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RESISTING APOLLO:
THE LEGACY OF EZRA POUND
IN LATE 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN POETRY

Abstract: While Ezra Pound is still widely repudiated in the U.S. for his wartime associations with Mussolini and his anti-Semitic statements, he is nonetheless recognized there and throughout the world as a groundbreaking modernist literary figure. Why this divided attitude? Of course, there is no dearth of interest in Pound inside and outside the U.S. Yet the most telling proof of his legacy is evident in his continuing influence on contemporary American poets. This essay offers an overview of Pound's deep yet varied impact on a broad range of later poets, especially among those at the turn of the twenty-first century, despite that these same poets tend to resist Pound as an influence and, often, do not to admit to any association with each other. While Pound's influence manifests itself in highly varied ways – for example, from the classical pose of Robert Pinsky to the ludic wordplay of Charles Bernstein, and from the untethered experimentation of Rachel Blau DuPlessis to the post-Imagist poetics of Marilyn Chin – the abiding characteristic that binds these and other American poets to Pound is their *poetics of resistance*, itself a trait intrinsic to American poetry from its beginnings. This essay considers Pound less for his political affinities than for his quintessentially *American* sensibility – revealed, as his diverse successors demonstrate, in the breadth of his innovations, his resistance to constraints on the imagination, and his fidelity to the word.

Keywords: Ezra Pound, modernist poetry, poetic influence, contemporary American poetry and poetics, Robert Pinsky, Charles Bernstein, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Marilyn Chin.

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СОПРОТИВЛЯЯСЬ АПОЛЛОНУ:
НАСЛЕДИЕ ЭЗРЫ ПАУНДА
В АМЕРИКАНСКОЙ ПОЭЗИИ КОНЦА XX ВЕКА

Аннотация: Несмотря на то, что Эзра Паунд до сих пор постоянно подвергается критике в США за его поддержку Муссолини и антисемитские высказывания во время Второй мировой войны, он является значительной фигурой литературного модернизма как у себя на родине, так и во всем мире. С чем связано такое двойственное отношение? Безусловно, фигура Паунда популярна в Америке и за ее пределами, и во многом об этом свидетельствует неослабевающий интерес к его творчеству среди современных американских поэтов. В статье рассматривается влияние, которое Паунд оказал на своих последователей, особенно на рубеже XX–XXI вв., при том, что сами поэты нередко отрицали эту преемственность и зачастую не признавали никакого сходства друг с другом. Многогранное и разнообразное влияние Паунда находит отражение как в классическом стиле Роберта Пински, так и в шуточной игре слов Чарльза Бернстина, как в смелом экспериментаторстве Рейчел Блау Дюплесси, так и в постимажистской поэтике Мэрилин Чин; неотъемлемой чертой, присущей и Паунду, и другим американским поэтам рассматриваемого периода, является *поэтика сопротивления*, свойственная всей американской поэзии от самых ее истоков. В фокусе данной статьи не столько политические взгляды Э. Паунда, сколько его истинно *американское мироощущение*, явленное, как это убедительно доказывают его многочисленные последователи, в широчайшем спектре инноваций, в борьбе за свободу воображения и верности поэтическому слову.

Ключевые слова: Эзра Паунд, поэзия модернизма, поэтическое влияние, современная американская поэзия и поэтика, Роберт Пински, Чарльз Бернстин, Рейчел Блау Дюплесси, Мэрилин Чин.

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The first part of my title derives from a line in Pound's craggy Canto 98 in *Thrones de Los Cantares* (1959):

"The body is inside". Thus Plotinus,
But Gemisto: "Are Gods by hilaritas";
and their speed in communication.
et in nebulas simiglianza,
καθ' ὁμοίωσιν Deorum
a fanned flame in their moving
must fight for law as for walls
– Herakleitos' parenthesis –
And that Leucothoe rose as an incense bush
– Orchamus, Babylon –
resisting Apollo.¹

After first invoking Plotinus (205–70), Greek author of *The Six Enneads*, who serves as the epic poet's guide much earlier in Canto 15, and whose intricate account of the soul's relationship to the body is a central focus in Cantos 98 and 99, Pound evokes another Neoplatonist philosopher, the fifteenth-century Byzantine Georgias Gemisto (1355–1452), a prominent member of the Eastern Orthodox Church entourage that traveled west in 1438 to Ferrara and Florence, Italy, in a failed effort to reunite the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches (as presented in Canto 23). Later known as Plethon, Gemisto is linked here by Pound to Plotinus in the latter's view of the human soul as enwrapping the body, rather than as being surrounded by it, as well as in Plotinus's notion of "hilaritas," variously defined as the joy of the gods but also as the gods' "speed in communication / et in nebulas simiglianza," that is, the gods' ability "to communicate more rapidly than mortal men who have to engage in conversation or writing."² As such, the gods can be imagined by "their likeness in clouds"³ or "as a fanned flame in their moving," in Pound's allusion to the pre-Socratic concept of Heraclitus (ca. 500 BCE) that the most prominent of the four basic elements (the "Logos") is fire, which dwells in a moving tension of opposite forces.

¹ Pound, Ezra. *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. New York: New Directions, 1996: 705.

² Liebrechts, P. *Ezra Pound and Neoplatonism*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004: 339.

³ Terrell, C.F. *A Companion to The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. One Volume. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980: 628. Terrell translates the Greek phrase, "*καθ' ὁμοίωσιν*," as "down in the manner" and the Latin, "Deorum," as "of the Gods."

