

# RENDEZVOUS

*Rendezvous at the  
Ezra Pound Centennial Conference*



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## Some Remarks on Ezra Pound

by Mary de Rachewiltz

For over a year there have been Centenary celebrations, quite properly; the first was held in Venice where Pound published his first book in 1908 and where he died in 1972. There was a small exhibition of his books and lectures, mostly in Italian but simultaneously translated, on literary aspects, at the Fondazione Cini. The movie, *Ezra Pound, An American Odyssey*, was shown in New York and last spring in Milano. There have been poetry readings, exhibitions and concerts in his honor in several Italian towns, and a plaque on the house in Rapallo and one at Sant Ambrogio; a path in the Tyrol was named for him and all his editions were displayed at the Landesfürstliche Burg in Merano. In London the Tate Gallery had a most beautiful exhibition entitled "Pound and his Artists," as well as a series of lectures and slide shows. At the Centre Culturelle Royaumont, an old Abbey near Paris, I've heard all the Cantos read in French translation during a three-day marathon attended by more than forty French writers. The radio program *France Culture* devoted an hour a day to Pound for the entire month of October. Symposiums were held in Zurich, Japan, England and at Yale. Carroll Terrell gathered an impressive number of Pound scholars and admirers at the University of Maine, Orono, last June, and then took a group to visit the Sacred Places, the tomb on the Isle of San Michele, the houses where Pound lived and the churches and art works Pound loved.

At the Grollier Club in New York and at the Center for the Study of Ezra Pound and his contemporaries at Yale there were exhibitions of books and manuscripts, primarily The Pisan Cantos notebooks. The play, *Women of Trachis*, was performed in San Francisco; and at my home, Brunnenburg, there were 12 students from St. Andrew's Presbyterian College, North Carolina, who read through all the Cantos and enjoyed it. And clearly, Hailey, Idaho, is not lagging behind in honoring her native son, even if the local press has suggested there might be some perplexity if he were to return. This is a painful reminder of how slowly truth makes its way once it has been slanted. When I came to Hailey the first time, I heard talk of a monument and was most warmly welcomed by the present owner of the homestead. I said then that the best way to honor Ezra Pound is to read him, read him without blinkers. Do not read *about* him; study what he wrote. I said you will discover that he was a patriot who had made the greatest gift a poet can make to his country: he gave the American people their own Epic, as Homer had done for Greece. But the obfuscation, verging on slander, continues among people who have not had the good fortune to know him personal-

ly. Anyone who knew Pound well, over a long span of time, *loved* him, and that includes his inquisitors, jailers, soldiers and ward attendants.

The young must continue to seek him, to seek the truth. They will find a true gentleman in Pound: at times Prometheus, Proteus, Father of many guilds, Seer, Critic, Economist, Philosopher, Frontiersman, Don Quixote, Village Explainer, (for some) Revolutionary Simpleton, (for others) Prophet, Iconoclast, Historian, Musician, Voice in the Wilderness, Patriot, Lawmaker, *Il Miglior Fabbro*, Builder of Light, Carpenter and Poet. A genius. Through Masks or onion skins, what at the end of his life *he* cherished was the seeking. In *Drafts & Fragments* we read: "Forever seeking", and

"the verb is *see*, not *walk on*  
i.e. it coheres all right" —[*Canto CXVII*]

Everything he said and did, seen in the right perspective, coheres.

I have seen his glorious explosion of vigor, have seen him laugh and dance and curse, build and plan. I have watched his despair when he found jealousy and possessiveness "where the living were made of cardboard," and no one had enough compassion to be his minister. I saw him stop fighting the world, heard him agree with T.S. Eliot and Marianne Moore that "all wars are inward." I heard him pray:

"pray—There is power. . ." [*Canto CX*]

As a young man, in "The Venetian Night Litany," he had prayed to the God of Silence: "Purifiez nos coeurs; make clean our hearts within us."

In old age he practiced Purification, heeding the constant Confucian summons: "Renew yourself, with every sun renew yourself." Holding to the four TUAN, he introduced Chinese ideograms to revitalize our worn-out Christian symbols, strengthening the cardinal virtues of Justice, Prudence, Temperance and Fortitude.

Prudence, I am afraid, Pound never quite mastered. Pisa had served as atonement; Pound was ready to help with the reconstruction. He was not ready to accept petty vengeance. Yet at the end of his creation the words he gave us were kindness, charity and justice, ending with the summons:

"to be men, not destroyers" [*Notes for CXVII*]

For almost ten years at St Elisabeths, he studied the Law Codes, texts known to John Adams that went into the American Constitution. He studied *charters* dealing with misprision. According to the laws which govern us, Pound would not have needed Athena's vote to save him.

