

## Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeth's

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T. S. Eliot once called Pound the inventor of Chinese poetry in English, by which he meant that Pound had rendered the spirit of Chinese poetry into English as no one had before. Pound has as good a claim to be the inventor of modernism in English letters. Such a claim rests on his transformation of Yeats from an aesthete into a modernist, on his role in the creation of Imagism and Vorticism, on his "discovery" of Joyce and Eliot, and finally on his co-creation with Eliot of *The Waste Land*. If literary modernism in English has any individuation, it can most plausibly be identified with the work of these four men and their imitators. Pound's claim to a special place rests more on his role as an impresario and theoretician of the movement than on his contribution to it as a poet.

I have no wish to defend—nor, indeed, to challenge—Pound's role in the genesis of literary modernism, but merely to remind you of this view—one standard throughout the Cold War period, and still surviving in anthologies and handbooks. It is worth bringing to mind because it would be nugatory to discuss his Fascism and anti-Semitism if he were not someone who otherwise has claims to distinction and worth.

In pre-Postmodern days critics seldom spoke of "American Modernism." Literary modernism was thought to be internationalist. The modernists claimed to be the heralds of an epoch in which the limitations of national cultures would be transcended in a new, triumphant, universal culture. It was in this spirit that Pound co-opted Chinese poetry for English readers, that Yeats assimilated Byzantium to Ireland, that Joyce juxtaposed Dublin with the Homeric Mediterranean, and that Eliot rendered urban post-war Europe archetypally as all of European history. Of course, we now see this alleged internationalism as a species of cultural imperialism, and the only cultural imperialists worth talking about are the Americans. For that reason I take "American Modernism" to be synonymous with "Modernism" as used in the Cold War period.

It is now common for the early modernists to be scolded for their reactionary and nationalist views, for being out of touch with Marxist international-

ism, which most “boomers” (those born between 1946 and 1966) believe to have been the genuine wave of the future. Certainly the early modernists were reactionary in the sense that they—in contrast to the subsequent cohort or generation—were anti-communist. And it is true that Communism itself was—and is—internationalist in the sense that it regards national cultures as just so many versions of false consciousness, to be overthrown by true consciousness, that is, Communism. But such a view of early modernism is seriously anachronistic.

Of the events I have listed as foundational of literary modernism, only T. S. Eliot’s *Waste Land* postdates the Bolshevik revolution in composition. Communism was not an issue for the early modernists. They identified their antagonists as nineteenth-century scientific rationalism, whose culmination was Russell and Whitehead’s *Principia Mathematica* (1910-13), and the mass culture of the periodical press. The crisis they confronted was the loss of faith in Darwinian science as a substitute for Christianity. And their solution was to seek a spiritual alternative along the lines outlined in William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience* and promoted by the Society for Psychical Research. These objectives were pursued with a peculiarly American strategy because the two dominant figures in the articulation of literary modernism—Pound and Eliot—were both Americans temporarily resident in London.<sup>1</sup>

On their own self-understanding (which I cannot document here) they were engaged in the assembly of pan-European culture with the intention to rend it down in a cultural melting pot so that the best and the permanent would precipitate to the top. Modernism, then, began as both a post-nationalist AND a post-colonial cultural analogue of American civilization. It had three tactical objectives: to break the British and bourgeois monopoly of American high culture; to transform American popular culture into a medium capable of high seriousness; and to conquer London with that product. They succeeded in the first and last objectives, but failed so thoroughly in the second that probably most of you disbelieve my claim that they had such an objective.<sup>2</sup>

With hindsight it is easy enough to recognize that their project was not truly international, but shamelessly Euro-centric; that it was not post-Christian, but vestigially Christian and metaphysical; that it was not sexually liberated, but un-self-consciously patriarchal and homophobic; and that it was not genuinely American but elitist and European.<sup>3</sup> Since these are all features that they shared with Fascism and Nazism, it is easy enough to conclude that Pound’s decision to throw in his lot with Mussolini and Hitler, and to denounce Churchill and Roosevelt in the most strident terms, was the inevitable and natural outcome of his modernist ideology; to conclude, in short, that modernism and fascism are two faces of the same coin.