Using the modernist, collage-like method found throughout *The Cantos*, Pound then introduces the figure of the young maiden, Leucothoe, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book IV – not to be confused with the character of Leucothea (almost identically spelled), the daughter of Cadmus, whom Pound depicts in Cantos 95 and 98 as the young woman in Book V of the *Odyssey* who, when transformed into a seagull, guides the drifting Odysseus to safety on his raft. Rather than Homer's character, in Ovid's story, Leucothoe unwittingly captivates the attention of Apollo, god of the sun, who “should gaze on all, impartially” but has “eyes but for the virgin.”⁴ Becoming obsessed with her, Apollo neglects his daily duties until he gains secret access to her room and overwhelms her with his radiance. When Leucothoe's friend Clytie, who is smitten with Apollo, learns what has happened, out of envy she rushes to tell Leucothoe's father, Orchamus of Babylon, of his daughter's lost virginity. In his rage, despite “his daughter's pleas,/ her hands uplifted to the Sun in prayer/ and her own explanation of events,” namely her efforts to resist Apollo's advances, the angry Orchamus has Leucothoe buried alive, “then heaps up/ an enormous mound of sand upon her grave.”⁵ In his grief over losing her, Apollo then pours light and heat on her grave to melt the sand, but he cannot bring her back to life, so “he sprinkles her body and the site around it/ with fragrant nectar,” and Leucothoe dissolves into incense so that “divine aromas” rise from her grave.

Like Ovid's translators, readers can debate whether Leucothoe earnestly resists Apollo's advances, or as translator Charles Martin renders it, “she gives into him without complaint.”⁶ What I want to suggest here – more as a consideration than as an argument – is that, despite the broadly expressed resistance to Pound's influence on contemporary American poetry, there prevails an allegiance to his legacy evident in such a diverse range of American poets that it is nothing short of uncanny. While it remains true, even a half century after his death, that Pound is still widely repudiated in the U.S. for his wartime associations with Mussolini's Fascism and his well-publicized anti-Semitic statements, he is equally acknowledged, in the U.S. and throughout the world, as a prominent (if not the *most* prominent) groundbreaking literary figure among the modernists. Why this divided attitude? The fact that the Italian authorities paid Pound for his con-

⁴ Ovid. *Metamorphosis*, transl. Charles Martin. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004: 131.

⁵ *Ibid.*: 133.

⁶ *Ibid.*

troversial radio broadcasts made in Rome during World War II (which the U.S. government argued provided comfort for the enemy during war time, defining them as treasonable) certainly seemed to compromise Pound's status as an American patriot. Nevertheless, he consistently maintains in those broadcasts that he is simply exercising his right to freedom of expression as an American citizen, without any constraint or coercion on the part of the Fascist regime.

Another, more residual reason, among both academic and ordinary readers, to condemn or devalue Pound's literary contribution to American culture may be the complexity and obscurity of his poetry itself, especially *The Cantos*. Rejecting him on political grounds – or diagnosing his fascist inclinations as those of a mad man – allows readers to disregard his art altogether. As Richard Parker explains it in his reading of Elizabeth Bishop's 1950 poem, "Visits to St. Elizabeths," "This position does not just state that Pound's political beliefs were wrong, but insists his whole method of political understanding and communication – his entire output as a political poet, and, thus, *The Cantos* – can be dismissed as an aberration, something both mad and/or bad and separate from Pound's formal innovations."⁷ Of course, despite this widespread dismissal, there proliferates an ever-growing number of critical studies on Pound inside and outside the U.S. On the British side, for instance, after considering the reaction to Pound among the mid-century American poets such as Charles Olson and Allen Ginsberg, Parker makes a case for Pound's "most useful" work for contemporary British poets to be "in the fields of political writing, historiography and translation."⁸ Yet what's more telling in the United States than the plethora of Pound scholarship or his politics, in terms of his influence, is how his legacy can be found in a diverse range of contemporary American poets (together with those influenced by his revolutionary approaches to criticism and translation). Even as the poets justly criticize Pound's controversial anti-Semitic comments – most of which are found in letters, essays on economics, and documents other than his poetry – the powerful attraction of his creative thinking and practice, like Apollo's power over Leucothoe and Clytie, keeps poets rising through the sand and turning toward him, in their efforts to find themselves as poets.

⁷ Parker, Richard. "'Here's Your Fucking Light Shithead': Ezra Pound and Contemporary British Poetry." *News from Afar: Ezra Pound and Some Contemporary British Poetries*, ed. Richard Parker. Bristol, UK: Shearsman Books, 2014: 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*: 19.

Pound's deep, sustained, yet varied influence on later American poets at the turn of the twentieth century into the twenty-first is remarkable, including among those who may emphatically qualify their connections to him, as well as those who often will not admit to any association with each other, either. While his influence manifests itself in very different ways – from the classical pose of Robert Pinsky to the ludic wordplay of Charles Bernstein, from the Vorticist tirades of Amiri Baraka to the allusive understatement of Robert Hass, and from the untethered experimentation of Rachel Blau DuPlessis to the Imagist poetics of Marilyn Chin – one abiding quality that binds these and other American poets in Pound's wake, I think, is their spirit of *resistance*, a characteristic intrinsic to American poetry from its beginnings. While I can only begin to speculate on Pound's eventual place in the coming century, the palpable footprints of his poetics in these (and scores of other) important poets' work leave a remarkable record of his artistic achievement, if nothing else: The evidence of his thinking in their poetry strongly suggests that, over time, Pound may be read less for his twentieth-century political views and his sheer difficulty than for his quintessentially *American* sensibility – revealed, as his successors demonstrate in their own work, in the diversity of his art and his own dogged resistance to constraints on the imagination, but most significantly, in his fidelity to the word.

