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Idee Fondamentali**Ezra Pound***Edited by Caterina Ricciardi**Rome: Lucarini, 1991*

While it is well known that Ezra Pound broadcast for the Axis over Rome Radio during World War II, it is little known that during the later 1930s and early 1940s he wrote approximately 90 articles for the *Meridiano di Roma*, a fascist-sponsored publication. Apart from rare archival copies in the United States, these works have been largely inaccessible, and so Caterina Ricciardi's edition of 42 of the *Meridiano* articles will be welcome to American Pound scholars. She provides a 15-page introduction, a bibliographical note, textual commentary, and a detailed index. The collection is important to Pound studies, at once supplementing his broadcasts and clarifying our comprehension of his politics and ideology.

Nonetheless, Ricciardi's editing is flawed. Her textual notes should have been more informative at points, and her introduction, makes little use of the studies listed in her bibliography, treats Pound's politics misleadingly. Instead of standing outside Pound's ideology to analyze it in terms other than his, Ricciardi duplicates rather than explains it. Failing to add up her evidence, and repeating the discredited apologetic strategies of Pound criticism, she minimizes Pound's fascism and anti-Semitism, even denies their existence.

Ricciardi sees these articles' dominant theme as an attack on an international financial conspiracy, or "*usurocrazia*" (xxiv, 10). As she notes, he advertises major works of American, English, and French literature to widen Italian taste and to break the usurers' stranglehold over publishing and radio (xi). In her view, Pound's chief aim is to replace usuroc-

racy with a new economy. No longer valuable in itself, money will serve primarily as a means of exchange and pricing instrument; the government will regulate the just price; grain and the plough will supplant unproductive, parasitic gold and usury; and an "*ideologia contadina*" will be established through a revival of the agrarian and erotic cults of the ancient Mediterranean (xviii). For Ricciardi, Pound categorically espouses anti-militarism, denouncing usurers who create wars in order to profit from war debts (xii). Like other apologists, she claims Pound supported fascism solely out of the mistaken notion that he and Mussolini shared the same monetary and economic objectives. Ricciardi describes Pound as a "pseudo-fascist," a political visionary and utopian who misunderstood fascist ideology as much as the fascists misunderstood him (xiii). Noting that Pound saw himself as a political eccentric and that fascist ministers considered his economic proposals bizarre, she observes that

Fino alla fine Pound continuerà ad attribuire al fascismo ciò che nel fascismo non c'era e non ci sarebbe mai stato, ben convinto che gli levitavano gli elementi collimanti con una sua visione dello stato ideale. (xiii)

Ricciardi dismisses his fascism as a "cliche" (xxiv), since an immense distance separates him from true fascism (xiii). There is no truth to the claim that Pound ignores fascist ideology while pursuing an independent utopian agenda. Far from being a cliche, his fascism is easily demonstrable, partly and abundantly by the evidence Ricciardi has collected. She assesses it incorrectly and proves her ignorance of the typology of Italian Fascism. *Idee fondamentali* reveals that Pound's connection with Italian Fascism (and Nazism) is more intimate than some recent scholars have found.

Pound's knowledge of and allegiance to fascism, as well as his commitment to an Axis victory, are unmistakable in these articles. Like other fascists, he conceives of fascism as a faith (*fede*) or quasi-religion (84), and he recommends Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and Mussolini's *Scritti* for a library of fascist classics (122). Besides accepting Italian Fascism's primarily repressive and exploitative labor policies, Pound backs the fascists over the Communists in the Spanish Civil War (98). He is also impressed by the Italian Fascist minister Giuseppe Bottai's proposal to unite humanistic and practical education, a characteristically fascist pedagogical agenda (101). Apparently sensing Italy's diminishing hopes in World War II, Pound endorses the fascist slogan *Credere, Ubbidire, Combattere*—emphasizing *credere* (165). To this end he defends Mussolini's propaganda policies and strongly recommends Gioacchino Volpe's official *History of the Fascist Movement* (137-140). Like Mussolini, Pound realizes that Fascism's "seconda ondata" is doomed unless the younger generation is indoctrinated (137-40). The same anxiety pervades Pound's propagandistic Cantos 72 and 73, the *Italian Cantos*, which he wrote in Italian and published in a fascist naval journal toward the end of the war, and which, inexplicably, Ricciardi never mentions.