There are ideological and historical difficulties with such a conclusion that I cannot fully engage here, but which should be mentioned. They are the same as those which have been articulated in the literature on the Nazism of Martin Heidegger and Paul de Man and the accusation that deconstruction itself is a neo-Nazi ideology.<sup>4</sup> The first difficulty, I have already presented—modernism was programmatically internationalist like Communism, in contrast to the resolute nationalism of fascism. Secondly, modernism was an outgrowth of aestheticism, and retained the doctrine of aesthetic autonomy—anathema to both Nazism and Fascism. Thirdly, modernists regarded fascist art as kitsch, and fascists denounced modernist literature, music, painting, and architecture as degenerate and Jewish.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, modernism and fascism both assigned a causal role to culture in the formulation of a society and a polity—in contrast to Marxism, for which society could be transformed only by a fundamental alteration in the objective conditions of industrial capitalism. Modernism and Fascism, that is to say, shared the neo-Marxist or Gramscian postulate that an alteration in the mind-set of a society could transform that society from the top without any precedent alteration in the means of production or social structures. But British Fabians, American New Dealers, and Canadian CEFers also subscribed to top-down social reform. Hence we cannot apply this postulate as a litmus test for fascism. We need to look to the particular mind-set selected rather than merely to the strategy of top-down “revolution.” Indeed, top-down transformation of society is virtually the touchstone for post-modernism.<sup>6</sup>

Modernism was undeniably elitist—a propensity that Marxists invariably, and sometimes legitimately, attribute to their opponents. However, neither Mussolini’s Fascism nor Hitler’s Nazism were really elitist ideologies, even though both were top-down. They permitted only one leader, a Führer or Duce. Certainly there were privileged individuals and groups, but they were court favourites rather than elites. Mussolini’s Fascism, for example, was officially a democracy of professions. Tradesmen and professionals were to be proportionally represented in the Fascist parliament—though it was never elected. And Nazism was officially Volkish and anti-intellectual. Although party members in both systems formed a privileged group, Nazism and Fascism shared that feature with Bolshevism, an officially anti-elitist regime.

The one issue most people identify with Fascism is anti-Semitism, but no case can be made for the proposition that modernism as a movement was anti-Semitic, even though some of its adherents were. For example, it is often said that Eliot’s cultural theories as articulated in the forties and fifties amount to anti-Semitism in

that his pan-Europeanism and Christianity would exclude Jews—either as a religious group or as free thinkers. There is some bite to this argument, but Eliot's position is a form of cultural exclusivity or perhaps cultural imperialism, rather than a form of racism. However, reprehensible cultural exclusivity might be, it cannot be used as a criterion of Fascism or Nazism. It is, after all, a universally distributed trait of cultural groups. As I observed above, insofar as such cultural theories are inter- or pan-national, they have more in common with Communist internationalism than they do with Fascist appeals to a shared racial heritage. In addition, the Anglican Eliot of the postwar had been disowned by his surviving fellow modernist and was no longer thought to be articulating a modernist ideology.

Nonetheless, Eliot's late cultural theories are consistent with the project of early modernism to formulate a world culture, even though the content he wishes that culture to have is remote from what early modernism had envisaged. The Christian Eliot can no longer countenance the admixture of pagan, Christian, Hindu, shamanistic, and occult components that he surveyed in *The Waste Land* as the broken fragments of an archaic world culture. Joyce, for his part, never seemed to regard such polyglot internationalism as anything but risible—on the evidence of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Pound is another matter.

Pound retains his adherence to the cultural programme of early modernism throughout his Fascist period—that is from 1933 until very nearly to his death in 1972. Documentation for this is everywhere, but most prominent in the *Cantos*. Pound's project was to take a decayed and polluted culture and to "make it new," to take the *disjecta membra* of human culture and recombine them into an authentic culture or *paideuma*. In the early years Pound thought of the task of culture creation as one primarily of recovery and restoration. But he came increasingly to think of it as one of cleansing and purgation. This move from restoration to purification is very much the reflex of his conversion to Fascism.

For Pound the metahistory of European civilization and culture is the story of a struggle between the donative forces of Greece, Rome, and China on the one hand, and the exploitative or accumulative forces emanating primarily from Semitic civilization and culture.<sup>7</sup> *The Cantos* trace the survival and occasional efflorescence of these donative forces in world history—in Justinian Byzantium, Albigensian France, Quattrocento Italy, Revolutionary America, and finally Fascist Europe. The accumulative forces—which he calls "Usury"—are constantly attacking and suppressing these donative forces, which have survived surreptitiously through most of history in a sort of underground or permanent resistance made up of artists, who pass on the donative counter-culture in an esoteric form in their artworks.