My first example (of only four to be discussed here) involves the work of Robert Pinsky (b. 1942), the classically educated formalist (though not associated with the American “New Formalist” poets), translator of Dante and other poets, and Poet Laureate of the United States from 1997 to 2000.⁹ Although a poetry devoted to a more generally accessible, more “discursive” (to use a term Pinsky himself uses¹⁰) style than that of Pound's more cryptic poetry, nonetheless Pinsky's work bears Pound's stamp throughout, and he readily admits to admiring Pound's accomplishment. Lowell Bowditch, for instance, specifically links Pinsky to Pound through their both being “Horatian” poets, that is, not only *in their pose* as cultural, often ironic, meditative

⁹ “More about Robert Pinsky.” Library of Congress (United States of America). Online at https://www.loc.gov/poetry/more_pinsky.html

¹⁰ Pinsky, Robert. *The Situation of Poetry*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976: 134–6. For instance, Pinsky defines “the discursive aspect of poetry” as not “a single kind of writing” but “a quality which may appear in a surprisingly wide range of styles”; in considering examples, he describes the style as “[n]ot epic bulk, but inclusiveness, a wish to handle many of the mind's steps and many of its interesting travels.” *Ibid.*: 134–5.

commentators on their respective age (golden for Pound as a modernist, silver for Pinsky as postmodernist, as Pinsky himself might phrase it), but as *poet-critics*, who are equally engaged in criticizing the poetry and the role of poetry in their eras. As Bowditch argues, “[B]oth Pound and Pinsky engage Horace from a similar conviction of the importance of literary history and the models it provides,” but, he contends, in contrasting the stylistic contrast between Pound’s “ideogrammic” technique as a poet and Pinsky’s more discursive style, “Pound takes up the lyric Horace as a model of superior craftsmanship, while Pinsky embraces the epistolary Horace in order to explore ideas about cultural and national identity.”¹¹ As Bowditch demonstrates, although both poets employ classical references and allusions throughout their verse, Horace’s *Odes* serve as Pound’s model, whereas Pinsky draws more on the Roman poet’s *Epistles*.¹² Yet although Pinsky may draw more overtly on Horace for his poetics, especially in his book-length poem, *An Explanation of America*, his more immediate modern influence is Pound, suggests Bowditch, who writes, “Pound’s insistence on translation as a means of finding one’s own voice... surely influences the didactic and ethical posture which Pinsky discovers through Horace.”¹³

It is in his role as a poet-critic in a 1998 interview, in fact, where Pinsky remarks on Pound in a quite different manner than he does in his earlier critical book, *The Situation of Poetry*. To his interviewer, J.M. Spalding, who, in referring not only to Pound but to T.S. Eliot and (strangely) Jack Kerouac, asks, “[C]an one *truly* like the poetry and not the poet?” Pinsky replies with another question, “Wouldn’t Pound be a greater writer if he had

¹¹ Bowditch, Lowell. “The Horatian Poetics of Ezra Pound and Robert Pinsky.” *The Classical World* 89:6 (1996): 454.

¹² *Ibid.*: 455–456. Elsewhere Bowditch concludes: “The technical and rhetorical devices of hyperbaton and *parataxis* that Pound admired in Horace eventually led, through Imagism, to a poem [i.e. *The Cantos*] that celebrated the didactic potential of the cultural past [where] ... the suggestiveness of a fragment from a work of the past, displaced to another context, creates a kind of ‘historical hyperbaton’: the phrase or ‘bit’ of the original work bringing all its connotations into play with the new context. Pinsky, in turn, while rejecting the specific aesthetic of Imagism and its later permutations, is also committed to keeping alive our connection with the past, and learning from the models it provides. His translation of the epistle to Quinctius reflects an inheritance from Pound as well as from Horace: Pound’s insistence on translation as a means of finding one’s own voice ... surely influences the didactic and ethical posture which Pinsky discovers through Horace in ‘An Explanation of America.’ And the Horatian biographical image in Pinsky’s poem in many ways serves the same [didactic] purpose as the literary fragment in Pound’s aesthetic.” [*Ibid.*: 477.]

¹³ *Ibid.*

attained something more of [James] Joyce's complex humanism?"¹⁴ Despite its implications about the difference in their visions, this is an odd question, especially given the effort Pound made to secure not only the publication and distribution of Joyce's *Ulysses*, but to help sustain the Irish writer during and after the writing of that book, such that Joyce sent his own copy of the galleys, inscribed, with a dedication to Pound. Later, in a short essay (or blog) for *Slate* journal mostly given over to praise for a sixteenth-century Scottish love poem by Mark Alexander Boyd (1562–1601), as well as for Pound's formidable re-discovery and translations of Dante's mentor, Guido Cavalcanti (1255–1300), Pinsky nevertheless decides to characterize "Pound as critic" as "a charming, persuasive bully, a great ear and a defective mind. Does the reckless confidence that makes *ABC of Reading* so valuable have the same roots as the actual diagnosis of insanity – literally and not as a literary trope for love – that saved Pound from being executed for treason?"¹⁵

When viewed from a distance of several years, Pinsky's dramatic language here strikes me, in this context, as gratuitously extreme, even for discussing Pound's politics, as the latter poet acquiesces to popular antagonism toward Pound: "Unintelligible or repulsive in large ways," Pinsky remarks, "Pound did have the gift of the ear," a gift Pinsky finds almost unimaginable, yet still worth imitating, as found in Pound's translations of Cavalcanti's Sonnets, which Pinsky calls "marvels of grace," with a musicality, restraint and fervor he also identifies in Boyd's Scottish sonnet. Indeed, a comparable, deliberately strained, gracefully restrained, yet finally engaging lyricism also comes through in Pinsky's own verse, often, especially when he curbs his predominantly "discursive" style for the *jouissance* of a poem such as "Song," which begins:

Air on instrument of the tongue,
The tongue an instrument
Of the body. The body
An instrument of spirit,
The spirit a being of the air.¹⁶

¹⁴ Spalding, J.M. "Interview with Robert Pinsky." *Cortland Review* (March 1998). Online at <http://www.cortlandreview.com/features/98/pinsky.php>

¹⁵ Pinsky, Robert. "Crazy in Love: For Valentine's Day, a Poem Ezra Pound Called 'The Most Beautiful Sonnet in the Language'." *Slate Online* (14 February 2012). Online at http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/classic_poems/2012/02/a_valentine_s_day_poem_by_mark_alexander_boyd_that_captures_the_insanity_of_love_.html

¹⁶ Pinsky, Robert. *Jersey Rain*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000: 37.