But his own people did not recognize his service, did not make peace with him, their Poet. He therefore continued to fight against all the powers and individuals he suspected of doing harm to his country and to mankind. He continued the war his "grandad had been in," metaphorically reenacting the bold gesture of Joseph Wadsworth who stole the first Connecticut Charter and hid it in an oak tree:

"I stood still and was a tree. . ." [The Trees]  
"bare trees walk on the skyline. . ." [Canto CX]  
"trees open, their minds stand before them. . ." [Canto CVI]

Pound had tried, for over forty years, to prevent wars. Throughout the Cantos he had lent his voice to others, primarily to John Adams who had said:

"Every bank of discount is downright corruption  
taxing the public for private individuals' gain.  
and if I say this in my will  
the American people wd/ pronounce I died crazy." [Canto LXXXI]

What Adams feared, to Pound it happened.

It happened because during the Second World War he became to his countrymen, "Ezra Pound speaking from Europe." From a cultural outpost, he defended the freedom of an American citizen to dissent. He lost his temper often, his voice was shrill and ugly at times. But so were the bombings of civilians, the destruction of temples, all the cruelties and ravages that occurred everywhere in World War Two. Nevertheless, he has made his lasting contribution to freedom of speech:

"that free speech without free radio speech is as zero." [Canto LXXXIV]

He would have returned to express his opinion inside the United States had not U.S. officials prevented him from doing so. It is bitterly ironic now that people who most strongly condemned him can avail themselves of this freedom to express their opinions and get away with it.

Other speakers are dealing with this difficult topic, so I shall not dwell on it.

Since we are here to honor Ezra Pound, we must also honor his parents, Homer and Isabel Pound. His mother especially has so far not received the attention due to her. I shall let her speak for herself through a letter she wrote to her mother in New York City from Hailey, one hundred years ago. You can see from whom the son inherited his taste for writing letters.

May 22, 1885

My dear Mama:

You shall have a letter by today's mail whether the dishes are washed or not, from which remark you will infer I am not surrounded by the Celestial atmosphere.

Last Sunday we drove to a mine beyond Deer Creek Hot Springs. Monday, with half an hour notice, we started for Camas Prairie—Mr. Foote, Mr. Pound, Homer and myself. The weather has been more unsettled this month than during the whole time I have been here and particularly so during our drive. Monday we had rain, hail, snow and glorious sunshine, and each time the sun shone we could not believe that in another half hour we would be glad for our gossamers and umbrellas, but so it was. The drive was delightful and merry, the scenery fine; at one eminence we had a picture before us like Bierstadt's Rocky Mountains, peak after peak, until we could just distinguish the outline of the furtherest in the distance, and near us we could see the deep valleys. The entrance to Camas Prairie is down a steep narrow gulch, prettily surrounded with a stream beside the roadway; looking down the gully to the Prairie I could but think of the old patriarchs looking over into the Land of

Canaan. On the Prairie there are many streams to ford, and at one of them I was so much engaged watching to what depths the horses would go in that my pedal attachments were submerged, and all the things in the wagon, our lunch rolls etc. Thereafter we looked like the moving panorama of the great American washday. We drove twenty miles on the Prairie, stayed over night at the Inn of Soldier, where the lands belonging to various members of the family are situated. It is all fine farm land, rich and level and there are many settlers all about. A large quantity of fencing has been done, miles and miles so as to protect the farmers from herds that range there. Homer and Mr. Foote have fenced forty acres each to protect the next morning so as to get Mr. Pound to Hailey in time for the Ketchum train as he wished to see to some business there regarding the Altmas mine. We just did it. The train had started from the depot, but I waved a handkerchief and it halted. All the difficulties regarding that most promising mine are at an end. The jumpers were engaged to work it and ore has already been sold. Mr. Pound returned to lunch with us Wednesday and left by the special train that afternoon with the Omaha Business Men's excursion. The Celestial left the morning we started for Camas. I hoped to find a girl while out there but our time was so short I could only leave word at [the] Hotel that there was occupation for one in Hailey. . . . Mr. Pound asked if you were not coming out to visit me. I wish he could get you a pass for this year, but I fear his railroad influence affects only his own locomotive. I don't know though. He may be out again in a month or so. I am told I have secured his admiration in many ways and his stay was much enjoyed. . . . Lovingly, Belle.

The ellipsis stand for a full page devoted to Uncle and Aunt and Cousin Sara, clothes, a yellow kitten, and her wish for a yellow dog, but not one word was said about expecting a baby to be born in October.

Punctuation marks have been added by the editors for clarity.