For Pound the project of modernism was to make manifest the cultural nuggets of this archaic and embattled *paideuma* (or *Weltanschauung*) in works of art, thereby generating a new world culture. I have recently made the case for this view of modernism elsewhere, so I will not attempt to substantiate it further here. However, it is obvious that such a view of cultural history would be palliative for Pound during his confinement in St. Elizabeth's. The defeat of Fascism and Nazism, and his own "martyrdom," counted as further evidence that he and they stood for those donative forces, which had been suppressed and perverted by the accumulative forces throughout history. This view from St. Elizabeth's contrasts strongly with the confident prediction of an Axis triumph over the alliance of capitalism and communism he had expressed in correspondence, prose publications, and broadcasts between 1933 and 1945.

Pound had articulated this metahistory as early as 1912-13 (in *Patria Mia* and "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris"). His epic poem, *The Cantos* (begun at the same time) was intended both to announce and to instantiate the new civilization. Pound's cultural theories have affinities with those of such so-called proto-fascists as Stewart Chamberlain and Alfred Rosenberg and also with the racist theories of Artur Gobineau and Paul de Lagarde. One can also find affinities between Pound's archaism and the philosophy of Nietzsche and with the musical drama of Wagner. The Nazis claimed all of them as precursors and were especially enthusiastic about Wagner and Nietzsche.

It is perhaps worth noting how these individuals situated themselves with respect to Nazism. Chamberlain lived just long enough to disassociate himself from Nazism; Nietzsche, Wagner, Gobineau and de Lagarde all died before Nazism appeared;<sup>8</sup> Rosenberg embraced Nazism and was given high posts by Hitler; Pound embraced Fascism and supported the Axis war effort against Britain and the USA. The question I will address, then, is not whether Pound was a Fascist supporter—for he clearly was—but whether his cultural and historical views are themselves authentically Fascist.

I will now turn to a case study of the survival of Fascism as an ideology during the Cold War as represented in the correspondence between Ezra Pound and a Fascist friend still in Italy, Olivia Rossetti Agresti. The subject is topical, I think, for two reasons: 1. postmodernists routinely characterize modernism as reactionary if not fascist, and opponents of deconstruction and postmodernism just as routinely point to the Nazi past of Heidegger and de Man as evidence that deconstruction is in truth a revival of fascism; 2. the resurgence of Fascism as a political force in France and Italy, and of anti-Semitism and Nazism in Germany.

My goal is neither to generate an apologetics for Pound, nor an exposé of

deconstruction, but rather to persuade you that a binary, pseudo-Manichean grid of good-guys and bad-guys is inadequate to the case of the post-war and cold-war periods. However, I must admit at the outset that my approach is already theory-bound to the extent that it is parasitic on the claim that the correspondence to which I refer has some autonomy and is not simply the reflex of what I wish to say.

Pound first wrote to Olivia Rossetti Agresti in June of 1937 offering an article on Social Credit in Alberta. She was at the time editor of the journal of the Italian Association of Joint Stock Companies, a position she held from 1921 to 1943. She found Pound's Italian too picturesque and rejected the article, but they subsequently met and became friends. Ten years Pound's elder and sixty-one years old at the time they met, she was never the object of an amorous interest on his part, nor was she an admirer of his poetry. Indeed it was many years before she discovered that he was a famous poet, and before he learned that she was the daughter of William Michael Rossetti, niece of Dante Gabriel and Christina Rossetti, and first cousin of Ford Madox Ford.

ORA—Pound's acronym for Olivia Rossetti Agresti—was born in London on September 20, 1875. She began a political life of sorts at the tender age of 17 by publishing an anarchist journal, *The Torch*, with her 13-year-old sister, Helen, from the basement of their parental home in London. Through that enterprise she met and married (1897) Antonio Agresti, a Florentine journalist briefly exiled in London. They settled in Italy where she lived until her death in Rome on November 6, 1960, not long after her 85th birthday. She was widowed young and earned her living from 1904 as a translator for David Lubin until his death in 1918. She then worked as a translator at the League of Nations in Versailles until she got the job with the Association in 1921.<sup>9</sup>

The correspondence covers 22 years—from 1937 to 1959. It is particularly informative because of the imperfect match between their views. Despite her adolescent anarchism, and despite having been raised in a freethinking family, ORA had become a devout Catholic by the time Pound met her. On the other hand, they shared a radicalism in economics, which she retained from her years with David Lubin and his International Institute of Agriculture. But here too, there was an irritant, for Lubin was Jewish. The broadest agreement they shared was as Italian patriots and admirers of Italian culture and civilization, including the Fascist period.

