and for his suggestions.

recently that he spent about twenty years studying the text and ten for translating them.²

In the early thirties, Pound's friend and protégé Ernest Hemingway received the publication of *A Draft of xxx Cantos* (1933), asserting that they 'will last as long as there is any literature.' At that time, Pound had already explicitly endorsed Mussolini and his regime, and was defending Italian Fascism against foreign critics. Since then, he would use his skills writing many articles for the international press to promote Fascism in the international scenario. Moreover, Pound created a wide network of acquaintances within the Italian regime, corresponding with key figures as Galeazzo Ciano, ministers as Alberto de Stefani, and leading intellectuals of the time. He even succeeded in meeting Mussolini himself, to whom he wanted to explain his economic theories. This had become almost an obsession for the self-exile poet, as proven by the quantity of letters Pound wrote to the *duce*. Pound recorded the meeting in Canto XLI: 'Ma questo,' / said the Boss, "è divertente". Naturally, 'the Boss' is Mussolini who did not pay much attention to Pound's talking about economics and wanted to read *The Cantos* instead, finding the text 'divertente' ['funny'].³

Then, during World War II Pound took a even more active part in propaganda machine of the regime with his notorious broadcastings for the Italian Ente Italiano per le Audizioni Radiofoniche (EIAR, the Italian public broadcaster). These were short speeches in which Pound addressed in English the Allies, with the aim of dissuading them to attack Italy. This became the main count against Pound in the trial for treason of the US, and the principal reason of his disgrace among the public. Not springily, in the prologue of his biography, Alec Marsh notes that if you ask 'most of the people who Ezra Pound was, [...] they will say a fascist and an anti-Semite.' If you ask the same thing to an insider, to somebody 'who cares about poetry', he will answer that 'Pound was also a great poet.' As Marsh notes, Pound's prolonged compromise with the far right has had a double effect: literary scholars tended to remove the politics from Pound's poetry, while ordinary readers discarded his work out of revulsion for his political views.⁴

For more than 50 years, Pound has been analysed by critics who have often left aside his political views, but these views had such a strong importance in his life that one cannot read his verse and ignore them. At the same time, his work cannot be dismissed because of his fascist beliefs, unless we are also ready to sink into oblivion Heidegger, Hamsun, or Céline, for instance. Nowadays, scholars attempt to put the different facets of Pound's poetry back together, this article tries to follow this path.

2 Jesús García Calero, "No Hay Google Que Valga Para Los Cantos De Ezra Pound", *ABC*, November 27, 2018, accessed December 14, 2018, https://www.abc.es/cultura/libros/abci-no-google-valga-para-cantos-ezra-pound-201811260153_noticia.html; POUND (2018).

3 For Hemingway's quote: WILHELM (1994: 64), POUND (1933). Correspondences that are preserved at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, Ezra Pound Papers, YCAL MSS 43: box 9, folder 401, Ciano, Galeazzo 1933-36; box 49, folder 2195, Stefani, Alberto de, [1935-36]; box 36, folder 1516 Mussolini, Benito [1933]-43. For Pound's correspondence with Mussolini see also Pound's letters preserved at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato Italiano, Segreteria Particolare del Duce.

4 For Pound's radio broadcasts have been translated into Spanish, POUND (1984), MARSH (2011: 9). The *Pisan Cantos* are ten, from the LXXIV to the LXXIV, in the latest edition of *The Cantos* (POUND, 1996: 444-560).

2. BEFORE WORLD WAR I: THE FOUNDING OF A NEW POETRY

It is impossible to understand Pound's poetics and political thought without knowing his unique biography. Born on 30 October 1885 in a small house in Haley, Idaho, his family could claim deep American roots. Both of his parents had English ancestors who emigrated to North America in the XVII century, leaving a Europe shattered by religious wars. While still very young, Pound manifested his literary ambitions by studying Romance languages at the University of Pennsylvania, where he obtained an MA degree with a thesis on Lope de Vega. During these years, Pound also cultivated his early interest in ancient Greek literature and culture, this passion would strongly influence his thought and his literary production. After the graduation and a short period of teaching at Wabash College, Indiana, Pound left America in March 1908 with the intention of becoming a poet. He moved to the UK, where he would live for the next twelve years. There, Pound worked for a while as assistant of William Butler Yeats in the pleasant setting of Stone Cottage, then he moved to the to London. He was introduced into the most important artistic and intellectual circles of the city, and became a leading intellectual of literary avant-gardes of Imagism and Vorticism. Pound's contribution to the development of these artistic movements was fundamental, infusing a spirit of renewal into the British literary scene of the time.⁵

After World War II, the literary critic Hugh Kenner, would meet Pound interned in St. Elizabeths psychiatric hospital, and he would declare 'I suddenly knew I was in the presence of the center of modernism'. Clearly, Pound's charisma and reputation poetry was undiminished and still impressed his devotees, despite the passage of time. After a series of meetings and interviews at St. Elizabeths, Kenner became close to Pound and wrote *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* in 1951, though the poet had suggested as title *The Rose in the Steel Dust*, which was the title of a large article by Kenner that preceded the book. The roots of this title can be found in the Confucian scholarship that Pound discovered frequenting the dynamic cultural circles of London. In 1912, thanks to the Imagist poet Laurence Binyon, Pound met the widow of the orientalist Ernest Fenollosa, Mary McNeill Scott, who entrusted to Pound her husband's notes for a book he could not finish. She had just succeeded in publishing for his husband the posthumous and influential *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* (1912) and, after Binyon endorsement, she wanted Pound to edit and publish her husband's notes on Chinese poetry and Japanese Noh drama, which would eventually appear in 1918 as *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*. Pound's discovery of oriental art, of the ideogrammatic method, and of Confucianism, is a key point of his mature poetics. Furthermore, Confucianism strongly influenced Pound's own personal growth so much that he would come to declare himself a devotee of the Chinese philosopher.⁶

⁵ See, for instance: STOCK (1964: 1-28), MOODY (2009: 3-62), MARSH (2011: 12-26 and 12-66) and LONGENBACH (1988).

