

THE GOLD THREAD

Ezra Pound's Principles
of
Good Government
& Sound Money

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Strangers Press

LONDON

NEWPORT

Acknowledgments

I would like to mention James Laughlin, to whom we owe so much of the preservation of Pound's work-in-print today. Laughlin's efforts as a student, editor and friend of Mr. Pound provided him with a lifelong commitment to see Ezra Pound's writing made available.

C. F. Terrell and Hugh Kenner are singled out for their serious and in-depth scholarship in the field of Pound studies.

My thanks to Matthew Flynn at University College, London, for his help in the early stages of the book.

I would like to thank Abdassamad Clark of Norwich, England and Rick Feher of Northern California, two talented and exceedingly patient proof readers and editors, for their help in preparing the manuscript for print.

Credit is due to Dr. Abd al-Alim Palmer for his assistance with the etymology of the Chinese characters.

Appropriately left to last, as the single most important influence and aid in my own life's journey, is Shaykh Abdalqadir Al-Murabit, whom I thank for his pre-eminent contribution toward my accomplishing this study of Pound.

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I

To Make a Tapestry

A warrior poet of the twentieth century, not unlike the ancient heroes of his Odyssean epic, *The Cantos*, Ezra Pound wore the mantel of Teutonic activism into a battle that spanned more than fifty years of his life. He was a volitionist visionary who strove to realize his *ideas in action*. Through the long circumnavigation of his unfolding Odyssey, constructed along the lines of a musical score rather than a sequential narrative, it was his quest to see a just and enlightened system of governance. Good government, he believed, must first establish a clear and precise definition of words, hence the importance of language. Upon doing this, leadership must create a healthy and clean monetary system that puts wealth (and credit) into the hands of people, not an oligarchic élite who would (assuredly!) build a pernicious, and, in

Pound's view, filthy system that would see all nation-states reduced to debt receptors, all culture, art, and religions destroyed and the vast majority of the world's population *debased* into a citizenry of debtor-slaves. It should be seen, right from the very start, that while Pound was revered as "the last American living the tragedy of Europe," it was nothing less than the precipitant destruction of European civilization that he was trying to avert. (James E. Miller's *The American Quest for a Supreme Fiction*.)

While the *magnum opus* of Pound's literary career is undisputedly *The Cantos*, his prose writing, which took the form of historical and educational essays as well as full-length texts, make up an essential part of his work. A great deal of what appears in *The Cantos*, particularly in relation to his monetary principles, ideas of good government and social and cultural elevation, are the subject matters of those prose pieces. Other significant areas of Pound's endeavors were his literary criticisms, principally those on the works of his friends—T. S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, William Carlos Williams, Gaudier-Brzeska, James Joyce and Hilda Doolittle (H. D.)—for whom he was a tireless champion and supporter. There were also his translations which included the three main books by Confucius, the *Confucian Odes* (for which Confucius was the anthologist and collector), early Anglo-Saxon verse and selected

poems from his much-loved Provençal troubadour bards. All of these various strains found their way back into the weave of his great musical tapestry, the *Cantos*. It is here that the words of the distinguished Pound critic, Hugh Kenner, from his serious work, *The Pound Era*, set the stage for what is to be the theme of my own work. Kenner says, "These ideas of wealth [money created as interest debt, artificial scarcities, monopolies...] are not extrinsic to the *Cantos*, but warp and woof." To elaborate on Kenner's succinct statement it is recognizable that in the same *ideogrammatic* manner, used by Pound in creating *meaning-forms* ("a radiant node or cluster, a Vortex...from which and through which and into which ideas are constantly rushing." —*Selected Essays*) that what functions as warp and woof on the one level becomes totally expressed as design on another. These principles, then, are displayed in much the same manner that one would see expansive winged trusses in a vaulted cathedral ceiling or support beams in traditional Japanese house construction.

The slew of pseudo-scholarship, throwing up statements like, "a flawed genius who strayed into incoherent and obtuse theories about economics, government and history..." reveals how far the censorship of his work has been taken. Censorship, in this case, taking the form of covering-up by the act of obscuring, and discrediting, the man and his ideas under a heaped up mountain of

wastepaper. This, of course, is exactly what has been done to Richard Wagner by the tantrum-throwing highchair academics who have built their careers on infantile slander and *ressentement*. (See Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*.) Yet, when all is said and done, the rapturously beautiful music dramas of Wagner have never ceased thrilling the hearts and minds of those who are capable of listening. Likewise, despite all of the insipid attacks on the poet and obfuscation of his work, those tepid sniffers have not been able to put Pound—the man and his masterpiece—to rest.

