



*Ezra Pound, April 18, 1958, after the indictment of treason against him was dismissed. Photo courtesy Associated Press.*

# TOM REA

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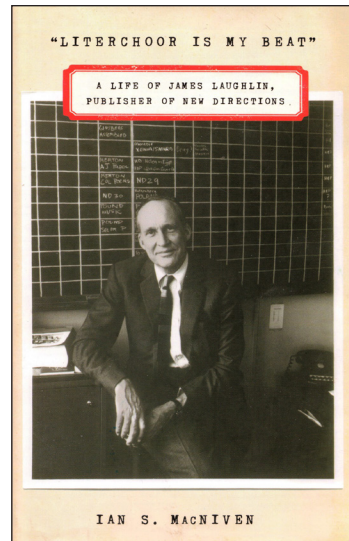
## *Ezra Pound, Donald Trump, and a Leafy Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

**T**he first of January, 2021, I dreamed of a hot, small meteor that came zooming in over my right shoulder, picked up the Trump family and carried them—WHAM—into a black marble wall and installed them there, bronzed forever in a shining Roman coin. But maybe it was a small round window through which to peer at them in their tiny, circumscribed future. This struck me as funny and I woke up laughing. Happy New Year! I said aloud.

The following Tuesday, January 5, was the day of the Senate runoff election in Georgia. Congress was arriving back in D.C. A third of those congresspeople had begun a steady, disguised attack on the states' certified counts of the electoral votes, and thus on the Constitution. Proud Boys and their friends were gathering in the hotels and streets. Mike Pence was going to have to choose whether to follow the law or follow his boss—there was no way he could do both.

Meanwhile, I'd recently read *Literchoor Is My Beat*, Ian McNiven's 2014 biography of James Laughlin, Ezra Pound's longtime publisher at New Directions, and in the wake of that had picked up an old friend, *What Thou Lovest Well Remains: 100 Years of Ezra Pound*, Rick Ardinger's anthology of essays, anecdotes and poems that came out of a Pound conference in Hailey, Idaho in 1985 on the 100th anniversary of Pound's birth. What, I wondered, would Pound have thought of Donald Trump?

The extreme events of January 2021 completed a flip in my feelings about Pound that began earlier; I want here to trace those feelings over several decades. I also want to tell a little about the only person I ever knew who knew Pound—Pound's publisher, who was a relative of mine; we grew up in the same neighbor-



hood, though not at the same time. That world, the otherworldly comfort of it, is also part of the story.

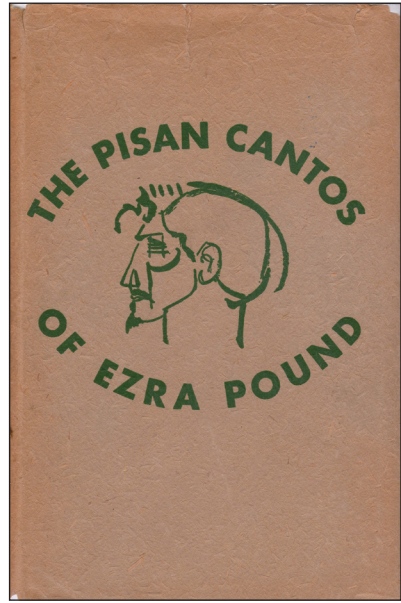
The Pound I wanted to quiz about Trump was not the same Pound I'd so loved and absorbed way back in my twenties. That Pound was the poet who "broke the back of the iamb," as he put it, reminded poets everywhere to "Make it new," re-made ancient Chinese poetry in English, led us through Provence with the troubadours, prodded us to read Dante and Villon and was so kind, helpful and generous to writers of his own time—Eliot, Joyce, Hemingway and Yeats among them. The old Pound was still very much the Pound of the always perplexing *Cantos*, but the *Cantos* of my 1972 New Directions edition that left out *Cantos* 72 and 73. Pound wrote those two in Italian. They are blatantly pro-fascist and anti-Semitic.