⁶ Kenner met Pound at St. Elizabeths in 1948, the utterance is quoted in Cowley and Williamson (2007: 82). *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* has been reprinted: KENNER (1950, 1971 and 1985). On Fenollosa: MARSH and POUND (2011: 61-66) and JIANG (2018: 174-180).

Not by coincidence, in 1913, Pound would write the very famous 'In a Station of the Metro', a short poem composed as modern and incomplete *haiku* describing the scene in the station of the Metro at La Concorde, in Paris:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.⁷

The poet explained that with this poem he was 'trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective.' These fourteen words are generally considered to be one of the highest examples of Imagism, and were extremely influential in defining Modernist aesthetic. Robert Stark, who explained Fenollosa's influence of Pound's poetry, states that Pound's poetic style changed between 1908 and 1916. According to him, with the lines Pound composed during and immediately after the Great War, he sought 'to supercharge ordinary language with intensity and precision [...] by turning towards more intimate and personal expression while scrupulously disdaining public and political discourse'. Since then, in fact, Pound's poetry would progressively deal with political, social and economic matters.⁸

In London, Pound became a regular contributor and leading intellectual of the magazine *The New Age*. This was an influential magazine for the artistic avant-gardes of the time, but it also dealt with politics; indeed, it would become Pound's political training-ground. Since 1907 the magazine had been directed by Alfred Richard Orage, a British intellectual who would have a strong impact on Pound's political development. In those years, *The New Age* officially supported Guild Socialism, a Marxist movement that promoted the labourer's control of the means of production through a system of national guilds, or trade unions. Under the direction of Orage, who would lead the magazine until 1922, the columns of *The New Age* regularly hosted big literary names like George Bernard Shaw, Katherine Mansfield, and well-known intellectuals as the Chesterton brothers, Hilaire Belloc, and Arthur Pentz. The magazine also hosted international names such as the Serbian Dimitrije Mitrinovic, the Italian Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and the Spanish Ramiro de Maeztu. In *The New Age*, Pound befriended the French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, who would shape the iconic head of the poet (figure 1), and the English intellectual Thomas Ernest Hulme, a literary critic, philosopher and poet then best known for having translated into English important works by Henri Bergson and also Georges Sorel's *Réflexions sur la violence*. Hulme joined the avant-gardes led by Pound before World War I and influenced Pound's political development.⁹

The North American poet, once almost exclusively interested in poetry, was shocked by the Great War: it tore apart his close friends Gaudier-Brzeska and Hulme, who both volunteered and were killed by bombshells on the Western front. These losses, together with the distress caused by the general massacre, created what Charles Taylor has defined as a 'mood of despair, loss and cynicism' (TAYLOR, 2007: 407-412, 408).

7 Ezra POUND (1913). It would be republished in POUND (1917: 50).

8 Ezra POUND (1916: 103), STARK (2012: 142-165), quote at 142.

9 On *The New Age*: MARTIN (1967) and JACKSON (2012). Hulme's writings on Bergson published posthumously: HULME (1936) and HULME (1955). See also SOREL (1915).

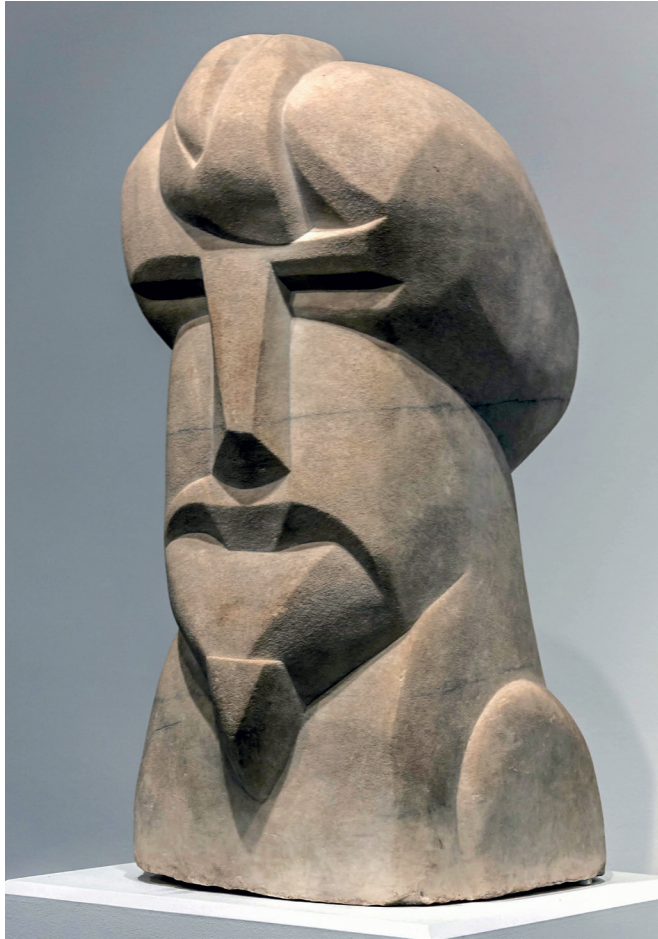


Figure 1. Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound (marble). 1914. Gift from the Collection of Raymond and Patsy Nasher. Credits: Wikimedia Commons, photographed by user 'Léna', April 03, 2013.

Pound would describe this consequent loss and sense of crisis in the entire Western World in the famous stanzas of 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley':

There died a myriad,
And the best, among them,
For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
For a botched civilization.¹⁰

The two last lines would become the epitome of an epoch and a generation of intellectuals marked by the impact of WWI, as in Robert Wohl's *The Generation of 1914* (WOHL, 1981).

