

# *Pisan Canto*

*a theatre piece from Plays of Pure Land  
by Adrian Guthrie*

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[playwright@australiainmail.com](mailto:playwright@australiainmail.com)

# PISAN CANTO

from *PLAYS OF PURE LAND* by Adrian Guthrie

*(Ezra Pound is seated in a wire cage in the full midday sun. He is typing very quickly with one finger.)*

Pound            *(He makes an error typing.)*  
Shit.

*(He tries to correct it.*  
*Types.*  
*Makes another mistake.)*  
Arsehole of god!  
Shit! Shit! Shit!  
Sweet Jesus shit!

Exhausted -  
exhausted by sanity -  
am I to let them kill me?

One more page!  
Let me type one more page!  
Then you can shoot me!  
One more song!

*(To the typewriter.)*  
Come on type,  
you fucking deadshit cunt!  
Type for the love of god!  
Type a little more for me!  
Cunt! Cunt! Cunt! Cunt!            *(He hammers the typewriter.)*

*(Long silence. Pound is motionless. Beyond despair.)*

*(An American Army officer enters. He wears a white coat over his uniform.)*

Officer            Mr Pound.

Pound            I want an eraser.

If it is within the bounds of  
the conventions governing a  
prisoner of war.

Officer            You are an American citizen, Mr Pound.  
You are being held to answer  
the charge of treason.

Pound            Treason!  
Did St Francis have to answer such a charge?  
Well, I s'pose he nearly did didn't he?     *(Pound chuckles.)*

Jesus!  
Treason must be an easy thing to do,  
if a little talking will topple  
this nation of yours.

Officer            Your nation, too, sir.

Pound            No, I left America in 1902 -  
or perhaps I was banished  
when Wabash College  
found I had a Spanish gypsy woman  
in my room -                             *(He laughs.)*

They kicked me out  
and I banished myself from America.  
She was raven haired -  
played guitar and danced flamenco.     *(Laughs.)*

Look, that eraser -

Officer            It was probably overlooked  
in the Haig Convention -  
but I'll see if I can find one for you.

Pound            Thanks.  
Do you think that I'll be shot tomorrow?

Officer            The usual thing is hanging.

Pound            I know, they hung Till yesterday  
for murder and rape with trimmings.

He thought he was Zeus' ram!

But I think I'm Ezra Pound  
and you've got damn all on me.

Oh, England,  
where is free speech  
if not on the airwaves.

Officer            You broadcast for the Fascists.

Pound            I broadcast for myself.  
Man's got to live somehow.  
And I damn well meant it.  
Still do.

Fuck the sun.

Officer            I'm sorry

Pound            Barbarians!

*(There is a silence.*

*Then the Officer pulls out some paper  
from his coat. He pushes it through the mesh to Pound. )*

Pound            Oh, thanks.

Officer            Even in Hell  
there is mercy.     *(He goes.)*

Pound            We who have passed over Lethe  
know the sun shoots us.

Shoots for the heart.

Shoots to kill.

But in Hell -  
the true shot lies.

This sun is God's mouth,  
and when a man  
is bitten

the straw on his tongue  
catches fire.

After three weeks  
with the spot lights on all night  
and the sun all day -  
I have lost  
my power...

My power of speech.

I am that fella  
whose father removed his mouth!  
Took it -  
because he made too many things!

*(Pound chuckles at the idea. Then becomes sad - then morbidly afraid.)*

I took everything  
I could find  
from 30 centuries  
and laid it out  
for all ...

And they pissed on me. *(Extreme sorrow.)*

Look!  
Bird on Barbed wire!  
A number of birds ...  
five ...  
five finches ... *(Utter joy.)*

*(Reading from the manuscript in the typewriter.)*

“What thou lovest well remains ...  
Elysium,  
though it were in the halls of hell.”

BIRD SHITS ON WIRE.  
BIRD FUCKS WIRE.  
ENTANGLEMENT FOULED BY FOWLS. *(He chuckles.)*

Clouds over Pisa -  
rose-blue after sunset -  
part the breasts of the hills.

Landscape coitus.

Sunset -  
bright on the shit-house ...  
Shadow of the gibbet ...  
infidelity.

*(Pound reads from the box his typewriter is sitting on.)*

Pound            "Bacon box:  
Contract: W, 1, 1, 0, 0, 9, 0 -  
53 pounds gross weight."

Classy furniture  
they've got in this place -  
"Disciplinary Training Centre -  
D.T.C., Pisa."  
House of correction  
for the Army's out-and-outs  
and E.P.