Pinsky's second and third stanzas in this poem then introduce, respectively, a figure for "Song [as] a microcosm, a containment / Like the fresh hotel room, ready / for each new visitor to inherit" and a song "In the Cornell box" to signify how art can elevate thought and demonstrate an authority found more in a poem's music than in its words, as that music shapes its mood. With "Ephemera as its element," the poet concludes, a graceful "song," like a "preserved bird" in a Cornell box, is paradoxically "a study / In spontaneous elegy" and the "parrot" signifies "Art mortal in its cornered sphere." The accumulated layers of metaphorical figures in this poem, its openly authoritative pronouncement of what art is, and its elaborately staged yet winning formality and rhythm (almost dance-like) all bespeak Pinsky's affinity for Pound's transformative music, found not only in his early poems, but in his late *Drafts & Fragments*.

Born eight years later than Pinsky, after World War II, Charles Bernstein (b. 1950), though as a Jew he might have reason to do so, strikes a less openly hostile position against Pound's anti-Semitic statements and fascist associations than Pinsky does. As Pinsky is a leading formalist, Bernstein is the leading voice and most prominent public figure of the avant-garde "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" school of American poetry that still, nearly forty years after breaking into American letters, dominates the nation's alternative poetics, even if no longer as formidable an antagonist to the "mainstream" of American poetry as it once was. In a glimpse, Bernstein emulates Pound as a literary figure in at least three ways: (a) as a relentless, outspoken proponent of the vibrant, often avant-garde poetics he openly espouses, (b) as an internationalist in the broad scope of both his work and his influence, and (c) as an extraordinarily active collaborator with other poets and artists, as Pound was. Beyond these prominently Poundian traits, evident in Bernstein's letters (email) and his multiple publishing ventures, in his poems he discovers in – and gleans from – Pound a bold hybridity of styles and voices, as ready as Pound is in his work to combine idioms, mix and/or undermine formal patterns, and shift voices seamlessly from direct speech to idiosyncratic verbal designs, often giving himself over to stylized, calisthenic mannerisms as much to exercise the sheer reaches of language as to enact a revolutionary poetics.

To be sure, like Pinsky, Bernstein readily ridicules Pound for his misguided politics and political blunders. But his own engagement in aesthetics leads him to critique Pound more for the impact of his social doctrine on his poetry than for his work's historical or social repercussions. In his essay,

“Pounding Fascism,” first delivered as an address in 1984, Bernstein argues that “perhaps the greatest danger in an account of Pound’s fascism is not that he will be given an unearned pardon by literary history but that his guilt is bracketed off from our own. For Pound’s fascism is all too easily censured, as by slap on hand, while fascist ideas that infect his poetry and poetics seep unnamed into the orthodox cultural theory and criticism of society.”¹⁷ What concerns Bernstein in this essay is that, far from impeding Pound’s stature among American poets, his fascist position, almost paradoxically, has been “a major factor” in the *canonization* of his poetry, to the extent that the “righteously Eurocentric and imperiously authoritative undercurrent” of Pound’s own fascist pronouncements and writings have demanded attention to (and even the affirmation of) the “formal innovations” of his poetry that Bernstein considers otherwise radically at odds with his fascism, as well as with the mainstream of the poetic tradition.¹⁸ What preserves *The Cantos* – a poem which Bernstein calls “a text filled with magnificent gleanings and indulgent fraudulences” that render it “not the mastertext of modernism but the wreck of Enlightenment rationalism”¹⁹ – is how the epic’s “coherence is of a kind totally different than Pound desired or could – in his most rigid moments – accept.”²⁰ In other words, Bernstein himself remains deeply engaged in the *method* of *The Cantos*, not as separate from Pound’s politics but as complicit with, yet unwittingly contradictory to, them.

In a 1996 “conversation” on stage with poets at the University of Pittsburgh, for instance, Bernstein presses the question of how poets in the late twentieth century do or do not contribute to their “traditional” role of “forming national identity,” especially in a country such as the U.S. with its multicultural populations and communities. Here Bernstein discusses the wide variety of what he calls “different aesthetic persuasions” to “general public issues” about “imaginative freedom, self-expression, group identity, community identity, national identity, or a larger international identity.” In this ideological context, Pound’s well-known mixture of an internationalist vision and a fascist advocacy inevitably comes to mind: “[V]alues such as secession, separateness, distinction, or autonomy, which I take to be foundational poetic values as much as political values,” argues Bernstein,

¹⁷ Bernstein, Charles. *A Poetics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992: 121.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*: 121–2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*: 126.

²⁰ *Ibid.*: 122.

can ground themselves in an idea of an America whose unity is not based on singleness nor on the discrete divisions of identity or race or language. There are plenty of people who have other ideas of, and for, America. Pound's accusation against the Jew can sound like aesthetic malfeasance: a rootlessness and fragmentation that is fundamentally unsettling. I try to turn that logic around when I say what I'm standing for *is* [my italics – J.G.] unsettling. We need to be unsettling so that we can be resettled. The differences of which we speak, which we want to articulate in our work, are not authentic. Let's not go down that path. Our identities are neither incontrovertible nor expendable, they're . . . expandable.²¹

Rather than express consternation at Pound's contradictory political ideas or seek a rationale behind them, Bernstein attempts to turn the problem inside out, in order to rescue Pound's aesthetics for the purview of art, despite its misguided results, often, in Pound's political statements. In his short essay, "Introduction to Ezra Pound," composed for an anthology on modern poetry for a general audience, Bernstein reiterates this perspective succinctly, when he concludes, somewhat sanguinely, "Pound's troubling politics are interwoven, throughout his work, with his poetics and aesthetics, making for a useful, albeit sometimes distasteful, study of the unavoidable relation of poetry to politics. Pound's work reflects, like much of the century in which he wrote, both the best and worst of Western civilization."²²

Focusing more on Pound's aesthetics, then, in this piece, Bernstein discusses how he sustains his voice by way of his "persona poems" – alluding to Pound's selected poems in *Personae* (1926) which he meant to stand as his enduring early works, in each of which, according to Bernstein, "a made-up character with whom Pound did not completely identify" grants the poet the opportunity "to be satiric, even sarcastic, not only about the subject of the poems [such as war, courtship, historical or political chicaneries, and so on] but about their speaker, although he sometimes appears to share the sentiments of the poem's persona, making for an interesting ambiguity."²³ In other words, when framed in dramatic monologues, Pound's speakers draw

²¹ Bernstein, Charles. "On Poetry, Language, and Teaching: A Conversation with Charles Bernstein." *boundary 2* 23:3 (Autumn 1996): 60–61.