¹⁰ POUND (1920: 13).

The astonishing impact of the carnage led Pound to the study of the political, social and economic causes of the First World War. Together with Orage and his *The New Age*, Pound embraced the theories of a retired Scottish engineer and World War One veteran, Clifford Hugh Douglas, who aimed to establish a new and utopian civilisation called *Economic Democracy* (the title of his first book). Douglas' plans produced only very limited implementation and very few economists believed in his theories, but he nevertheless succeeded in convincing some followers who even structured a militia, the Green Shirts. In short, Douglas demanded direct State control over the banking and credit systems to make easier for everybody the access to funding. The dark side of the Social Credit plan was that it seemed to corroborate some conspiracy theories, by giving the idea that the world's economy was controlled by a reduced group of bankers and financiers. This seemed to substantiate some of the most common anti-Semite prejudices, and it was particularly true for Pound, who began to identify this loan sharks' conspiracy *tout court* with 'the Jews'. Thus, the poet became convinced that he had found the main cause of the war, which he believed had been provoked by this obscure lobby that had control over national governments. For Pound, a small group of bankers, weapons manufacturers and traders agreed with corrupt politicians to push Europe into the conflict for their own profit. The result of the heavy debts contracted by the countries involved in the war meant that the bankers gained the control over the government. It was just the beginning of his lifelong battle against usurers, whom he would denounce in his a litany against *usura* [usury] contained in *Canto XLV*. Pound's anti-Semitism grew throughout the following decades, and it is still one of the reasons for his enduring appeal among the far right.¹¹

In the meantime, the poet had also decided that it was time for him to leave the UK. The horror of mass destruction, that he had translated into verse, converged into a disgust for the entire British society. Thus, in 1921, he moved to France where he easily joined the famous artistic circles of the time: Marcel Duchamp, Gertrude Stein and Hemingway were some of his closer acquaintances. Besides his own literary production, he also followed his protégés: Hemingway himself and Eliot, as well as James Joyce, whose *Ulysses* he helped publish. That book had a strong impact on Pound, so much that when he received and read the final draft on 30 October 1921 he decided that a 'new era' had begun. On the 1922 spring issue of the *Little Review*, he declared 'THE END OF CHRISTIAN ERA', and included in the magazine a calendar of the new epoch based on a revision of ancient pagan divinities (figures 2 and 3).

¹¹ For instance, the white supremacist movement Stormfront has an internet forum that offer the free download of some of Pound's essays: POUND (1935). For *Canto XLV* see POUND (1996: 29-30).

140 *THE EGOIST* April 1st, 1914

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Figure 2. The slogan "THE END OF CHRISTIAN ERA" appeared the for the first time on 1 April 1914 in the last page of the magazine *The Egoist*, which announced the forthcoming review *Blast*, directed by Pound's close friend Wyndham Lewis; *The Egoist*, No. 7 Vol. I, 1 Apr. 1914, p. 140. Credits: Modernist Journals Project, <<http://www.modjourn.org>>, accessed June 04, 2018.

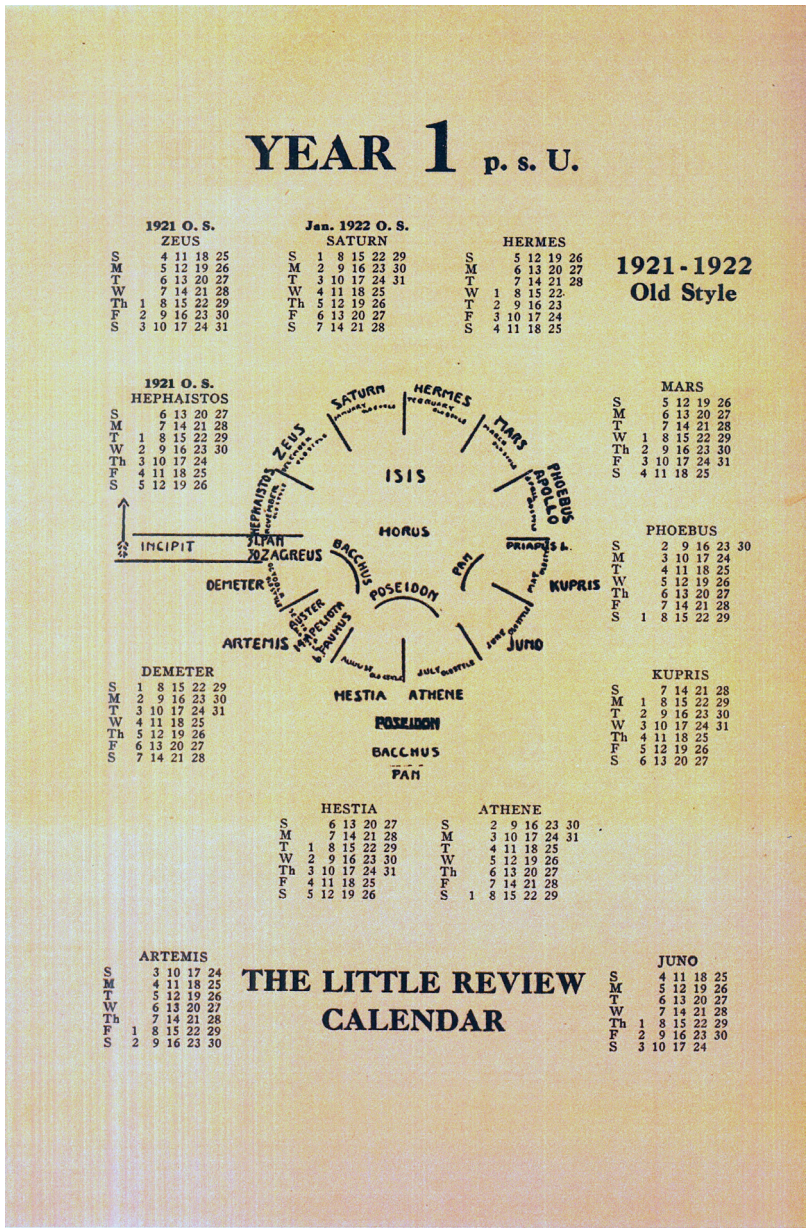


Figure 3. Year 1 calendar drawn by Pound on *The Little Review: Quarterly Journal of Art and Letters*, Vol. 8, No. 2, March 1922, p. 2. Credits: Modernist Journals Project, <<http://www.modjourn.org>>, accessed June 04, 2018.