II

Current Curriculum

THE COURSE to be charted begins with Confucius, whom Pound insisted was as relevant today, as in the fifth century B.C. According to Pound this is true of the study of classical Greek Literature; the glory of Rome; the Italian Renaissance; the later half of eighteenth-century America (with the advent of Jefferson, Adams, and Van Buren and their prodigious attempt to create "honest bills of exchange" with "no interest on them," says Adams); 1829 to 1841 and Andy Jackson's war from the White House against the banks [Jackson defeated the renewal of the First National Bank's charter which, despite its official sounding name, was a privately owned company with the monopoly rights to lend (rent) credit to the Nation]; the 1860s through the 1890s and the decline of American civilization in the aftermath of the Civil War. Pound tells us that the turning point of that civilization

was the passing of the National Banking Act, a bill passed through the American Congress, sponsored by Ohio Congressman John Sherman, lobbied into law by its original designers, the English bankers, the Rothschild Brothers with the collaboration of the Wall Street firm of Iklesheimer, Morton and Vandergould. "Any nation that pays rent for its credit are fools," said a Mr. Rothschild to Disraeli, then Prime Minister of England. The list continues with the events taking place in Europe during what Pound called the "century of Usurocracy," followed by World War I which brought about the final destruction of all of Europe's ruling monarchies as well as the Islamic Caliphate. Last on his list was the difficult task of coming to grips with, and making sense of, the deafening crescendo of the Second World War.

What Pound believed to be within the *relevant* scope of essential knowledge and understanding of history remains a prodigious challenge for any serious person. That some people of action should understand his work in order to make a world lit by the lamp of our "cultural heritage," (*Impact, Essays* by Ezra Pound) stands forth in sharp contrast against the hollow goals of a consumed society. Pound had said that it was "rash to write an epic in a time of chaos," yet that was precisely what he did. Since the aftermath of the Second World War the world had remained frozen in a cold war stasis, only to arrive thawed before the *terrifying* promise (mutant offspring of

the French Revolution) of a one world state, totally in the control of a non-elected usurious oligarchy.

This view of history, which Pound relentlessly put forth as crucial for the true education of people so as not to be “duped” by the mercantilism of modern publishing houses,

And the betrayers of language
 n and the press gang
 And those who had lied for hire;
 the perverts, the perverters of language,
 the perverts, who have set money-lust
 Before the pleasures of the senses;

howling, as of a hen-yard in a printing house,

Canto XIV

is best described by Clark Emery in *Ideas into Action*. Emery relates, “In his study of history, the effort will be to recapture the intensity of life being lived, and, instead of bringing history to the reader to bring the reader into history. That is, the reader will not witness an event as an accomplished fact, but will seem to be a participant in the event. He will, therefore, often receive fragmentary information, thus being [momentarily] as confused or ignorant or misled as the original actors. He will often

have to speak the language of the time, the dialect of the place. On the other hand, though pressed into action, he will simultaneously maintain his perspective as reader and will be able to draw inferences [and important insights] from startling juxtapositions or apparently divergent times, persons, places, events, ideas.”

While the entirety of Cantos XLIV and XLVI provide excellent examples of “bringing the reader into the events” (as do nearly all the *Cantos*), I have chosen to excerpt just a handful of lines in illustration. The first phrase may be heard as an official declaration on behalf of the Grand Duke, sounded in the city square.

AND thou shalt not, Firenze 1766, and thou shalt not
 sequester for debt any farm implement
 nor any yoke ox nor
 any peasant while he works with the same
 Pietro Leopaldo

Canto XLIV

Ferdinando EVVIVA!!

declared against exportation
 thought grain was to eat.

Flags trumpets horns drums
 and a placard

VIVA FERDINANDO

and were sounded all carillons
with bombs and with bonfires and was sung TE-DEUM
in thanks to the Highest for this so
provident law

Canto XLIV

‘The foundation, Siena, has been to keep bridle on
usury.’

Nicolò Piccolomini, Provveditore.

Canto XLIV

The following passage, now from Canto XLVI, takes up a dialogue constructed by Pound from conversations he had with Marmaduke Pickthall, an English *journalist* and orientalist concerning the behaviour of the British government in the near east. There is a previous reference in the poem to Balfour, the British statesman who drafted the famous “agreement” of the same name that gave up Palestine. Another reference, found in the following line, mentions ‘ole Johnny Bull with an “ankerchief,” which evokes the British archetype and their two-faced dealings with the desert Arabs, particularly the mad masquerading Lawrence, who, after gaining the trust of his hosts, sold them out. This indicates that Pound wanted to bring both examples to mind.

“getting profits. The general public will probably not
 “see it’s against their interest.”

Seventeen years on the case; here
 Gents, is/are the confessions.

“Can we take this into court?

“Will any jury convict on this evidence?”