This new Pound I'd finally confronted only three years earlier, over another New Year's when, on a warm vacation by a condo pool, I began reading *The Bughouse: The Poetry, Politics and Madness of Ezra Pound*, Daniel Swift's book about Pound's years in St. Elizabeth's, the federal mental hospital outside Washington. This is the Pound whose name is now a touchstone for a splinter of the Italian far right, who have named for him not just their headquarters in Rome but their movement and, for a time, political party: CasaPound. Pound's house. The movement is CasaPound Italia, or CPI. Their numbers are very small. They are very male, stylish and breathtakingly shrewd in their use of broadcast media. They have made it OK to talk casually about fascism as a real political possibility. Look directly into your heart, and then act, Pound told us Confucius said. That seems to be what these young men have done. They've taken Pound's words to heart, and acted. And from time to time, they beat up people in the streets.

So, I was wondering that Jan. 5, 2021, would Pound see Trump as a fraud who never read a book or thought a useful thought? Or would he see him as a new Mussolini? Pound loved to tell the tale of how *The Cantos* pleased Mussolini. "*Ma quaeato*," the boss said, "*è divertente*." It's pleasant, it's fun.

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During World War II Pound made a series of anti-American, pro-Fascist, sometimes virulently anti-Semitic broadcasts on state radio in Fascist Italy. Federal prosecutors indicted him for treason in 1943 around the time the Germans invaded the north of the country. He ran for it, often walking alone, 450 miles from Rome to Gais, the village in the Italian Alps where his daughter Mary lived. After partisans captured him and turned him over to American forces in April 1945, the Army held him in a prison camp near Pisa for six months, the first three weeks of that time in a six-foot-by-six-foot cell in a roofed, open-air cage.



At the camp Pound wrote his *Pisan Cantos*, his best ones and best-known. Meanwhile, in Washington, friends provided Pound with a good lawyer. Four psychiatrists testified at a competence hearing, and the federal court ruled him insane and thus unable to stand trial. He was held in St. Elizabeth's, the mental hospital, for 12 years.

Swift's book builds its story through Pound's visitors, most of them poets, among them Charles Olson, Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Elizabeth Bishop and Pound's old friend and rival, William Carlos Williams. Early on, Swift outlines two ways to read Pound. First, sympathetically, as Swift says he always had and I liked to think I had: There's value here, I believed, threading my way through the maze. If I keep after it and don't keep expecting straight narrative, there will always be beautiful, stunning passages and eventually, meaning will emerge.

The opposite, second way is an attitude of what-the-fuck-is-all this, which was more or less the attitude of the Justice Department at the time of Pound's indictment and of some of his doctors at St. Elizabeth's.

Eventually, however, Swift finds his sympathy wearing thin. "It is hard to convey bad poetry in quotation," he writes. "This is why Pound has tended to fare well in the hands of his critics. Anyone can find a good

line or two but the grand, bad faith of the *Cantos*—its pomposity, its anger—is a constant, running line after line.” Out of that question, good faith or bad? comes the question—did he mean it? And really, was he sane or not?

Swift contrasts Robert Lowell’s mental illness with Pound’s. For a few years Lowell visited Pound often, and they corresponded. Lowell was bipolar; in those same years he rolled several times from lows to highs to crackups to hospitalizations to medicated releases and a more subdued life. Pound’s madness was much more ambiguous; there were no such plain opposites.

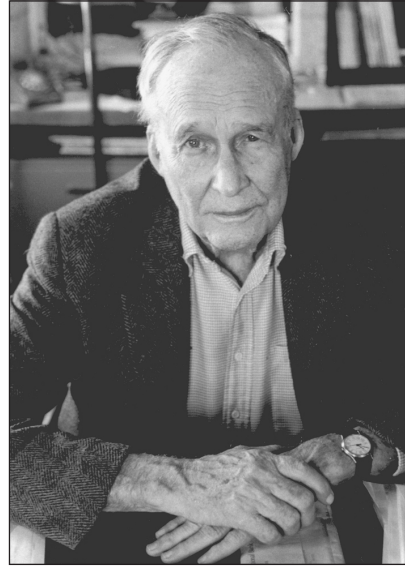
During his hospitalization and since, the suspicion circulated that he was faking it, that he was only pretending to be insane to escape the consequences of his treason. Circulating also, then and since, is the idea that “despite it all—the broadcasts, Pound’s allegiance to Fascism, his badness—here was a truly great poet,” Swift writes, “one who cannot be judged by mere human standards.” Certainly, until very recently, I was in that camp.