3.THE FASCIST ERA

The beginning of this new era coincided with a series of study travels to Italy that Pound undertook in search of primary sources for his new *Cantos*. In the early twenties, in fact, the North American was working on the so-called *Malatesta Cantos*, after the xv century condottiere and lord of Rimini Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta. For the composition of these poems, Pound consulted scrupulously primary sources preserved in different Italian archives and library, especially in the Italian region of Romagna, where the Malatesta family was established. During these field trips Pound visited the Church of St. Francis, which Sigismondo wanted to be the cathedral of Rimini, the most important city of his dominion. Sigismondo commissioned the church's construction to the most representative architect of the Renaissance, Leon Battista Alberti. Decorated by Piero della Francesca (figure 4), the church is today better known as *Tempio Malatestiano*, and it is a perfect example of the Italian Renaissance art and style.



Figura 4. *Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta in Preghiera Davanti a San Sigismondo*. 1451. Cultural Heritage Monuments in Emilia-Romagna, Tempio Malatestiano, Rimini.

Credits: Wikimedia Commons, by user 'Saliko'.

Pound was immediately captured by the syncretistic style of the building: its marble façade, for instance, with the entrance framed by a sort of Roman triumphal arch, is a clear example of Alberti's revitalisation of ancient architecture (figure 5). For Pound, this was clear evidence that Italian culture was the real legatee of the ancient pagan religiosity, and he decided he had to move to the peninsula. He eventually found a book that would further corroborate his theories, *La Sibylle*:

trois essais sur la religion antique et le christianisme, written by the Polish historian and classical philologist Tadeusz Zieliński.¹²



Figure 5. Tempio Malatestiano, Esterno. Italian Cultural Heritage and Landscape, Rimini. Credits: Wikimedia Commons, by user 'Saliko'.

Between 1924 and 1925, Pound set up in Rapallo, on the Ligurian seashore; he would remain in Italy until the end of World War II. What was supposed to be a mere study trip became in fact a political commitment that Pound would hold for the rest of his life. Yet, on 30 November 1926, he would write to his friend Harriet Monroe that 'I personally think extremely well of Mussolini'.¹³ Soon, in Pound's eyes the Italian dictator would become a sort of a modern Sigismondo: this was the starting point that led the poet to embrace Italian Fascism. For Pound, Mussolini was the present *duce*, or condottiere, who would lead Italy, and then Europe, to a new Renaissance, as Sigismondo did in his time. In an interview Pound gave in the early thirties, which is considered as first Pound's public endorsement of Italian Fascism, he would declare:

The thing that most interests me is civilization, the high peaks of culture. Italy has twice civilized Europe. No other country has done that even once. Each time a strong live energy is unleashed in Italy, a new renaissance comes forth.¹⁴

¹² ZIELIŃSKI (1924), POUND (1962: 205).

¹³ Pound to Harriet Monroe, 30 November 1926, in: Ezra Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. PAIGE (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), 204.206, 205.

¹⁴ The interview is reported and translated by REDMAN (1991: 76-77).

Pound meant that Italian Fascism was the only living force that was defending the European civilisation against the lobby of the usurers. As Caterina Ricciardi states in her introduction to *Idee Fondamentali*, the Italy of the interwar period was, for the North American 'exile', a utopian land where he saw the possibility of realizing the economic system of his dreams. It represented an unrepeatable opportunity to realise his ideal of a State founded on his religious and ethical sensibility. Considering these premises, Pound's case might be considered as a remarkable example of the 'sacralisation of politics', in the sense defined by Emilio Gentile. In fact, according to the Italian historian, a political religion is built by a political movement that 'more or less elaborately and dogmatically [...] confers a sacred status on an earthly entity', which becomes then 'an absolute principle of collective existence [...], an object for veneration and dedication, even to the point of self-sacrifice' (GENTILE and MALLETT, 2000: 18-19).

According to Gentile, the Fascist regime established a sort of political cult by reproducing features of classical religion. Italian Fascism had its own system of rites, myths and saints whose acme was the worship of the charismatic leader. Thanks to this quasi-religious apparatus, Italian Fascism found consensus and legitimisation. Gentile underlines the role played by the First World War not just in extending a sense of civilizational crisis beyond the elites to larger segments of the population, but also in producing a system of myths, rites and symbols that would form the basis for a new kind of identity, where veneration of the homeland replaced traditional religious belief. The historian Roger Griffin used and developed the concept of political religion in his *Modernism and Fascism*, where he mentions Pound as 'one of the most famous modernists poets' who thought he 'could help steer the ongoing Fascist Revolution towards the realisation of [his] idiosyncratic longings for a new civilisation.' After Griffin, some scholars used Gentile's theory heuristically to identify the nature of individual intellectuals' compromises with totalitarian regimes. Among them is Matthew Feldman, who studied Pound's case extensively in his monograph *Ezra Pound's Fascist Propaganda, 1935-45*. Feldman states that 'Pound's belief in fascist ideology was no mere aberration or temporary insanity. It was sincere, freely-adopted and both historically significant and historically explicable' (GRIFFIN, 2007: 217; FELDMAN, 2013: 6).

