

## CONTRA ELIOT & POUND

In responding to my poem, *Europa, Europa*, posted on my blog on 7/24/08, Chris Godfree Morrell wrote:

*I have a feeling this is a bit like prodding a hornet's nest, but what exactly do you think that Eliot and Pound 'did'?*

And I responded,

*Thanks for asking, Chris! I'll try not to let the teapot boil over. (smile)*

My objections to these two fellows emerged over time, and came about through a careful reading of their voices. I encapsulate that understanding in my poem, with the lines:

    Their little bigots, they call them prophets,  
    Whose manifesto reads, "You are the hollow men."

I express three important concepts in those two lines. The first is that Pound and Eliot are often described as the greatest writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, many critics have called them prophets. Obviously, I reject that, for two reasons. The first is that both men were vicious and outspoken bigots. This is not so obvious in their writings, so let me defer that discussion for a moment. Rather, let me begin with the voice, the perspective of the writer who wrote *Prufrock*, *The Wasteland*, and *Hollow Men*.

The literalist reader might claim that Eliot writes in such a way as to include himself among the empty and inept human beings he has chosen to describe. Eliot, in point of fact, does not write, "YOU are the hollow men." He writes, "WE are the hollow men." But these scathing poems have nothing of the hesitance, insecurity, self-doubt, and timidity of the characters they describe. In them, Eliot writes with unrestrained contempt and disdain. He accuses and points his finger at the people around him, little people in his eyes. He says "we," but he means "you." YOU are hollow; YOU are Prufrock; YOU live in a wasteland and YOU are not worthy of anything better. Eliot writes with the voice of a feudal master, overseeing his ignorant peasants and his simpering, sniveling servants.

These poems express an arrogance and contempt for humanity that offend me to the core of my being. Does the author suggest any new and better path for his characters? Does he offer a means for redemption? Does he at least show some empathy for the weakness and limits of these little people that are so far beneath him? Not a word.

Given this master-slave mentality in the poems, it is not so hard to read between the lines and see what Eliot's letters and private correspondence confirm: he is a racist bigot. Eliot privately, and Pound openly were nazi sympathizers and fascist supporters. And both were vicious anti-Semites.

Yet, somehow, the reading public has allowed itself to ignore these facts. It is as if in some alternate reality, Hitler and Goebbels were talented painters, skilled at representing the imagined deformity of those they hated, as well as being leaders of the nazi party. And in this alternate reality, the anti-nazi public, nonetheless, raved about how wonderful Hitler's and Goebbels' paintings were. Impossible? Outrageous? Yet we see it with Eliot and Pound: racist bigots who paint deformed human beings, and who, nonetheless, are accorded the highest honors in society.

So, Chris, you ask, "what have these men done?" They have slandered humanity. They have cursed their societies. And worst of all, they have misled a reading public into assuming the contempt-filled vision expressed by these two authors. The public, too, reads "YOU are the hollow men," and sneers at the incompetent and unredeemable Prufrocks around them. Sneers, and doesn't think to lift a hand to help.

Therefore, I say Eliot's and Pound's writing offends me. However, I am even more offended by their moral corruption as human beings. And being thus doubly offended, should I not speak out against them?

And finally, this postscript. You bigots! Don't imagine you can hide your bigotry beneath the surface of your writing, or somehow cleanse your writing from the stain and stench of hatred and intolerance. Emotions create the foundation and shape of our thoughts. Emotions determine what we look at and how we value things. A bigot's writing will be deformed by that bigotry. And just as their writing will be deformed and made ugly by hatred, so everything about them will be deformed and made ugly. The struggle against intolerance and hatred is a perpetual battle waged by every single person. Those who make headway in this battle become more beautiful and heroic; those who succumb become more ugly and more vile.

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