

# Selected Cantos

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Excerpt's from Pound's long poem designate his own choice of the basic elements in his life's work

Among his fellow modernists, Ezra Pound inspired equal parts admiration and contempt. T.S. Eliot called him "il miglior fabbro" and dedicated "The Waste Land" to him after Pound had surgically stripped down the masterwork. Gertrude Stein, on the other hand, mocked his obsession with "Kulchur" and his pedagogical need to insert his versions of history, thought, economics, and morality into the Cantos. Pound was, she punched, "a village explainer, excellent if you are a village, but if you are not, not."

Turning to the poems affords illumination, though not resolution. The complete Cantos number 117, weigh in at more than 800 pages, and require several companion volumes of exegesis, filled as they are with private matters and forgotten, obscure souls and associations. Selected Cantos, 117 pages in all, contains what Pound called his "beauty spots": evocations of his heroes (from Chinese emperors to the Founding Fathers), cameos and critiques of his contemporaries (Yeats admiring the symbol of Notre Dame more than Notre Dame itself), and scabrous, unbeautiful visions of politicians, war profiteers, and "the perverts, the perverters of language" in hell. A signal irony is that the poet whose goal was to "make it new" is often freshest in his evocations and imitations of the past.

The greatest sequence is, however, "The Pisan Cantos". In 1945, following his pro-fascist Italian radio broadcasts, Pound was imprisoned by the American military. The art that emerged out of desperation, particularly Canto LXXXI, is a litany of nostalgia, pain, and delusion. Pound for once casts a sharp eye (usually reserved for others) on his personal and artistic failings: "Pull down thy vanity / How mean thy hates / Fostered in falsity ..." But even this section is troubling. In the end, the village explainer could explain little. New Directions has been the primary publisher of Ezra Pound in the U.S. since the founding of the press when James Laughlin published *New Directions in Prose and Poetry* 1936. That year Pound was fifty-one. In Laughlin's first letter to Pound, he wrote: "Expect, please, no fireworks. I am bourgeois-born (Pittsburgh); have never missed a meal. . . . But full of 'noble caring' for something as inconceivable as the future of decent letters in the US." Little did Pound know that into the twenty-first century the fireworks would keep exploding as readers continue to find his books relevant and meaningful.

#### Other Books

The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature, "American literature appears here as more than an offshoot of a single mother country, or of many mother countries, but rather as the interaction among diverse linguistic and cultural trajectories."

⌘ ⌘ ⌘ ⌘ ⌘ . See Edward Larocque Tinker, *Les Ecris de Langue Française en Louisiana au XIXe siècle* ( Paris : Librairie Ancienne Honoré, ... African- American short story, was first published twenty-two years later in *The Anglo-African Magazine* 1, nos."