²² Bernstein, Charles. "Introduction to Ezra Pound." *Poetry Speaks*, eds. E. Paschen, R.P. Mosby. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2001. Online at <http://writing.upenn.edu/epc/authors/bernstein/essays/pound.html>.

²³ *Ibid.*

attention to themselves *as* speakers, thereby suspending their views from being synonymous with Pound's.

Besides Pound's ready adoption of diverse voices, a technique Bernstein also employs in his own poems – although usually not as specific historical characters, *per se*, but as a *posed* general voice, often satiric – Bernstein also embraces Pound's spirit of experimentation, as well as his predecessor's explicit advocacy for the *music* of poetry as itself a source of meaning. Concerning experimentation, if Pound in his application of style epitomizes modernist predilections even more than Joyce, Proust, or Stein do, then Bernstein does so for postmodern poetry. For instance, consider the features of his short poem, "Autonomy Is Jeopardy" (1995), especially in contrast to Pinsky's "Song":

I hate artifice. All these contraptions so many barriers
 against what otherwise can't
 be contested, so much seeming
 sameness in a jello of
 squirms. Poetry scares me. I
 mean its virtual (or ventriloquized)
 anonymity – no protection, no
 bulwark to accompany its pervasive
 purposivelessness, its accretive
 acceleration into what may or
 may not swell. Eyes demand
 counting, the nowhere seen everywhere
 behaved voicelessness everyone is clawing
 to get a piece of. Shudder
 all you want it won't
 make it come any faster
 last any longer: the pump
 that cannot be dumped.²⁴

Although a lyric piece, this poem recalls Bernstein's engaging book-length, deconstructionist metapoem, *Artifice of Absorption* (1992), where his speaker "talks" his way for sixty-five pages (followed by 53 detailed endnotes) through a complex self-portrait of the poet as literary theorist, in a

²⁴ Bernstein, Charles. *Republics of Reality, 1975–1995*. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 2000: 307.

poem that begins, auspiciously, “The reason it is difficult to talk about / the meaning of a poem – in a way that doesn’t seem / frustratingly superficial or partial – is that by / designating a text a poem, one suggests that its / meanings are to be located in some ‘complex’ be- / yond an addition of devices & subject matters.”²⁵ In “Autonomy Is Jeopardy,” a much shorter poem, he nonetheless manages to include a liberal set of flat statements (“*I hate artifice*,” “Poetry scares me,” “Shudder/ all you want it won’t/ make it come any faster”) and juxtaposes these against an almost slow, latinate multisyllabic semantics of intellection (“no protection, no – no protection, no/ bulwark to accompany its pervasive/ purposelessness, its accretive/ acceleration into what may or/ may not swell”). Indeed, in this poem, style is all: What coheres coheres not according to an identifiable subject nor even according to a subject-position, but by the sheer virtuosity of the poet’s voice alone. Although Pound’s experimentation in *The Cantos* often takes a much different turn, working through the juxtaposition of images, phrases, or languages, an unpredictable diction, and/or a panoply of sounds, Bernstein similarly eschews ordinary or affective speech to foreground the language itself *as* the poem, as in the sentence, “Eyes demand / counting, the nowhere seen everywhere / behaved voicelessness everyone is clawing / to get a piece of.” The poem practically coerces the reader into an interpretive position, as Pound’s poetry does, so it is not to be read just for its random association of terms and sounds. But also as Pound’s poetry does, Bernstein’s poem skirts any expression easily associated with a particular ideology.

Whereas Pinsky, almost in spite of himself as a social critic, confesses almost apologetically to being taken in by Pound’s alluring music, Bernstein celebrates Pound’s musicality and admires the humor and often ironic pose of *The Cantos* that help to sustain its crags and crannies as much as to create ambiguity. If Pinsky is drawn to Pound’s version of Horace, Bernstein is drawn to Pound’s Sextus Propertius. Yet what is especially striking is that, so far as I know, to date neither Pinsky nor Bernstein have yet acknowledged each other as prominent contemporaries.

Such is not the case, however, for Bernstein and Rachel Blau DuPlessis (b. 1941), whose experimentation in her poetry goes considerably beyond Bernstein’s (and that is saying something). Yet (to my surprise) DuPlessis’s work is conspicuously absent from editor Paul Hoover’s influential showcase

²⁵ Bernstein, Charles. *Artifice of Absorption*. Philadelphia, PA: Singing Horse Press/Paper Air, 1987: 6. This poem is reprinted in Bernstein, Charles. *A Poetics*: 9–89.

for many of the LANGUAGE poets, *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology* (1994; Second Edition, 2013). Regardless, what DuPlessis brings to bear on Pound's legacy – in more than an overt or superficial manner, as is often found everywhere – is a severe yet investigative feminist critique, not as a *political* criticism per se but as a *literary* critique. Speaking with Andy Fitch about her critical book, *Purple Passages: Pound, Eliot, Zukofsky, Olson, Creeley, and the Ends of Patriarchal Poetry* (University of Iowa Press, 2012), DuPlessis defines what she calls “patriarchal” in poetry in relation to “some poets’ subjectivity.” In particular, what concerns her are those male poets who “often possess the social capacity to shift among a variety of gender stances, all under a general rubric of maleness.” But, she adds, “as soon as a woman reaches for male subject-positions, she is often slapped down.”²⁶ In other words, “male figures have the capacity to range and appropriate [in basically “imperial” fashion] many more subject-positions including those that contradict each other” than women are permitted to adopt by critics. While male poets, such as Pound and Louis Zukofsky, who “struggle to retain such possibilities” as multiple subject-positions are revered for their range and inclusivity, DuPlessis makes a case for the very scope of their poetry, finally, as “a problematic form of dominance and exclusion”: Inclusion as exclusion. Yet rather than just dismiss Pound's and Zukofsky's multiplicitous voices, DuPlessis admits to adapting “an ambivalent approach to [their] patriarchy – noting both its oppressive and liberatory capacities.”