They say a caged bird sings -  
Kannon blesses all who  
free caged birds.

I will drink her wine -  
and kneel at her stone.

*(The Officer returns.)*

Officer            Everything present and correct?

Pound            I'm here  
and I think I'm correct,  
'Though I know others think I'm not.  
However, I'm workin' on 'em.

But I don't look correct  
In these clothes!  
What damage would I do the  
United States with a belt?

Officer            I think they are more worried  
about what you might do to yourself.

Pound            I'm very correct with my blankets -

fold them morning and evening.  
Both of them.  
You couldn't stretch it to another, could you?

Officer I'll see what I can do.

Pound You said that a week ago.  
Or was it Hannable,  
over there?

Officer Here's the eraser -  
or what's left of it -  
it was all I could find.

*(He hands it to Pound, who examines it with great pleasure.)*

Pound Plenty of errors will fall  
under this one yet!  
Very good!  
Thank you very much.

Officer You can use the Dispensary.  
We've seen all the patients for today.  
You can sit at a table  
sit up like a human being  
and write.

Pound Thank you, Doctor.

*(Pound leaves the cage. He takes the small typewriter and sets it up at a table.)*

Officer This fellow talks like  
single-handed he'll save the world.  
His ideas on money  
are strung together  
like holy writ...

And the Bishop doesn't like  
doubters and disbelievers -

His mind races -  
a genius for knowing everything  
from everywhere -  
or nothing.

He works all the time ...

I think his economics stinks.

*(Pound with a blanket around his shoulders sits dead straight at the little table with his typewriter in front of him. He has a bundle of notes.)*

Pound            I am myself again.

I am kept in a cage  
in Italy  
because I broadcast  
about America on Rome Radio  
during the recent deplorable conflict.

I tried to return to America  
at the beginning of the war  
and they wouldn't let me back..

If I had broadcast  
about America in America  
I would have proved  
the robustness of the American Constitution  
which young Americans were killed defending.

But as I was outside America  
I may be shot  
for exercising the freedom of speech  
guaranteed in that Constitution.

Now I am kept here  
incommunicado  
in case I return to America  
and speak ...

Amer - eeka th' beauti - ful.

But the good sense of America  
is without equal -

And Truman will listen!

The war-mongers have  
indebted the nation  
and placed every working American  
in hock to international banking!

The two greatest rackets are  
changing the value of money -  
and usury!  
And the socialists  
and the Jews run them both!

National money!  
That's the answer!

What is it? Money?  
It's just a work-token.  
A man does work and receives  
a token which he can exchange  
for another's labour  
or the produce of another's labour.  
But the international bank swine  
come along and change its value  
and make the token  
a thing in itself.

National money - that's the answer.  
My grandfather printed tokens  
for his employees to use -  
got some of 'em still!

That's what the United States should do.  
Free itself from the chains  
of international indebtedness.

Social credit!

I was in Rome  
when Rome fell to the Allies -  
and I escaped on foot North  
to my son-in-law's family  
in the Tyrol.

Eventually I returned to Rapallo.  
The North was still held by the Salo Republic.  
I tried to give myself up  
to some American soldiers later -

they were simply perplexed  
and sent me home.

After eighteen months  
partisans entered my house -  
fortunately there was an American unit  
and I again gave myself up to them -  
and I expected to be spirited off  
to the United States - but instead  
I have been condemned to purgatory.

Officer                    There is a question of Pound's sanity.  
If he is found sane  
he may be shot -  
or at least lose his liberty.  
If he is found to be insane  
he will not be charged  
but will be committed to an institution.

If he returns to sanity  
he will then have to face the  
the charge of Treason.

(This is what America does to troublemakers.  
This troublemaker is the greatest poet of the century.)

Officer                    (*To Pound.*)  
You are to be taken to Washington.  
The military flight leaves Rome today,  
17th November, 1945,  
and arrives Bolling Airfield,  
District of Columbia.

Pound                    If I am to go -  
if I am to go,  
and not be heard!

If I am to go,  
and be called a traitor  
I die, or lose my liberty!

If I am to go  
and be called mad.  
I lose my liberty in any case!

They must listen to me!

That wide, lively, eager Republic -  
Like Whitman, it is a nation  
I do not shrink from praising!

It's politics grew from honest men's  
passion for justice and freedom -  
and a newness -

Which is suddenly very old.  
As I am.

If I am to go  
and not be heard -  
All America is an asylum!

*(Pound and the Officer leave.)*