Pound did indeed become deeply involved in this system and contributed toward creating and supporting the fascist cult. During the *ventennio*, the self-exiled poet worked strenuously in favour of Mussolini's regime, following the *duce* even in the last, infamous and unholy days of the Salò Republic. Pound's belief in the *duce* was so fervent that his daughter, Mary de Rachewiltz stated that during the last tremendous days of civil war in Italy, 'Babbo [father] was infected by a desperate fighting spirit and faith' (GENTILE, 2001: 40-55; RACHEWILTZ, 1975: 197).

4. LINES FROM THE 'GORILLA CAGE'

According to David Moody, Pound's latest biographer, two armed men took the poet from his home at Via Marsala 12 in Rapallo on 27 April 1945. At the same time, General Mark Clark was entering Genova with the US Fifth Army, after having defeated the Germans lined up on the Gothic line. The Axis powers

had been essentially defeated. On the 28th, Benito Mussolini and Clara Petacci, together with her brother and other Fascist leaders, would be captured by Italian partisans in Dongo while they were trying to escape from Italy and reach Spain through Switzerland. They were summarily executed by an improvised firing squad on the same day, and their bodies were exposed to the crowd's fury in Piazzale Loreto, Milan, on the 29th. Their corpses, hung upside-down, disfigured and mocked by the angry mob, came to embody the fall of Italian Fascism.¹⁵

According to Moody, two self-styled 'partisans', probably two Fascists who jumped on the bandwagon looking for easy money, handed their precious prisoner in in Genova to the *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* [National Liberation Committee]. The partisans' commander believed he could not charge anything against Pound who, for his part, insisted upon talking with the local commander of the US Army because he was convinced he had committed no crime. This, despite the fact that he knew already that he had been charged with treason for his radio broadcasts for the Fascist Regime. In fact, when he was delivered by the partisans to the US army, the soldiers brought him to the concentration camp of Coltano, near Pisa, known for being the place where most of the Fascists and collaborationists were imprisoned (figure 6).¹⁶

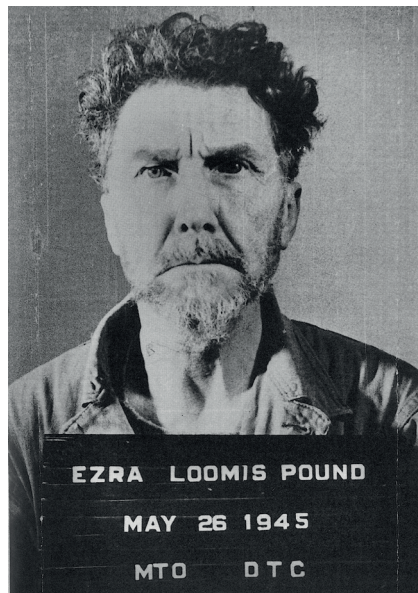


Figure 6. Pound's mugshot taken two days after his arrival at the Disciplinary Training Center. Credits: Photo by officer Morris J. Lucree (US Army photo).

¹⁵ FREEMANN (2016: 225). On Mussolini's last days see, for instance: MILZA (2011).

¹⁶ Most of Pound's biographers state that he was detained in Coltano, but somebody believes he was in another camp, also close to Pisa and to Coltano itself, a place called Metato, where the US army detained the American soldiers and collaborationist. See: KENNER (1971: 471-495).

The camp was full of collaborationists, but also of North American soldiers that were accused of felony offences. Pound was actually held on death row, with those accused of the grimmest crimes and who, in some cases, were executed at the camp. He saw them taken from their cells, brought to the gallows and hanged to death, and reported it in his verse, as in the case of Louis Till:

Pisa, in the 23rd year of the effort in the sight of the tower
and Till was hung yesterday
for murder and rape with trimmings plus Cholkis
plus mythology, thought he was Zeus ram or another one
Hey Snag wots in the bibl'?
Wot are the books of the bible?
Name 'em, don't bullshit ME.¹⁷

The '23rd year' of the 'Fascist era' (1945 - since the March on Rome, October 1922), which Pound was spending 'in sight of the tower' of Pisa. Louis Till was a US soldier who had been found guilty of raping two Italian women and killing another after the conclusion of some of the military campaigns. 'Cholkis', usually spelled 'Colchis', is the realm of Helios' son, Aeëtes, where Jason's Argonauts found the golden fleece. Pound may also be reporting here a dialogue between a guard, who asks Till, or 'Snag', if he had ever read the Bible.¹⁸ Till will appear again in some very similar lines in Canto LXXVII:

-niggers comin' over the obstacle fence
as in the insets at the Schifanoja
(del Cossa) to scale, 10,000 gibbet-ifom posts supporting
barbed wire
" St. Louis Till " as Green called him. Latin !
" I studied latin " said perhaps his smaller companion.
" Hey Snag, what's in the bibl' ?
what are the books of the bibl' ?
Name 'em! don't bullshit me! "
" Hobo Williams, the queen of them all "
" Hey / Crawford, come over here / ".¹⁹

This passage gives to the reader a better insight into the camp's life. The 'niggers' standing 'over the obstacle fence', as Francesco del Cossa's painted 'in the insets' of one of his frescos adorning Palazzo Schifanoia, in the region of Emilia-Romagna, built by the Este family in 1391 and decorated by Del Cossa himself and Cosimo Tura. These frescos had a fundamental influence in the architecture of *The Cantos*, so much that Pound would declare that he tried to reproduce the scheme of these paintings (figure 7). 'Green', 'Hobo Williams' and 'Crawford' are all DTC prisoners that had their cells close to Pound's, who reports excerpts of their conversation and that of the other prisoners.²⁰

17 POUND (1996:450, Canto LXXIV). For the exegesis see TERRELL (1993: 369).

18 Louis Till's case would become very famous because he was the father of Emmett Louis Till, whose abduction and brutal killing, in 1955, when he was only 14, would provoke a huge wave of indignation both in and outside the US, becoming pivotal in the development of the Civil Right Movement. About Till see KAPLAN (2018: 173, 222n) and WIDEMAN (2018)).