In writing about Pound's relationship with T.S. Eliot, as well as his editing of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, for instance, DuPlessis documents various instances of both Pound's and Eliot's overtly “patriarchal” manner “imperial[ly] [to claim] the feminine, the effeminate, and its own sex-gender materials” while simultaneously attempting “to narrow and obliterate female claims on similar and parallel materials,” as in the poetry of Mina Loy and Gertrude Stein; “this is precisely the mode of patriarchal poetry,” DuPlessis concludes.²⁷ On the other hand, in reading Eliot's “pre-‘Waste Land’ work and what she describes as his “depictions of female figures [that] often reveal hostility, shock, distaste, and a mordant masochism at their sexual energy and emotional power,” DuPlessis interprets Pound's considerable cutting and revising of *The Waste Land* itself as “tend[ing] to save Eliot

²⁶ Fitch, Andy. “Rachel Blau DuPlessis with Andy Fitch.” *The Conversant* (9 Nov. 2012). Transcribed by M. Spotts. Online at <http://theconversant.org/?p=2948>.

²⁷ Blau DuPlessis, Rachel. *Purple Passages: Pound Eliot, Zukofsky, Olson, Creeley, and the Ends of Patriarchal Poetry*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2012: 44–45.

from his own gendered stereotypes and rigidities” such that “the female characters now left in ‘The Waste Land’ have shadows and dimensionality.”²⁸ Similarly, taking her lead from critic Peter Nicholls’s comparison of the shared sensibility of Mina Loy’s poem, “The Effectual Marriage,” and Pound’s “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley,” DuPlessis argues that “Pound’s edited presentation of Loy’s work would then be a covert way of removing certain original striking features from her poem and thus assigning himself priority for the invention of split-persona tactics, seriality, multiple points of view, double endings, and the writing into the poem of a simulacrum of the poet.”²⁹ In other words, as a critic and modernist innovator, Pound tends to dismiss women’s contributions, yet, DuPlessis contends, “Pound often attempts to have things both ways, to come out on the winning side by placing a number of bets, and thereby to stay as current and forward-looking as he could.”³⁰ This way, rather than patently dismiss Pound for his patriarchal prejudices and (sometimes strident) anti-feminist statements that in moments approach the dramatic extremism of his anti-Semitic statements, DuPlessis recognizes the contradictions evident both in his critical declarations and (more poignantly) in his practice as a poet. As she argues in her essay, “Preponding Modernist Maleness: How Pound Managed a Muse,” “Pound uses poetic convention to protect himself from historical shifts round gender” not by polarizing the gender debate but by forging “from intricate cross- and intra-gendered power interactions that include among them friendship, mentoring, misogyny, sex-radical thinking, male potency, sexual hopes and fantasies, and male panic,” all of which factor into any poet’s poetics, regardless of gender identity.³¹

Among U.S. poets of the last fifty years, in fact, few can be said to match or even approach Pound in their sustained commitment to a “poem containing history” or, as Pound called *The Cantos* upon embarking on it, “a cryselephantine poem of immeasurable length which will occupy me for the next four decades unless it becomes a bore.”³² But DuPlessis is one of those poets. Her epic work, *Drafts*, now over three decades in the making and con-

²⁸ Ibid.: 49–50.

²⁹ Ibid.: 40.

³⁰ Ibid.: 44.

³¹ Blau DuPlessis, Rachel. *Blue Studios: Poetry and Its Cultural Work*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2006: 136.

³² “Ezra Pound, Letter to Milton Bronner, 21 September 1915.” Quoted in Moody, A. David. *Ezra Pound: Poet, A Portrait of the Man and His Work*: in 3 vols. Vol. I: *The Young Genius, 1885–1920*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007: 306.

sisting of 114 Drafts gathered into some eight volumes, clearly reflects the reach of *The Cantos* and Pound's dogged devotion to solving the dilemma of the long poetic form, as well as to tracing the record of a single, complex mind. As a brief example, if we glimpse just the start of Draft # 1: It, dated "May 1986–January 1987," begins:

N.

N.



and something spinning in the bushes	The past
	dismembered sweetest
dizzy chunk of song	
	one possible: there is a
in another	strange erosion and
dready fast flash	all the sugar is reconstituted:
	sunlight
silver backed	as 'stem'; sugar as dirt.
light this	
governed being: it? that? ³³	

Here already DuPlessis invokes several signature marks from *The Cantos*, including Pound's frequent use of initials (as in Cantos 14-15), his famous opening of Canto I *in media res* with the word "And" ("And then went down to the ship, set keel to breakers"³⁴ [C. I:1]), and a reference to the past, which comprises most of *The Cantos* as a "poem containing history." DuPlessis further on also introduces imagery of light, with what might almost be called a Poundian "ideogrammic" series of epithets: "dready fast flash all the sugar is reconstituted:/ sunlight/ silver backed as 'stem'; sugar as dirt./ light this/ governed being: it? that?" The phrase, "dready fast flash," recalls Pound's phrase in Canto 92, "a flash then agony then a flash"³⁵; "sunlight/silver backed" might link readily to "*e lo soleill plovil*" ("the light that rains")

³³ Blau DuPlessis, Rachel. *Tabula Rasa*. Elmwood, CT: Potes & Poets Press, 1987: 86.