To sympathize with Pound, Swift continues, you have to agree that he was crazy. But if he was crazy, can all that great advice about who and how to read, how to write and what to write about, be worth anything? Conversely, if you assume that the things he says are sound, then that means he was sane—which makes Pound a cynic and a coward, who went along with the diagnosis to avoid a death sentence.

In the early 1950s, the great poet and translator Robert Fitzgerald was working on his translation of the *Odyssey* and corresponding with Pound about it. But by 1954 the contradictions overwhelmed him. “You are in St. Elizabeth’s because you and your lawyer chose to plead insanity rather than stand up for a trial,” Fitzgerald wrote to Pound. “If there was something you wanted to fight for aside from yourself you could have fought for it then. If your mind was sick then you belonged in St. Elizabeth’s. If it wasn’t, then you were craven not to stand trial on your indictment.”

Pound’s frequent visitors included many poets just beginning to build their careers. They also included his wife, Dorothy, who took an apartment near the hospital to see to his needs. Pound’s mistress, Olga Rudge and their daughter, Mary, stayed in Italy. His publisher, James Laughlin, also visited often—as did many fans, critics, admirers and would-be biographers.

At New Directions, Laughlin published *The Pisan Cantos* in 1948, and the following year the book won the Bollingen Prize, a new, \$1,000 annual award funded by the Mellon family of Pittsburgh. In 1951 New Directions brought out a volume of Pound's Confucius translations, *The Great Digest and Unwobbling Pivot*. In 1955 Harvard published the Confucian odes: *The Great Anthology Defined by Confucius*. Yet in the breeze of all this admiration and accomplishment, Pound's fascist sympathies did not blow away. Quite the opposite: he was at the same time writing and publishing Jew-scoring articles and scraps of articles in tiny magazines, hundreds of pieces, nearly all under pseudonyms.



*Ezra Pound's publisher James Laughlin, of New Directions.*

Most prominent among his fringe admirers was the segregationist, white supremacist and unindicted suspect in terrorist school and synagogue bombings John Kasper. From his Make It New bookshop in Greenwich Village, Kasper published a number of Pound's economic and anti-Semitic writings as part of the cheap-paperback Square \$ Series.

But finally, thanks to the efforts of Archibald McLeish, Laughlin and others, Pound got a new lawyer, the former deputy U.S. attorney general and New Deal trustbuster Thurman Arnold, who negotiated a deal with the Justice Department. The charges were dropped. Pound returned to Italy. There's a photo of him in Naples, on his arrival. It must have been a hot day; Pound's white shirt is deeply sweat stained under the armpits. He beams with joy. And he's raised his right arm in a fascist salute.

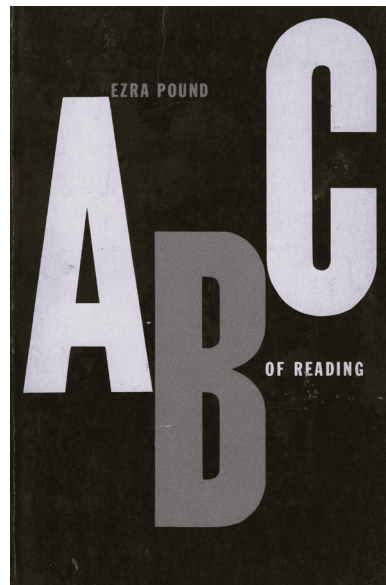
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I doubt I ever would have read much Pound if it weren't for Sam Hamill, founder, publisher and editor of Copper Canyon Press.

In the summer of 1975 I hitchhiked from Wyoming to Port Townsend, Washington, to the writer's conference at the Centrum Foundation at Fort Worden, where Copper Canyon is still located. I returned to the conference the following summer. Later that summer Barb and I were married and moved to Missoula, where I entered the MFA program and she finished her bachelor's degree. For the summer of 1977, Sam landed an NEA fellowship for us to work at the press as interns. Barb and I got to learn to make books, the old fashioned way.