19 POUND (1996: 493, Canto LXXIV).

20 TERRELL (1993: 412-413).

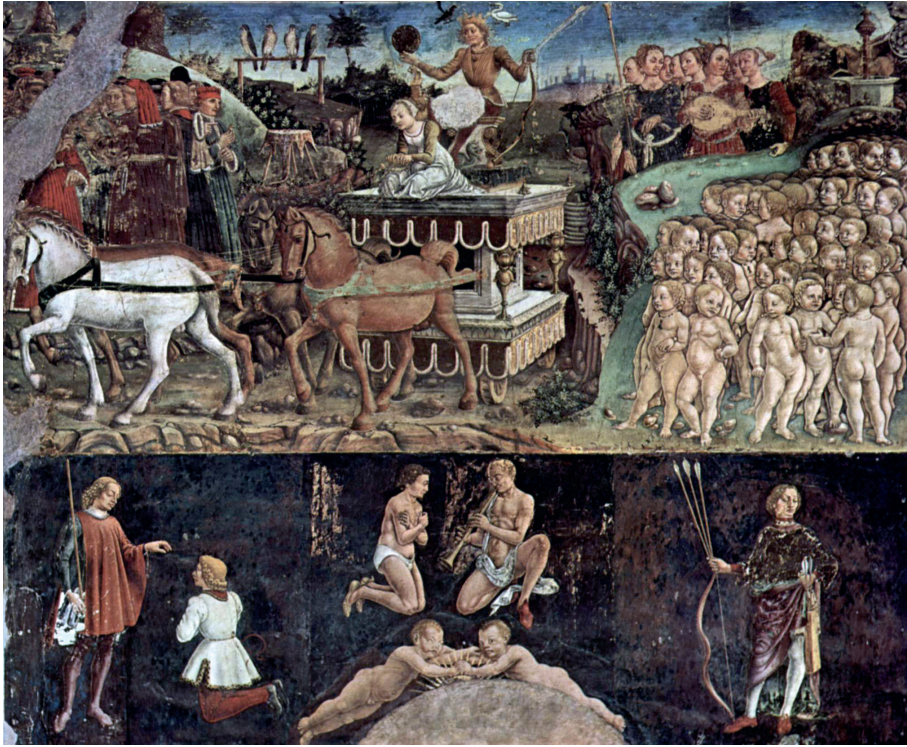


Figure 7. Francesco Del Cossa, *Allegory of May*. 1470. Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara.
Credits: Wikimedia Commons, photographed by user 'Eloquence', May 19, 2005.

According to Piero Sanavio, Pound received a 'special' treatment in the camp: he was held on death row and his cage was built on the concrete floor, like the others there; but Pound's was also covered by supplementary barbed wire and had no protection against the weather and the dust of the nearby military road. Probably, the officers of the camp wanted to prevent every type of self-harming and, for the same reason, during the night his cell was always flooded with light, so he suffered for sleep deprivation. This special prisoner was constantly watched by the guards, and was not allowed to leave the cell, even to discharge his bodily functions, which he was obliged to carry out in public. Pound was left in this inhuman pen, this infamous 'gorilla cage', for three weeks (figure 8).²¹

21 SANAVIO (2005: 32-33).

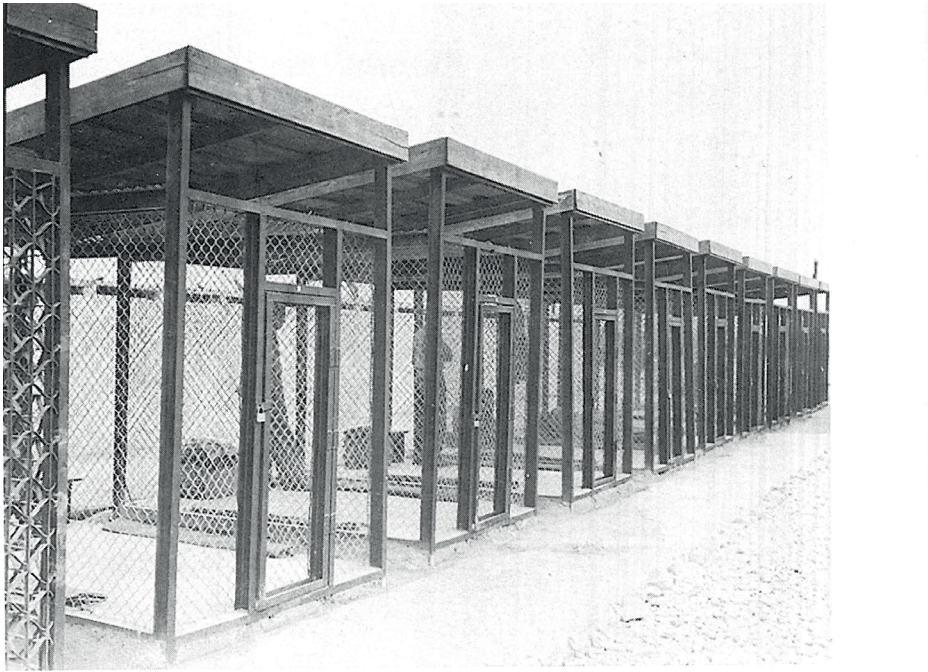


Figure 8. The cages where Pound spent three weeks exposed to the elements.
Credits: US Army photo.

The experience must have astonished Pound, as in fact he reported in Canto LXXXIII:

But in the caged panther's eyes:

“ Nothing. Nothing that you can do...”

green pool, under green of the jungle,
caged: “ Nothing. Nothing that you can do...”