This collection shows that Pound shares many basic assumptions of fascist ideology. He confirms Zeev Sternhell's recent argument that the attraction of fascism lay in its idealist, spiritual, voluntarist, communal, and anti-materialist values. Hence Pound's characteristically fascist attack on European "decadence," sexual corruption, and selfish individualism (9-10, 33, 139, 153). Hence too his detestation of Marx's historical materialism and determinism (128). Agreeing with fas-

cist theorists on the pragmatic necessity of actualizing ideas, Pound praises Mussolini's writings as *atti* (137). He resembles other fascists in arguing for the historical necessity of fascism and the superiority of its historical sense, or *senso storico*:

Anzi, il fascismo fu ed è la forma più intensa della comprensione del momento storico. E questa comprensione caratterizza il grande valore storico e rivoluzionario del fascismo. (165)

For all this concern for contemporaneity, Pound has his own version of fascist Romanità, linking fascism and Roman imperialism while calling for a return to the purity and clarity of Latin as an antidote to usury (65-66, 85).

These articles also show Pound's embrace of Italian Fascism's totalitarian political program. Just as he defends fascism's division of society into corporate economic groupings and the supposed "harmonization" of their interests by the centralized state (44-45), so he justifies the subordination of individual rights to the corporation and those of both to the state: "Lo stato deve assorbire TUTTA l'energia, e tutte le energie dell'uomo" (146, 123). Pound advocates as an alternative to parliamentarianism the fascist system of representation by occupational groups (44-45), accepts the fascist system of state censorship (121, 127), and recommends as an antidote to liberalism the fascist concept of rights and duties, whereby the state can command people to perform certain duties for the social good (27, 32). Like the Italian Fascists, Pound combines statist totalitarianism with a patriarchal and agrarian ideology that emphasizes sexual hierarchy. Denouncing effeminizing influences as decadent, Pound insists that Italy is a "civiltà maschile," a fatherland not a "motherland" (139). Although Ricciardi discusses the Circe episode in

Cantos 39 and 47, she does not show that they implicate fascist agrarianism and anti-feminism. Nor does she mention that Pound, as in the *Italian Cantos*, accepts the standard Italian Fascist view that the Catholic Church, in owing its existence to the Roman state, should render homage to the "Imperatore," currently incarnated in Mussolini (59, 132).

As against Ricciardi's interpretation, Pound's economics is thoroughly compatible with fascism. She should have emphasized that Pound's *ideologia contadina*, focusing on the establishment of homesteads and the increase of grain production, is typically fascist. Does not Pound endorse the fascist slogan *la battaglia del grano* (xx)? He stresses food production partly because he endorses the fascist goal of autarchy—adding eccentrically that the cultivation of soy beans and especially peanuts (*arachidi*) will help to provide Italy with the self-sufficiency necessary to defeat Jewish usurers (84, 96-99). Ricciardi ignores that Pound's anti-Marxist dissociation of "capital" from "property," in isolating usury rather than capitalism per se as the cause of economic exploitation (xvii), has numerous analogues among fascist writers, including Hitler, whom Pound cites on the evils of "loan capital" (xvii, 106).

As for Pound's anti-Semitism, Ricciardi falls into the old extenuating apologetics. She contends that Pound's anti-Semitism, like Voltaire's, is ambiguous, for in claiming that usurers "*non hanno razza*," Pound implicates Gentiles in usury (xxi, xxii). Yet in these pages as in his other writings of this period, Pound consistently regards Jews as "*patologia incarnata*" (100), the ultimate source of the evils afflicting Gentiles. These articles deepen our sense of Pound's cultural and racial anti-Semitism. Many repeat familiar accusations associating the

Jews with nomadism, anti-sociality, abstraction, sadism, usury, and other negatives opposed to his pagan, agrarian, and Catholic values. And, as in the broadcasts, Pound refers to Jewish conspiracies secreted in the *Kahal and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (29-31, 111). But the collection also contains what are for Pound unusual anti-Semitic allegations: that the Jews killed Christ (135); that Adam and Eve is an anti-usury parable (90); that the story of Cain and Abel is the origin of the Jews' supposed hatred of agriculture and practice of vendetta (xxii); and that the Jews are infiltrating the Church to undermine it, a fascist extremist theme also present in the *Italian Cantos* (134). To be sure, in placing anti-Semitism at the center of his political ideology and agenda, Pound resembles the Nazis more than the majority of Italian Fascists. Yet in this he also shows his affinity for some radical right-wing fascists, for instance Roberto Farinacci, who appears heroically in Canto 72, and who trafficked in racial, economic, and cultural anti-Semitism.

The chief error of Ricciardi's introduction, then, is the failure to state that Pound's "*idee fondamentali*" are largely fascist ideas. One hopes her soft and sanitized portrayal of Pound does not impede understanding of his works in Italy. Another Italian scholar, Massimo Bacigalupo, whose *Formed Trace* (Italian ed., *L'Ultimo Pound*) Ricciardi cites yet has not absorbed, has stated succinctly that *The Cantos* are the "sacred poem" of the fascist era.

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