Although it is possible to find Pound making positive remarks about Jews and Judaism in the correspondence, vitriolic denunciation of Western democratic leaders as either Jews themselves or in the pay of Jews is far more common. The following is a relatively mild exemplar of his fulminations:

Yes, heroism, decency / ALL excited by HIRED press to the wrong ends. Pawn yr / castles and rescue the HOLY sepulchre from the Muslim. etc. KILL the germans, defend Damnocracy etc. ALL to profit of arms manuf / and loan kikes. The decent motives which DO function perverted. History falsified. (August 17, 1954)<sup>10</sup>

Such intemperate vituperation is the sort of thing one expects from neo-Nazis and holocaust deniers.

It does not seem that Pound was a holocaust denier. One reference to the holocaust is occasioned by his reading of Fritz Hesse's memoir, *Das Spiel im Deutschland* (translated as *Hitler and the English* by F. A. Voigt. London: Allan Wingate, 1954). In recommending the book to ORA, he comments:

Even a man in Hesse's position did not know about gas ovens till Sept. 1944 and they were not particularly german, I mean not spirito del popolo / and there were none in ITALY tho I have only seen ONE statement of that fact, forget if in Bagnac or Spampanato / also my geo-politik to use a large word was NOT germanic. / (August 7, 1953)

While not an endorsement of the "final solution," these remarks hardly express disgust or revulsion. A year later, Pound was reading *Hitler's Secret Conversations, 1941-1944*,<sup>11</sup> and registers another judgement of the holocaust (September 3, 1954): "I consider genocide impractical / and admit in theory each individual shd / be judged on his merits. BUT the cathedrals rose when segregation was in fashion."

A month later he confides the following rather negative assessment of Hitler:

Crazy as a coot, as Mus / noted on first meeting him. BUT with extraordinary flashes of lucidity. He smelled the idiocy of judeo-xtianity, but had no basis either in Aristotle or Confucius.

first impressions of quick perception / Justification of germans who tried to bump him off / AND of those who saw need of strong Italy to balance the Neitzsche-Wagner teuto-bobble wobble.

On the whole, NO ethical basis. Not to say that Italy didn't produce a punk named Machiavelli. Lucidity without clarity. Churchill just the same kind of grabber and without any extenuating charm. (October 31, 1953)

These samples reveal two points that I think need to be heavily underlined: firstly, despite the holocaust Pound did not back off from his anti-Semitic posture;<sup>12</sup> secondly, although Pound shared the fantasy of a Jewish conspiracy with the Nazis, he rejects their aesthetic and their "metaphysics." The latter he characterizes as "Nietzsche-Wagner teuto-bobble wobble." Thanks to this imperfect harmony of views it is always possible for apologists to stress the points of Pound's disagreement with Nazism, and for accusers to stress the points of agreement. My purpose is to articulate the relationship, preserving its complexity as much as possible.

But there should be no question about where Pound stood. Still commenting on Hitler's table talk, he wrote on November 5, 1953:

Reading The Hitler Conversations[:] very lucid re / money / unfortunately he was bit by dirty jew mania for World Dominion, as you used to point out / this WORST of German diseases was got from yr / idolized and filthy biblical bastards. Adolf clear on the bacillus of kikism / that is on nearly all the other poisons. but failed to get a vaccine against that.

Here Pound clearly and unequivocally endorses Hitler's anti-Semitism, while grotesquely blaming the Jews for his "mania for world dominion." Obviously he is prepared to finger the Jews for all the evil in the world—even Nazism and the holocaust!

Olivia Agresti did not share his admiration for Hitler. She replied (November 18, 1953):

I have not read Hitler's Table Talk and do not know whether an Italian translation is being published. But do not trouble to send it to me as I have much on hand now and should not have time to do more than glance at it. I look upon Hitler as a madman, and a dangerous one; it is all very well to speak in a more or less flippant way of "better deads," but when from such talk one sets down to really killing off all those belonging



to such categories as one can lay hands on, it is a case of criminal lunacy.