Sam was always talking about Pound. Sam was a lot of things then, his frizzy hair grew in all directions, he was gruff, he was loud, pompous and deeply generous. He was an orphan and a westerner, raised in Utah; like Pound he was a strong autodidact who revered learning and scorned universities. One of Copper Canyon's first books, his long poem *Heroes of the Teton Mythos*, ends with the image of a mountain man standing beside his word—sincerity—a Chinese ideogram Sam learned about from Pound.

I was a former English major with an expensive education behind me, but beyond “petals on a wet, black bough” I'd read very little Pound. “Start here,” Sam said, and handed me a copy of *ABC of Reading*. But wasn't he, well, a fascist? “Just read this,” said Sam, “and see what you think.” It changed my life. The book is an anthology, with commentary. Swift notes that Pound had been handing people reading lists since he was a teenager; this book is an extension of that impulse. It sent me reading down all the Pound roads—troubadour Provence, Cathay, Renaissance Tuscany and of course the view from Odysseus's ship of all the Mediterranean shorelines: “Periplum,” Pound called it. Back in Missoula, there were no Pound experts in the English department, so I arranged for an independent study one trimester and read the Cantos straight through, meeting now and then with a professor who was often late for the appointment.



For biography and context I relied heavily on Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era*. Thank god for that book. To chase Pound's languages and allusions I had only some distant classroom French and Latin, plus a battered U. of Montana library copy of the *Annotated Index to the Poetry of Ezra Pound*, by John Edwards and William Vasse, which glossed many of the cantos but only up through number 85, the end of the *Pisan Cantos*. After that, you were on your own. But that was OK, right? Figure it out! Pound was an autodidact. Sam was an autodidact. Surely, I could be one too. Weirdly, it felt like an exclusive club. I was glad to be allowed in. All I had to do was keep reading.

The summer of our internship, Barb and I printed a chapbook of my poems, *Man in a Rowboat*, and Copper Canyon published it. One of the poems had an epigraph from one of Pound's troubadours, Arnaut Daniel. I sent a copy to James Laughlin, the New Directions publisher. Or at least I think I did. Somehow a copy landed in his hand and he sent me a nice note: "I thought I'd heard the muse had struck somewhere else in the family. Thank you. You are well on your way to becoming . . ." I forget what exactly. A poet, maybe. Laughlin was my father's first cousin. They grew up in side-by-side mansions on Woodland Road in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I grew up one street away.

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About the time we finished up in Missoula, 1980 or so, I visited my parents in Pittsburgh not in the big house I'd grown up in but in the smaller, Fifties-modern house they'd recently moved to four doors up the street. For some reason Jay Laughlin, as the family called him, or J., as he signed himself, was there as was his wife, Ann Resor Laughlin. I remember the five of us—Mom, Dad, J., Ann and me—standing in a line in the living room, the grownups' back to the light coming from the windows that looked out onto the little patio and hedge. In retrospect it feels like a reception line. I knew then about New Directions, had been assigned various of their books in English classes and in my Pound phase had read a dozen more. I knew vaguely that Ann's family had some connections in Jackson Hole, which she mentioned on learning of our Wyoming connections.



J. was perfectly cordial and watching my mom look at him—six feet five or so, bemused, genuinely interested—I understood why the guy had been a chick magnet all his life. Then the phone rang and it was Jack Heinz—maybe J.'s oldest friend in Pittsburgh or anywhere. He took the call in the den. Jack! I heard him say in a voice deep with affection.

Both were grandsons and great grandsons of tycoons—Laughlins in steel, Heinzes in pickles—and they loved to ski and travel together, flying sometimes to ski areas in Jack's private plane. Out of that skiing energy, J. was among the founders of Alta, on the Wasatch Front outside Salt Lake City, in 1939; skiing and the ski business was just one of his lifelong pursuits.

Other passions included publishing Pound, W.C. Williams, Tennessee Williams, Henry Miller, Dylan Thomas, Rexroth, Levertov, Merton, Ferlinghetti and hundreds more, and keeping them all in print at the best and longest-lived publishing house of avant-garde books in the U.S.A., carrying on an international social life and—oh yes—writing poems.