Δρῶζ, your eyes are like clouds

Nor can who passed a month in the death cells
believe in capital punishment
No man who has passed a month in the death cells
believes in the cages for beasts.²²

Despite the merciless treatment and his terrible conditions, Pound composed some of the most remarkable verses of the xx century there. According to Richard Sieburth, he began to write the *Pisan Cantos* when he was still in the cage, some were even drafted on toilet paper. Sanavio refers to how Pound mentally composed

²² POUND (1996: 550).

the verses and remembered them until some nurse let him use, secretly, an old Remington typewriter which they used for filling in forms.²³

The incipit of Canto LXXIV is perhaps the most striking passage of *The Pisan Cantos*, for its artistic and political significance:

THE enormous tragedy of the dream in the peasant's bent shoulders
Manes! Manes was tanned and stuffed,
Thus Ben and la Clara *a Milano*
by the heels at Milano
The maggots shd/ eat the dead bullock
DIGONOS, Διγονος, but the twice crucified
where in history will you find it?
yet say this to the Possum: a bang, not a whimper,
with a bang not with a whimper,
To build the city of Dioce whose terraces are the colour of stars.
The suave eyes, quiet, not scornful,
rain also is of the process.
What you depart from is not the way
and olive tree blown white in the wind
washed in the Kiang and Han
what whiteness will you add to this whiteness,
what candor?
"the great periplum brings the stars to our shore."²⁴

This is a perfect condensation of the Poundian cosmos, where 'Ben'[ito Mussolini] and his mistress Clara [Petacci] are depicted in their last abominable public appearance, when their corpses were exposed to the crowd at the Milanese Piazzale Loreto. The two fleeing lovers, like all the other *gerarchi*, were hung 'by the heels' as in a butchery. Here Mussolini is first compared to 'DIGONOS' and is depicted as a modern Christ 'twice crucified' and suffering a terrible end for others' sins. Then, Pound talks directly with his old friend T. S. Eliot, the 'Possum', and with some of the recurrent 'personae' in his long poem: 'Dioce', 'Kian and Han'.

5. 'THE ROSE IN THE STEEL DUST'

Other very significant lines are in Canto LXXIV where, despite the defeat of the Axis forces, Pound show to the reader that he still believes that his idea of Europe can be resurrected from the 'wreckage'. After mentioning the monuments

23 POUND (2003, xxxvi), SANAVIO (2005: 31-32).

24 POUND (1996: 445-469, 445). Scholars have discussed about this incipit: some, like Bush, believes that the original incipit of *The Pisan Cantos* was 'The suave eyes, quiet, not scornful', which is now the line 12 of Canto LXXIV. According to this theory, Pound would have added the first verses only later, in autumn 1945. On the contrary, Bacigalupo asserts that Pound wrote since the beginning of the composition. Thus, Pound may have composed this beginning in the very first leg of his long detention, in Genova, on that known toilet paper. Pound, would have used also the front cover of a book he had with him in Genova (James Legge's *The Four Books*) to write another draft of these verses. A third draft of Canto LXXIV is contained in the notebook where he wrote also all the other drafts, precisely the *Pisan Cantos Notebook G* (at p 91, end of July 1945). According to Bacigalupo, Pound wrote these lines in the very hectic period of 1945, under the fresh impact of the images of Piazzale Loreto and the chaos of those days in Italy. See BACIGALUPO (2007).

built during the previous years that will not be forgotten by the people and will serve as a basis for European rebirth, Pound conclude the Canto with this image:

Serenely in the crystal jet
 as the bright ball that the fountain tosses
 (Verlaine) as diamond clearness
 How soft the wind under Taishan
 where the sea is remembered
 out of hell, the pit
 out of the dust and glare evil
 Zephyrus / Apeliota
 This liquid is certainly a
 Property of the mind
 nec accidens est but an element
 in the mind's make-up
 est agens and functions dust to a fountain pan otherwise
 Hast'ou seen the rose in the steel dust
 (or swansdown ever?)
 so light is the urging, so ordered the dark petals of iron
 we who have passed over Lethe.²⁵

For those who passed the river Hades, whose water has the power of amnesia, there is still a chance of a new future. Terrell defines the image of the steel rose, 'a pattern of a rose under magnetic influence', as the representation 'of divine order operating in the material world', a miracle that can seldom be seen in nature.²⁶

Until now, scholars have not noticed that this image is also to be found in the script for a movie written by Pound together with the Italian director Ferruccio Cerio. Written in 1931, and largely neglected by literary critics, this was supposed to be a celebration of the decennial of the Fascist March on Rome of 1922. Here, Pound re-imagines the entirety of Italian history in a sort of crescendo that culminate with the advent of Fascism. The sixth sequence of the script concerns the Lateran Treaty of 1929, and the scene starts with a map of Rome engraved on a metal surface, on the top of which some iron powders, nails and other metal results squeak and rattle, giving the idea of the confusion that reigns in the city. A huge calamity approaches the board and brings order to the chaos and the festivities: all the pieces are now polarised and start to move and organise themselves in order to reproduce an enormous 'living rose'. The image of the iron rose fades to give space to the *duce* making the famous speech known as '*il discorso del bivacco*', his first in front of the Italian Parliament. Pound and Cerio imagine the camera focusing on the *duce* pronouncing the known words, '*Potevo fare di questa Aula sorda e grigia un bivacco di manipoli*' ('I could make this deaf and grey House a bivouac for black-shirts'). This 'main action' would alternate with the images of the map of *Piazza Venezia* where, 'very shortly, without breaking the continuity with the first' scenario, the different 'black iron fragments' are now

25 POUND (1996: 469).

26 Teller reports also this passage from Ale Upward's *The New World* (222): 'He who has watched the iron crumbs drawn into patterns by the magnets; or who in the frostwork on the window pane has apprehended the unknown beauty of the crystal's law, seems to me to have an idea more wholesome to our frail imaginings of the meaning of the mystery of Life.' Carroll Franklin. About the 'swansdown' Terrell mention Ben Jonson's 'Her Triumph' contained in *A Celebration of Charis*: 'Ha' you felt the wool o' the beaver? / Or swan's down ever? / Or have smelt o' the bud o' the briar? / Or the nard in the fire?'. TERRELL (1993: 388).