These remarks elicited a spirited defence of Hitler, worthy of a holocaust denier:

Yes, my Dear O.R.A. BUTTT we shd / ask WHAT kind of a bloody lunatic, and what druv him [i.e. Hitler] / and NOT allow *ourselves* to be intoxicated by the very filth of propa-ganda which you so rightly deplore. The POSITIVE lucidities which revived the whole of germany by enthusiasm / the 6 months blind in hospital knowing no one / NO high connec-tions / the mass of kraut stupidity opposed to him / AND one must place pore Adolf in proportion to the two loathsome tops / FDR and W.C. neither of whom EVER was under hammer of necessity, or in ANY misery, or suffered five minutes from sympathy with the multitude. NEVER five minutes agony for the state of the people. (December 1, 1953)

It is painful to read these passages, and most Pound scholars quite understandably endeavour to pass over such sentiments in silence, regarding them as aberrant. But it is clear that they are not aberrant; they arise out of Pound's understanding of the dynamics of world history—a grotesque misunderstanding surely, but one which Pound shares with Hitler and the Nazis, and to which he adheres faithfully.

Among early Nazi and Fascist post-war apologists<sup>13</sup> it was routine to point out that the Cold War was the result of Churchill and Roosevelt having misunder-stood the threat of Bolshevism. Had they allied themselves with the Axis against Moscow, the argument goes, the West would now (in the 50s) be safe. Of course, there was never a chance of such an alliance on either side, but that did not bother the revisionists. Pound shares this view, and even imagines Jews controlling Mos-cow as well as the democracies:

Of course Roose betrayed the world to Moscow / there was one war on / and the dirty work aimed at making sure of a third / with the U.S. and the occident in weak position and the kiko-russ on top / god rot the lot of 'em / including Weinstein Kirchberg [i.e. Winston Churchill] / and the barbers block / Winston of Clowning St / the Barclay Gammon of the political night club. (April 30, 1953)

It is instructive to turn to Heidegger's *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, a lecture series first delivered in 1935, but published in the same year (1953) as the letter just cited. Heidegger expressed much the same analysis of geopolitics—although without Pound's anti-Semitism:

This Europe, in its ruinous blindness forever on the point of cutting its own throat, lies today in a great pincers, squeezed between Russia on one side and America on the other. From a metaphysical point of view, Russia and America are the same; the same dreary technological frenzy, the same unrestricted organization of the average man.<sup>14</sup>

Both Pound and Heidegger regarded Western liberal democracies and Eastern Bolshevik dictatorships as indistinguishable when viewed from their lofty "metaphysical" perspective. They both believed that they understood historical trends more profoundly than those around them who saw only the superficial antagonisms of nations and ideologies.

Although Pound and Heidegger had divergent metahistorical views, they both rejected modern, Christian (or post-Christian), Western civilization in favour of an authentic culture which they both derived from an imagined archaic Greek *paideia*.<sup>15</sup> Whereas Heidegger's guides were Nietzsche and German romantic poetry, Pound's were the theosophists G.R.S. Mead and Alan Upward, the Polish classicist, Thaddeus Zielinsky and other little-known and eccentric scholars. For both men, the authentic tradition was pre-Socratic and Aryan. Both were resolutely anti-Christian—and on similar grounds. For Heidegger, Christianity was a form of "onto-theology" (by which he meant a religion of transcendence as opposed to an immanentist or pantheist faith). For Pound Christianity represented an infection of "clean" Mediterranean erotic-ecstatic paganism by Semitic ascetic monotheism.

The following is an instance from *An Introduction to Metaphysics* of Heidegger's immanentist critique of Christianity:

It was in the Sophists and in Plato that appearance was declared to be mere appearance and thus degraded. At the same time Being, as *idea*, was exalted to a suprasensory realm. A chasm, *chorismos*, was created between the merely apparent essent here below and real being somewhere on high. In that chasm Christianity settled down, at the same time

reinterpreting the lower as the created and the higher as the creator. These refashioned weapons it turned against antiquity (as paganism) and so disfigured it. Nietzsche was right in saying that Christianity is Platonism for the people. (*IM* 106)

Pound's judgement is similar, though less philosophically rendered, and reflects his anti-Semitism. Insensitive to Olivia Agresti's Catholic faith, he opined in 1949:

The Church of Rome decayed, got steadily stupider *pari passu* as the jew books were put into circulation, and stupidities engrafted on the clean greek and roman ideas of the early Church. (May 1949)

Greek and Roman here stand for pagan as opposed to Christian. Unlike Heidegger, Pound assumed that the pagan sensibility survived in all ages in an underground or alternative culture. Occasionally, the underground culture surfaced—as with the Albigenses and the Templars. But normally, it persisted surreptitiously and esoterically in art.