My introduction to those was *In Another Country*, the small, nearly square book *City Lights* brought out in 1978, when J. was 64, collecting poems from the previous 40 years. There are not many, they're all short, they spring off the page like bugs off a hotplate and mean what they say. When J. left Harvard in 1934 to spend months with Pound in Rapallo at what J. later dubbed the Ezuversity, Pound supposedly told the young man his poems weren't worth much; instead of writing poetry he should use his father's money to publish poets—which he did. And he seems to have taken Pound's judgment of his own work to heart. He published few poems up to the time of *In Another Country*. Pound died in 1972; in a complicated way he was an extra father for J., who needed one. But J. may also have needed Pound to die before he could set the old man's judgement aside. For the rest of his life, J. wrote and published more and more: poems all over the place, essays, personal accounts, more small-press slim books and a fat autobiography in verse he called in correspondence "my MEEE-moirs" and sometimes "my auto-bug-offery;" it was published after his death as *Byways*.

My copy of *In Another Country* is inscribed only "To Tom from JL." I may have acquired it in Port Townsend; one of those three summers J. gave a talk in the lecture theater. I remember him telling how his father

gave him \$100,000 in 1936 to start a publishing business—some of the listeners hissed softly and booed at this. It didn't faze him. Or I may have asked him to sign it that time In Pittsburgh, the only face-to-face conversation I had with him.

Near the beginning of that book is a brief poem, "The Generations," about J.'s father, my great-uncle Hughart Laughlin, who was married to my grandfather's sister. The narrator tells how the father gives him some advice—drink three glasses of water before going to bed drunk—and adds how

he walked up and down the  
room crying peccavi peccavi  
in deep anguish because he  
had been with the girls and  
thought he had broken my  
mother's heart . . .

These glimpses were far more than I'd ever heard about the man. Uncle Hughart died 12 years before I was born. In the family hardly anyone talked about him.

But his house! It was large, old and full of daylight: Staircase with two landings, Persian carpets, an Ethiopian throne facing the foot of the stairs, long drawing room, grand piano with a Russian chess set on it, another room beyond that from which a not-so-secret staircase led to a bedroom upstairs. My great-Aunt Marjory, J.'s mother, lived alone in this house, with servants. The ceilings were high, the rooms large; Uncle Hughart's absence, I now realize, was everywhere.

Next door was another mansion, very different. This was the house my father and his seven brothers and sisters grew up in, so it was full of activity and stories. My father was the second oldest; he was born in 1913 and thus a year older than J. "Manic-depressive," was the word my dad used about Uncle Hughart; "alcoholic" would more likely have been used by my mother. I knew he'd died not long before "the war" everyone still called it then as though there'd never be another—World War II. How he died was never spoken of, so as I got older I assumed a car crash, or maybe suicide. When I was a child Uncle Hughart's Parker shotgun with the side-by-side barrels, engraved with his initials above the trigger guard, stood in my grandfather's gun rack.

McNiven, J.'s biographer, describes Hughart Laughlin as bipolar. J. adored him and all his life carried memories of sundrenched outings, including their voyage in a wooden cabin cruiser down the inland waterway of Florida. J.'s father was not interested in the family steel business—Jones & Laughlin was the fourth largest steel company in the U.S., never absorbed by U.S. Steel—and spent little time in it after he was about 40. He was gone a lot on escapades and as the years went by, was more and more often under professional care. He died, I learned only from McNiven, early in 1938 of blood poisoning from an infection from a fishhook that had caught in his leg. I wonder if J. ever really got over that.

My dad had only two stories about J., whom he seemed to like, but in a distant way. In the late 1930s the two cousins were both in Cambridge, J. still dawdling his way through as a Harvard undergraduate and Dad at Harvard Law. J. had already started *New Directions* by then. Dad went with him to a printer, for the first look at the cover of a book. It showed a huge eye, was all that Dad remembered. This seemed to me very avant-garde, very *New Directions* when Dad told me about it. It had to have been *The Cosmological Eye*, ND's first book by Henry Miller, published 1939. Dad's second story was about the time J. brought Delmore Schwartz to dinner at Woodland Road, and Delmore managed to offend pretty much everyone. Except J., who was perhaps expecting it and didn't seem to mind. My dad never told long stories.