The Canto, as it draws towards its end, building in
 intensity reads:

Aurum est commune sepulchrum. Usura, commune sepulchrum.
 helandros kai heleptolis kai helarxe.
 Hic Geryon est. Hic hyperusura.

Canto XLVI

[Gold is a common sepulcher. Usury, a common
 sepulcher, destroyer of men, and destroyer of cities, and
 destroyer of governments.]

["Here is Geryon. Here is hyper usury."]



Geryon was a three-headed monster living on the
 island of Erythia, killed by Heracles. In his *Inferno*, Dante
 used Geryon as both the symbol of fraud and for guard-
 ing of the eighth circle of hell, as well as the symbol of
 usury and violence against nature and art.

FIVE million youths without jobs
 FOUR million adult illiterates
 15 million 'vocational misfits', that is with small chance for jobs
 Nine million persons annual, injured in preventable industrial
 accidents
 One hundred thousand violent crimes. The Eunited States ov
 America
 3rd year of the reign of F. Roosevelt, signed F. Delano, his uncle.
 CASE for the prosecution. That is one case, minor case
 in the series/ Eunited States of America, a.d. 1935
 England a worse case, France under a foetor of regents.
 'Mr. Cummings wants Farley's job headline in current paper.

Canto XLVI

Pound gives us here in staccato rapid-fire some current statistics of his day. We hear them with the memory still fresh in our minds of those "so provident laws" of Pietro Leopaldo which would be the safeguard against such atrocities. The last line being a bit of newspaper fodder which provides its own irony: Mr. Cummings, an American lawyer and one-time U.S. Attorney General wants Mr. Farley's job, which we learn was the lucrative post of United States Postmaster, given him as a *political favor*. (See C. Terrell's *Companion to the Cantos*.)

A basic understanding of Pound's way of viewing history together with his method of constructing his epic and the various uses of styles and meters will accompany us in the perusal of his ideas on governance and money. The stressed significance of the "necessity of the clear definition of words"—taken from the *TaHio* of Confucius, rubbed in later on by Dante, picked up on by Ford Maddox Ford (an early literary mentor of Pound), will resound its message in our inner ear. The discovery of Major C. H. Douglas, the twentieth-century British engineer turned monetary reformer, and his theory on the increment of association "and the incredulity of total costs (of production) in their (falsified) relation to purchasing power" bring up important questions. Likewise, can we follow the *traces* of the hard-fought battles of Jefferson, Adams and Martin Van Buren against the impossibility of creating a just State without establishing a just money?

These questions and more, which bring us to the post-World-War-II period, were ones that Pound continued to put forth and elucidate up until 1969. Although Pound's personal odyssey came to an end in 1972, it did not in any way bring to an end the imperatives of his immense battle. *The Cantos* stand full of splendor, lucidity, intricacies and words  by which man  stands: A man standing by his words—

"integrity." As we enter into the closing years of this century, with so much of what Pound fought to preserve and restore: the preservation of languages and cultures, the importance of the rituals and acts of worship of the Divine, the necessity of an honest means of exchange to facilitate the natural intercourse of trading goods and services, and a form of governance that can stand firmly to safeguard each of these, now threatened and endangered to the point of extinction, we must take seriously the lessons of this committed genius. The eye seeks its aim.

And he said

 "Anyone can run to excesses,
It is easy to shoot past the mark,
It is hard to stand firm in the middle."

Canto XIII

There are, undoubtedly, esteemed academics who are dying of embarrassment at the very thought of Pound not running to excesses. They have, unfortunately, taken their detached objectivism as a substitute for passion and the ability to derive meaning from what they study. Pound, on the other hand, never lacked for either.

While the poet suffered greatly from both physical and mental exhaustion during his cruel imprisonment in

Pisa at an American concentration camp, he was, nevertheless, able to reflect on both what was happening to him as an individual and also to the civilization of which he was a part. No further proof of this is needed other than the *Pisan Cantos*, which he wrote during that time. That collection stands firmly as one of the greatest pieces of verse written in the English language and is a hallmark of twentieth-century literature. Pound was awarded, much to the deep embarrassment of the U.S. Government, the prestigious Bollingen Prize (sponsored through the U.S. Library of Congress) for the *Pisan Cantos* for the highest accomplishment of poetry in the year 1949.

All the same, the long thirteen years he spent locked up in St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington D.C. virtually *sentenced for life* (to a mad-house) for a crime he was never tried for, added to the immense strain put upon him. If he was a mad poet, why didn't they leave him wandering in the hillsides of his *imaginary* Italy? (*Vision Fugitive* by E. Davies.) If he was a traitor, why was he not tried and shot? Tragically, Ezra Pound was punished for what he wrote and spoke.