Pound characterized this underground tradition, and discriminates it from Christianity in another letter of 1949:

J.C. [i.e. Jesus Christ] indubitably had a good chunk of the true tradition, BUT the yidd already had Leviticus XIX / so there is no use pretending those pious sentiments differentiate the Christer from the yidd /  
The bulk of jewish law is nothing but a wheeze, however, to jerk fines out of the populace for the benefit of the cohens and levis. Zielinsky has neatly shown that all the dogma worth a damn came from greek mysteries etc / everything that built the cathedrals.  
Yr friend Lubin notes this tother way on / i.e. that the Christers lugged in pagan elements. (Thank gawd fer that.)

Five years later, he repeats much the same sentiment (1954): “That ALL the clean ideas in Xtianity come via greece (earlier origin may be india) but at any rate NOTHING of the goddm kikes / {vid} Tertullian, Gibbon, the classic authors / slime always getting xtens / killed off. FACE it” (June 27, 1954).

Now these views of Pound and Heidegger do not conform to one another nor to Mussolini's Roman Imperialism or Hitler's Wagnerian Teutonism. Nonetheless, all of them look to an archaic past beyond the ancient roots of modern industrial capitalism for redemption, a posture they all share with Romanticism, Symbolism, Aestheticism, and some versions of the postmodern. Communism, Bolshevism, and other versions of the postmodern also reject modern industrial capitalism, but look to the future for redemption in revolution, in an apotheosis of technology, in cyberspace where there is no outside of language—or at least, of semiosis.

Pound and Heidegger also looked to the future for redemption, but the Fascist future of which they dreamed did not come to pass. Heidegger withdrew into a theory of art as "technology:"

Because the essence of technology is nothing technological, essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it.

Such a realm is art. but certainly only if reflection upon art for its part, does not shut its eyes to the constellation of truth concerning which we are *Questioning*.<sup>16</sup>

Pound had expressed a very similar view long before the debacle (in 1913):

The arts, literature, poesy, are a science, just as chemistry is a science. Their subject is man, mankind and the individual. ... The arts give us a great percentage of the lasting, an unassailable data regarding the nature of man, of immaterial man, of man considered as a thinking and sentient creature. They begin where the science of medicine leaves off or rather they overlap that science. The borders of the two arts overcross.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike Heidegger, Pound did not retreat from politics to poetry. On the contrary, he advanced from poetry to politics, nor did he retreat a single step during the thirteen years he spent in St. Elizabeth's. Instead, he maintained virtually unaltered the Fascist analysis of world history that he had adapted to his own particular metaphysics. Much as it goes against my inclination to find excuses for Pound, I cannot avoid the conclusion that his anti-Semitism arose primarily from his own metaphysics and metahistory rather than from Nazi racism. Pound would

almost certainly have been anti-Semitic if Hitler and Nazism had never existed

I have begun a story I cannot possibly finish here, but let me conclude by observing that Fascism, Nazism, and Marxism are all varieties of historicism, which is itself a variety of that reflexivity I discussed in my opening remarks. Reflexivity holds to the supposition that the world is determined by the ideas to which human beings adhere, and hence is determined by mind, or—if we are more metaphysical—by spirit. Historicism adds the supposition that events within the world are likewise determined by the ideas to which human beings adhere. Dialectical materialism, although historicist, is, of course, not idealistic. Marxism maintains that ideas are always ideological, that is, always a superstructure epiphenomenal of a material base made up of means of production and distribution and the institutionalization of their ownership. Fascism and modernism were more “metaphysical” or idealistic, and reversed the causality, postulating that a Duce, a Führer, or an artist-genius can bring about a change in consciousness of an entire nation by the force of his or her genius.