My father died in 1986. My mom got a sympathy note from J., saying my dad was "the sweetest of the bunch," meaning the turbulent crowd of cousins next door. I agreed, and for that kind note am still willing to forgive J. pretty much anything.

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In 1933, after his freshman year at Harvard, J. spent the summer in Europe, including stays with friends in Munich and a stay in Vienna before dropping down to Italy, where he first met Pound in Rapallo, but only for a day or two. J. that summer wrote a long letter to his aunt Leila Laughlin Carlisle in Connecticut, the woman who knew him best and with whom he was closer than any other of the many women in his life. He told her it looked like this guy Hitler was doing a pretty good job in Germany, bringing order to a nation that had been in a chaotic mess. Hitler had

come to power the previous winter, after the Reichstag fire. Anything she might have heard about Jews being treated badly simply wasn't true, J. wrote, though Communists now had something to worry about.

The following year J. returned to Rapallo and spent months there soaking up everything he could from the charismatic master of the Ezuversity. What an education that must have been!—and not just in poetry and culture but love, sex and food. J. had an affair with a young Italian woman, Lola Avena; the title poem in *In Another Country* is about it. Pound by then was absorbed by the economist C.H. Douglas's ideas of social credit—the not unreasonable idea, as far as I've been able to understand it, that keeping interest rates low or at zero will allow a nation and a people to thrive. And Mussolini, Pound thought, was already doing a great job of making that happen. The problem was that in Pound's mind lending money at interest—what he called *Usura*—was all wrapped up with conspiring, malevolent Jews who were out to rule the world and who made mountains of money off every war fought. How much of this, along with languages, sun, sea, love and Pound's long reading lists did J. soak up in those months? I've never been clear.

McNiven writes that in the Thirties, J. was “already moving away from the knee-jerk antisemitism of his class” in Pittsburgh; the traces of it in his letters gradually subside. Pound, however, was definitely moving in the opposite direction. One good hint of J.'s sensibility is in a short story, “Night Winds Rising,” published in 1935 in the *Harkness Hoot*, a Yale undergraduate magazine. In the story a young, tall American in a seaside town in Italy is attracted to the wife of a loud local bar-frequenting extrovert. Mussolini himself has just been driven through the town—a big deal—but driven with a reckless disregard for any person or animal that might have been by the road. It's night; cadets in white uniforms, drunk, are walking and singing in the streets. The young man goes for a long walk in the darkness in order, you realize by the end, to have somewhere to put his feelings for the woman. Palpable but completely unspoken is the threat of violence everywhere in the night. My point is, J. was already, at 21 years old, aware of the violence that underlay—underlies—Italian Fascism. Pound was not, or if he was, he welcomed it.

In January 1941 Pound made the first of the hundreds of radio broadcasts, first from Rome and later, after Rome fell to the Allies and the Germans invaded the North, from Bergamo. He attacked Churchill,

Roosevelt and Jews; he praised *Mein Kampf*; he demanded bookstores be required to stock *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. “I think it might be a good thing,” he said on the air in April 1943, “to hang Roosevelt and a few hundred thousand yids IF you can do it by due legal process.” The following month he said, “Until England and America delouse, and get rid of their Jew gangs, there is no place for either England or the United States in the new world at all.” The Pound archives at Yale contain receipts for 195 payments to Pound for the broadcasts totaling around 250,000 lire, about \$207,000 today.

For years I wondered what J. did in the war, as I knew he hadn’t served. My father, all four of his brothers and two of his brothers-in-law served in the Navy (though Dad, a father by then with two young children, did not enlist until the spring of ’44); the third brother-in-law served in the Army. McNiven informs us that J. applied for a 4F medical deferment on account of his eyesight—but was turned down. By then he’d been living for several years on his Aunt Leila’s estate in Norfolk, Connecticut, running New Directions from there and from an office in Manhattan. Lelia may have made some phone calls, McNiven implies. The Norfolk draft board left him alone.