³⁴ Pound, Ezra. *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*: 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*: 640.

in Canto 4³⁶; “this/ governed being” may invoke a number of phrases such as lines that Pound transmutes from Hesiod on Canto 49; and so on.

Of course, DuPlessis is not overt in her homage, if *Drafts* can be considered as a kind of homage, nor does she settle into imitation, as she interjects playful phrasing (“pwee wee/ half/ tones/ have tune’s/ heft”³⁷, more or less avoids deliberate allusions in the convention of Pound and Eliot in *The Waste Land*, at least in this first collection of *Drafts*, and perhaps most tellingly, explores, exploits, and exhorts a conditional indeterminacy, rather than looks to make the poem “cohere,” as Pound makes a considerable effort to do³⁸: varying from *The Cantos*, DuPlessis’s poem is less fragmented or layered as a series of juxtaposed images or passages than it is discontinuous, aleatory, and even incidental in its progress. And if she is taking a “subject-position” here (to invoke the feminist term), it is almost a disembodied one, rather than a position informed by a sequence of appropriated, potentially recognizable voices reflecting “dominance and exclusion” on the part of the epic poet. Furthermore, throughout Draft #1, DuPlessis deliberately ruptures gender identity (“one day lose him her/ One day lose them”³⁹ [87]), and (ironically, if not paradoxically, in the manner of Gertrude Stein more than of Pound) she deconstructs the making of the poem itself as part of the poem’s making:

There’s no way to read it?
One point is to achieve a social momentum of switched
referents and (merry coral white clover
ding ding ding) commentary in which what he (you)
says or does must be read differently from what she
does or says whether he, you does it to her or them to
it (of whom?) she to it feels different (nights of Holly-
wood fascism) in an unsettling but not articulate way.⁴⁰

Like Pinsky and Bernstein, DuPlessis works directly with, through, and against Pound to cultivate her own poetics. As Paul Jaussen has observed, “DuPlessis fully engages with the ‘Pound tradition’ of long poetry by way of critical resistance, actively revising, countering, and extending the

³⁶ Ibid.: 15.

³⁷ Blau DuPlessis, Rachel. *Tabula Rasa*: 86.

³⁸ Pound, Ezra. *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*: 816–817.

³⁹ Blau DuPlessis, Rachel. *Tabula Rasa*: 87.

⁴⁰ Ibid.: 92.

experimental practices of modernism and its accompanying ideologies.”⁴¹ Indeed, even more than Pinsky and Bernstein, DuPlessis acknowledges the significance of Pound’s impact on her work, as well as on the tenor of a great deal of other twentieth century poetry, as she also works toward reconstructing the aesthetics of his impact toward a more inclusive vision, one that even Pound could not be expected to have anticipated.

Like DuPlessis, Marilyn Chin (b. 1956), rather than repudiating Pound or denying his influence, also acknowledges but then *revises* Pound’s work, in order to lay claim to her own poetics as an Asian-American woman poet.⁴² In this case, as a post-Confessional poet in the wake of poets such as Robert Lowell and Adrienne Rich, rather than a LANGUAGE poet like Bernstein and DuPlessis, Chin confronts Pound not so much from a feminist perspective but from considering his writing on and translations from classical Chinese – in particular, his revolutionary presentation of Ernest Fenollosa’s *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*. As Irene C. Hsiao has noted, despite that Asian American writers such as Chin are themselves conversant, even immersed, in their own *inherited* sense of the sound and dimensions of classical Chinese, the modernists’ (especially Pound’s) readings of Asian (especially Chinese) literature have helped shape contemporary Asian American poetry itself: Citing Josephine Nee-Han Park, Hsiao writes, “American modernist orientalism complicates the work of Asian American poets”⁴³ mainly because “[t]he ideogram has become the touchstone that reveals those that peruse it by their allegiances to poetics and the realities of the Chinese language. Stylized, ornate, poised temptingly on the edge of obscurity and legibility, hinting at the primordial, to those accustomed to the phonetic, which subdivides and encodes the aural, the Chinese ideogram invites the fantasy of a purely visual language that respects the wholeness of and retains a material connection to the thing itself.”⁴⁴ Even though Fenollosa’s etymological

⁴¹ Jaussen, Paul. “The Poetics of Midrash in Rachel Blau DuPlessis’s *Drafts*.” *Contemporary Literature* 53:1 (2012): 115.

⁴² Turner, Anastasia. “An Interview with Marilyn Chin.” *American Book Review* 35:3 (Mar/Apr 2014): 31. Online at http://americanbookreview.org/chin_int.asp

⁴³ Hsiao, Irene C. “Broken Chord: Sounding Out the Ideogram in Marilyn Chin’s *Rhapsody in Plain Yellow*.” *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 37: 3 (Fall 2012): 195.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*: 196. Hsiao in part bases this assertion on the case made by Haun Saussy. See Fenollosa, Ernest, Pound, Ezra. *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, eds. H. Saussy, J. Stalling, L. Klein. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008: 2.

theory that classical Chinese poetry “speaking at once with the vividness of painting and with the mobility of sounds”⁴⁵ has been widely repudiated by sinologists, Pound’s persuasive argument for the cross-cultural primacy of the image in poetry – what he calls *phanopoeia*⁴⁶ – and his even more compelling *practice* of that theory and its spread through the revolutionary moment of Imagist poetics have prevailed in shaping the work of American poets for the last century, ever since the advent of Imagism in 1912 and the publication of Fenollosa’s *The Chinese Written Character* in 1919. Indeed, T.S. Eliot’s famous claim for Pound as “the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time”⁴⁷ has become as much of a burden as a boon for those Asian American poets who wish to gain a less circuitous link to their own linguistic heritage.