Pound certainly belongs to the Fascist side of this bifurcation. However, it is also the case that neo-Marxists, insofar as they are Gramscian, are also on the Fascist side, as are Foucauldians. Foucault’s theory of madness and of the role of “*formations discursives*” in determining cultures is equally reflexive and top-down. Indeed the Cold War, insofar as it was a war for the hearts and minds of the peoples of what we now call the Third World, was fought by the Reds essentially on these ideological grounds. The Communists endeavoured to win the hearts and minds of the people—and had considerable success. The West, paradoxically, for the most part bought third-world leaders and relied on the efficacy of police and military repression to maintain the base of material conditions we call capitalism in the hope that it would create a prosperity which would ultimately win the hearts and minds of the people. (It seems that this cynical strategy is winning.)

Pound’s analysis of the post war is Gramscian in that he believed that American popular democracy was maintained by propaganda, that is by the inculcation of false consciousness. It is easy to miss this aspect of Pound because it is always couched in terms of a Jewish conspiracy controlling that propaganda. But his theory of historical causation is unmistakably top-down. He wrote to ORA in 1954:

Does ANYone who gets injected with Marx or Hen. George  
EVER return to lucidity? Possibly those who drop Marx  
INSTANTLY when they meet something better. (February 24,  
1954)

In the same letter, he adds the obfuscating element of a Jewish conspiracy to this notion of intellectual infection:

The basic objection to communism is that it is from Moscow / originally hired by yr / beloved goddam kikes in N.Y. or elsewhere. Anyhow it can now be treated under heading FUORI i barbari / goddam hrusskys /. A fake, as bad as any other kikery / pretended to attack Leihkapital and attacked the homestead. ANY any attempt to deMuskvize wop commies shd / be based on that distinction.

This analysis led him to support the efforts of Senator Joseph McCarthy, whom he blesses in the same letter, and to ally himself with such unsavory characters as David Horton and John Kaspar.<sup>18</sup>

What are we to make of all of this? Certainly not that Pound's behaviour is excusable because he sincerely believed in the nonsense he spouted, or because he was not a genuine Fascist or Nazi, or because he was an artist and artists ought to be forgiven everything. The conclusion I draw is not a moral or judicial one, but one that I guess has to be called philosophical. It seems to me that Pound's political errors and moral failings arise from his belief that ideas determine events. If that is so, then the evils that befall humankind must be the consequence either of ignorance or of malice. If of ignorance, then surely everyone would recognize the true Poundian gospel once exposed to it and evil would disappear. Since that consequence manifestly did not come about, the only remaining explanation was malice, and malice needs an agent. In this respect, Pound was not so much out of step with the Cold War, for Cold Warriors applied much the same analysis to world events attributing all evil to the malice of the other side—to Commies or Capitalists. And, I am afraid, Postmodernism continues the tradition, applying the method exclusively to the realm of discourse, on the grounds that discourse exhausts the universe—that there is nothing outside of language.

## Notes

1. Of course, Eliot's sojourn in London turned out to be permanent. But he arrived in London in flight from Berlin at the outbreak of the first World War. When Eliot arrived in London, Pound had been there nearly five years and probably intended to stay. In the event, he left London in 1921 never to return as a resident.

2. I cannot document this claim—which is somewhat idiosyncratic—but Eliot's early experiments in comic verse, and *Sweeney Agonistes*, a music hall burlesque, attest to his efforts in this direction. The remote and rebarbative nature of high modernism effectively obscures their motivation to co-opt popular culture for their own high seriousness. However I think a case can be made from their own remarks for the claim that Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and Joyce all imagined that their art was designed to play the same role in a modern culture of urban dwellers that folk literature played in an archaic culture of nomads.

3. On the point of homophobia, we have the case of Bloomsbury. Bloomsbury was British, free-thinking, and gay. Its relations with the Yeats-Pound-Eliot-Joyce nexus was always contentious. Eliot alone was capable of bridging the gap. Eventually he crossed the line to Bloomsbury on the British front, but remained ambivalent (not to say paranoid) about the issue of sexual preference, and hostile on the issue of free-thinking.

Something of the same sort of inconsistency is found in Nazism. Ernst Rhöm and Himmler were openly homosexual, but the Nazi party was officially homophobic. Of course, Hitler had Rhöm assassinated. But Himmler never lost Hitler's support.

4. Perhaps the most thorough and least compromising of these is David H. Hirsch, *The Deconstruction of Literature: Criticism after Auschwitz*, Hanover: Brown UP, 1991.