replaced by needles and pieces of brilliant steel, after having been magnetized, to form the huge rose.²⁷

The image of the iron rose, which reminds the 'black petals' of 'In a Station of the Metro', is a sort of terrestrial beauty representing divine splendour thanks to its order. The disposition of the different components working together in harmony is a clear metaphor for the Fascist ideal of the organic society, where there is no social clash, and the different classes work together for the well-being of the nation. In fact, as early as 1915, writing on the Vorticism, Pound had written that:

You do not demand of a mountain or a tree that it shall be like something; you do not demand that "natural beauty" be limited to mean only a few freaks of nature, cliffs looking like faces, etc. The worst symbolist of my acquaintance [...] has said to me more than once, quoting Nietzsche most inadvertently, "The artist is part of nature, therefore he never imitates nature." That text serves very well for my side of the case. Is a man capable of admiring a picture on the same terms as he admires a mountain? The picture will never become the mountain. It will never have the mountain's perpetual variety. The photograph will re-produce the mountain's contour with greater exactitude. Let us say that a few people choose to admire the picture on more or less the same terms as those on which they admire the mountain. Then what do I mean by "forms well organised" ?

An organisation of forms expresses a confluence of forces. These forces may be the "love of God," the "life-force," emotions, passions, what you will. For example: if you clap a strong magnet beneath a plateful of iron filings, the energies of the magnet will proceed to organise form. It is only by applying a particular and suitable force that you can bring order and vitality and thence beauty into a plate of iron filings, which are otherwise as "ugly" as anything under heaven. The design in the magnetised iron filings expresses a confluence of energy. It is not "meaningless" or "inexpressive."

There are, of course, various sorts or various sub divisions of energy. They are all capable of expressing themselves in "an organisation of form."²⁸

Even if this text had been written years before the seizure of power by Mussolini, it helps us to give a background to Pound's ideas for the movie and for image of the rose.

The following scene of the plot is a view on the top of Rome where the 'fascist of the *decennio*' are marching in front of their *duce*. Here Mussolini is represented by an equestrian statue of himself, an iconographic image that Pound borrows from the stamp that the Italian postal service put out also to celebrate the decennial of the March. In the background, a sky full of dark clouds and the noise of a strong wind storm fades down into the musical crescendo of ten military bands playing the notes of the song of the Piave. The music, now extremely loud, accompanies the figure of the dictator that ascends to Valhalla riding his horse. This 'pagan ascension' of the *duce* might be one of the very first passages where Pound tries to envelop the Italian dictator with that 'sacred canopy', in Griffin's terms, to give to Mussolini and his regime a sacred aura. Readers of the *Cantos* can easily compare the image of the ascending *duce* with the much more famous one contained in the *Pisan Cantos*, where Mussolini is defined as 'twice-crucified,' quoted above.

²⁷ The plot for *Le Fiamme Nere* is in; see also the Ezra Pound Papers at the Beinecke Library, YCAL MSS 43, box 103, folder 4285, box 82, folder 3608, Cerio ["Le fiamme nare"]; typescript, n.d. The title is actually misspelled, it should be 'nere' ['black']. See also box 8, folder 367, Cerio, F. Ferruccio, 1934.

²⁸ POUND (1915).

6. CONCLUSIONS

Far from being an exhaustive and careful examination of the *Pisan Cantos* like, for instance, the pivotal works of Ronald Bush, this paper modestly aims to present some new perspective based upon undisclosed archival material.²⁹

Particularly, I aimed to show that religion was for Pound a very peculiar ambience in which he took refuge against the extreme conditions of his imprisonment, and that this religious aura contributed to create his myth among the far right. In fact, especially after the twelve years Pound spent in the psychiatric hospital of St. Elizabeths, the modernist poet became a sort of a 'fascist martyr', whose fame is wide and still raises the admiration of new acolytes. In Spain, for instance, it is not uncommon to see activists paying their homage to the only monument dedicated to Ezra Pound. Built in the municipality of Medinaceli, in the province of Soria, this stone reminds the trip Pound realised in Castilla in 1906, and it is now the destination of radical pilgrims and devotees.³⁰

7. ARCHIVAL MATERIAL

From the Beinecke Library, Yale University, Ezra Pound Paper, YCAL MSS 43:

- General Correspondence: box 8, folder 367, Cerio, F. Ferruccio, 1934
- General Correspondence: box 9, folder 401, Ciano, Galeazzo 1933-36;
- General Correspondence: box 36, folder 1516 Mussolini, Benito [1933]-43
- General Correspondence: box 49, folder 2195, Stefani, Alberto de, [1935-36];
- General Correspondence: box 82, folder 3608, Cerio ["Le fiamme nare"]
- Manuscripts: box 103, folder 4285, [Le "Fiamme Nere"]: (Cerio): typescript

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²⁹ See BUSH (1977), and especially BUSH (2010). Also, BACIGALUPO (2017). See also Pound's correspondence with his wife Dorothy Shakespear (in POUND, 1999).

³⁰ From the web page of *Arianna Editrice* Miro Renzaglia asserts that Pound is a 'martyr of the fascist revolution': Miro Renzaglia, "Perché Ezra Pound ci parla ancora," *Arianna Editrice*, accessed April 07, 2017, http://www.ariannaeditrice.it/articolo.php?id_articolo=39552. See, for instance, the homages payed to Pound by the Movimiento Social Republicano: <https://msrgalicia.wordpress.com/2011/05/08/el-1-de-mayo-del-msr-en-medinaceli-ciudad-del-cielo/>; and Acción Juvenil Española: <http://mceaje.blogspot.com/2017/05/por-rutas-imperiales-medinaceli.html>.

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