In her poetry, Chin achieves that link not by rejecting Pound, however much she remains circumspect about him and is hesitant to celebrate his Imagist aesthetic. Rather, as a poet, Chin cultivates a *parodic* voice that enables her to splice traditions, to incorporate Imagist and other poetics self-consciously, and to address racial and gender identity seriously, all at the same time. Like Pinsky, Chin absorbs Pound’s musicality, though, in her case, her poems recall “The strangeness of Pound’s translations [which] makes the foreign native and the native foreign, ultimately producing a poetry that claims transnationalism, even as in retrospect it is nativized as American Modernism.”⁴⁸ Like Bernstein, on the other hand, Chin attenuates the Pound impact on her work through humor. And like DuPlessis’s *Drafts*, though in a radically different style, Chin’s best poems often become inclusive and resonant with ambiguity. Consider “And All I Have Is Tu Fu”:

Pied horse, pied horse, I am having a dream.
Twenty-five Mongolians on horseback, twenty-five;
their hooves gouging deep trenches into the loess.
Now they enter a hole in the Wall, now they retreat.
Freud snickers; Jung shakes his head.

⁴⁵ Fenollosa, Ernest, Pound, Ezra. “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry.” Pound, Ezra. *Early Writings*, ed. Ira B. Nadel. New York: Penguin, 2005: 309.

⁴⁶ Pound, Ezra. *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T.S. Eliot. New York: New Directions, 1935: 25.

⁴⁷ Eliot, T. S. “Introduction.” Pound, Ezra. *Selected Poems*. London: Faber & Gwyer, 1928: XIV.

⁴⁸ Hsiao, Irene C. “Broken Chord...”: 199.

Then, a soldier comes forward who calls himself Tu Fu.
 He opens his mouth and issues a cartouche:
 all black-bearded, knitted browed,
 each meaning “what your viscera look like
 after having been disemboweled!”

Pray, promise me, this is not what the dream portends –
 my roommate’s in the bathroom fucking my boyfriend,
 and all I have is Tu Fu.⁴⁹

Several lines in this 13-lined poem could practically be lifted from the “Rihaku” (Li Bao) poems in Pound’s *Cathay*, his 1915 renditions of Fenollosa’s Chinese translations: Lines 2-3, “Twenty-five Mongolians on horseback, twenty-five; / their hooves gouging deep trenches into the loess,” echo such lines in Pound’s Chinese adaptations as “They ride upon dragon-like horses, / Upon horses with head-trappings of yellow metal, / And the streets make way for their passage”⁵⁰; lines 6-7, “a soldier comes forward who calls himself Tu Fu. / He opens his mouth and issues a cartouche,” have a similar tactile richness to lines in *Cathay* such as “King So’s terraced Palace / is now a barren hill, / But I draw pen on this barge / Causing the five peaks to tremble, / And I have joy in these words”⁵¹; and line 11, “Pray, promise me, this is not what the dream portends,” carries a plaintive tone reminiscent of Pound’s “Ah, how shall you know the dreary sorrow at the North Gate, / With Riboku’s name forgotten.”⁵² In fact, though, Chin’s poem goes further to vary from *Cathay* by including both allusions (Freud, Jung, Tu Fu) and classical Chinese symbols (the pied horse, the field battle, the hole in the [Great] Wall), yet she also employs the very “strangeness” and formality of voice that Pound deliberately brings to his translations to create a distinctly “Chinese” intonation, both in the poem’s syntax (“Pied horse, pied horse”; “what your viscera look like...”; “A soldier comes forward who calls himself

⁴⁹ Chin, Marilyn. *The Phoenix Gone, the Terrace Empty*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 1994: 79. Even the title poem of this collection hearkens back to Pound’s version of Rihaku’s poem entitled “The City of Choan,” which begins: “The phoenix are at play on their terrace. / The phoenix are gone, the river flows on alone.” See Pound, Ezra. *Personae: The Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound*, eds. Lea Baechler, A. Walton Litz. New York: New Directions, 1990: 142.

⁵⁰ Pound, Ezra. *Personae*: 135.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*: 152–153.

⁵² *Ibid.*: 137.

Tu Fu”) and in its sustained use of odd diction (*pieb horse, loess, cartouche, knitted browed, portends*). The degree to which the English accurately conveys the tone of the Chinese is, of course, based on a Western convention, “invented” by Pound yet employed by Chin.

Despite these Poundian devices in her poetry, however, Chin’s poem ultimately cuts directly and deliberately *against* Western “Chinese-ness” by also bringing into it an overtly American vernacular (“snickers,” “shakes his head,” roommate,” “fucking my boyfriend”). True, when considering their poems’ personae, whereas Pound’s “River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter” and “Jeweled Stairs’ Grievance” portray Chinese women from different social classes as paradigms of feminine modesty, Chin’s speaker, though in a far more impish manner, is equally self-deprecating. In short, for all its humor and sophistication – with its juxtaposition of war and love, the ancient and the modern, the obscure and the idiomatic – as a poem, “And All I Have Is Tu Fu” is finally poignant in its mood, as Chin self-consciously draws from Pound’s poetics yet also revises them, not only to *address* her own minority, often erased status as an Asian American woman, but simultaneously to *assert* her own dignity, by virtue of how stylistically she succeeds in giving herself a unique voice.

As himself a poet of resistance and a poet dedicated to innovation not for the sake of “making it new” alone, but for re-establishing the concision, clarity and candor which together mark the hallmark of American poetics, Pound left an indelible mark that no amount of deprecating his ideology or questioning his poetics is likely to erase. Like Leucothoe, American poets, who may only reluctantly acknowledge a shared aesthetic with one another, have nonetheless continued to raise their arms toward – if not Pound himself – the cogently innovative practices he has brought into focus in modernist and postmodernist American literature, even from the distance of his prolonged exile and later internal incarceration. And like the incense bush into which Leucothoe was ultimately transformed in Ovid’s tale, their own poetry persists in the light of Pound’s paradigm, even as they continue to resist him. Beyond the four poets discussed here readers will find a plethora of other poets – as *unlike* each other as Robert Hass from Amiri Baraka, Harryette Mullen from Mary Oliver, and Dana Gioia from Jorie Graham, each of whose poems bear the stamp of Pound’s formidable poetics.

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