5. An exception to this generalization is Filippo Marinetti and Futurism. However, it is an exception that perhaps proves the rule. Marinetti was ignored—though not suppressed—by Mussolini, and the Russian Futurists were ignored and then suppressed by the Bolsheviks.

6. Philosophically, the notion that the contents of mind are determinants not only of beliefs, but also of "truths" is known as "reflexivity." Reflexivity has been endemic in German philosophy at least since Dilthey and Schleiermacher—that is, since hermeneutics. A resolute reflexivity is the rock-bed of Rorty's neo-pragmatism. However, Nazi thinkers were invariably essentialists, believing that there was an objective world. Their involvement with reflexivity was on the lines of

Heidegger's in that only appropriate Dasein could receive the "self-revealing" of Sein. In other words, Jews, Slavs, Gypsies and other non-Germans could receive only distorted or degenerate "self-revealings."

7. Pound also fulminates against the imprecision and darkness of Hindu and Buddhist culture, but this hostility is a small and little-examined component of his culturmachia. Christianity, of course, is a hybrid of Greco-Roman and Hebrew culture and, hence, can be approved or denounced selectively.

8. But Wagner's widow, Cosima Wagner was an enthusiastic Nazi, and the Nazis were very enthusiastic about Wagnerian opera as was Nietzsche's sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche. Both of these women put the reputation of their famous relatives at the service of the Nazi party.

9. Olivia and Helen jointly wrote and published an account of that experience, over the pseudonym, Isabel Meredith, called *Girl Among the Anarchists* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1903). She also wrote a biography of David Lubin, *David Lubin, A Study in Practical Idealism* (Boston: Little & Brown, 1922).

10. All citations from unpublished letters of Ezra Pound are copyright the Estate of Ezra Pound.

11. Trans. Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens, with an introductory essay on the Mind of Adolf Hitler by H.R. Trevor-Roper. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Young, Inc., 1953.

12. Even though this prejudice was based more on a conspiracy theory of history than on simple racism, it is no less reprehensible for that. Pound focussed his hostility on Judaism—on its monotheism, and the absence of eros from its rites and beliefs. In his view Christianity shared these failings and added the vice of transcendence.

His remark to ORA on September 3, 1954: "a usurer is a spiritual kike whatever his blood count," also indicates that his anti-Semitism was not strictly racial. And, as all defenders of Pound insist, he was never hostile to Jews in person, and even had some Jewish friends, such as Jacob Epstein and Louis Zukofsky, and admired some Jewish thinkers and scholars—notably Alexander Del Mar, and (grudgingly) David Lubin.

However, such nice distinctions cannot be invoked to excuse Pound's failure to condemn Nazi genocidal policies toward Jews.

13. Herman Hesse and Luigi Villari are two whom Pound read with care and commented upon in letters to Olivia Agresti. The former was mentioned above. The latter wrote *Italian Foreign Policy under Mussolini* (Italian 1953. English, New York: The Devin-Adair Co., 1956. No translator credited.)



14. Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim, New Haven: Yale UP, 1959 (Lectures first delivered in 1935) p.37. It is not clear whether “today” means 1953 or 1935. It would seem odd to name America instead of France and England in 1935, so one must assume that this remark was revised in the 1953 version.

15. Heidegger’s singling out of technology is more characteristic of his post-war rhetoric than of his writing in the thirties and forties where he stresses the “onto-theology” of the Western tradition as the source of its error. Pound has little to say about technology, but he did identify his modernist movement with scientific and technological advances in his early years. For example, both he and Eliot thought the radio offered new paradigms for rhetorical organization. Indeed, Pound likened *The Cantos* to a radio play where one could recognize the speakers by their voices.

16. “The Question Concerning Technology” in *Basic Writings*, Ed. David Fallell Krell, New York: Harper & Row, 1977 p.317.

17. “The Serious Artist” in *The Selected Essays of Ezra Pound*, Ed. T. S. Eliot, London: Faber, 1960 p.42.

18. Kaspar and Horton founded the Square Dollar Series, a publication house created to reprint those works Pound thought would save the world by making the donative paideuma current. Horton was once arrested for inflammatory attacks on African-Americans and Jews. They published some of EP’s works and translations, and reprinted many of his favourite authors such as Del Mar and T.H. Benton.