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Later that day in Pittsburgh in 1980 after our conversation with J. and Ann at my parents’ house, I rode along on the trip to the airport. J., with his long legs, was in front; my dad drove. Ann and I were in back. We swung past the Phipps Conservatory, with its statue of Andrew Carnegie’s favorite poet, Robert Burns, in knee breeches and tam o’ shanter. “Bobby Burns,” I said, hoping to impress J. No luck there. “Mmm,” he said. So I asked him the question that was really on my mind: Was Pound crazy when he returned to the states after the war? No doubt about it, J. said. “Oh yes. He was crazy.”

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In the early 1960s, J. visited William Carlos Williams at Williams’s home in Rutherford, N.J. Bill, as his friends called him, had suffered a series of strokes through the 1950s and by this time napped often and could walk only with difficulty. Williams had spent his entire working

life as a family doctor, writing all his poems, essays, fiction and plays at night. Unlike Pound's often arcane and archaic grandiosity, Williams's poems are filled with clear American speech charged with perception and thought. He'd been among the early stars at New Directions, but when ND published his novel, *White Mule* in 1937 to good reviews, J. was off skiing. When the first print run ran out, J. wasn't around to order a second while demand was hot. Substantial sales were lost. Bill nursed a grudge, and fifteen years later when he retired from doctoring and needed money he approached Bennet Cerf at Random House about publishing his books. J. felt stabbed in the back and began nursing a grudge of his own.

J. later published a short story about his meeting with Williams called, "A Visit." The names are changed. The point of view is that of a tall publisher, McDonald; the poet, a lifelong lawyer for the poor instead of a doctor for the poor, is Homer C. Evans. The story turns on McDonald's remorse and his deep need to restore the old friendship—an opportunity he nearly blows, but doesn't. But it also includes a quick, shrewd conversation about Pound.

Talking casually about inventing modern poetry, Evans says,

'We had to find out some way to do it for ourselves, some way so that it would sound like us. Ezra just dug in the backyard. The best ear, but he didn't want to listen to people talking any over here [in the U.S., apparently.] It was always music to him, hearing the music in all those old languages he boned up on. I don't think he knows yet what I was up to—the arrogant bastard! But you've got to hand it to him . . .'

Evans shook his head. He was still rubbing one hand with the other.

Just gets me every time I reread it, the offhand accuracy of those remarks: "Ezra just dug in the backyard" and "those old languages he boned up on," as though Pound's passions were only archeological. Latin, Greek, Provençal, even Chinese were artifacts dug from a past he was so confident would prove instructive to the world. Remember Canto XLV, the famous *Usura* canto? From the mid-1930s?

With usura hath no man a house of good stone  
 each block cut smooth and well fitting  
 that design might cover their face,  
 with usura hath no man a painted paradise on church wall  
*harpes et luz*

## THE LIMBERLOST REVIEW

or where virgin receiveth message  
and halo projects from incision  
with usura  
seeth no man Gonzaga his heirs and his concubines  
no picture is made to endure nor to live with  
but it is made to sell and sell quickly . . .

Powerful, powerful music: It's among his greatest poems. And the argument the music builds, line after line, that lending money at high interest harms good work and good life, would be entirely reasonable *if we didn't know where it led him*.

"Fuck biography," said an old friend of our daughter's when visiting her and us in Casper last year. We'd been talking about that old, old question of whether, when you learn of a poet's meannesses and failings it should change how you read the poem. "The art's what's important," she said. "The art needs to stand on its own." Does it? I wondered.

During the time of Pound's long silence and depression after his return to Italy, Allen Ginsberg visited Pound and Olga Rudge in Venice. This was the fall of 1967. Conversations stretched over many lunches; Ginsberg wrote long journal notes afterward. When he tells Pound that Pound's work provided "[p]raxis of perception, ground I could walk on," for himself and so many other young poets, Pound replies that his own work is "a mess . . . stupidity and ignorance all the way through."

Ginsberg brings up an exchange about prosody he'd had with Williams in 1961, "and anyway, Williams said, 'Pound has a mystical ear'—did he ever tell you that? 'No,' said Pound, 'he never said that to me,' smiling almost shyly but pleased—eyes averted, but smiling almost curious and childlike."

*The Cantos*, Ginsberg tells their maker, are a "record of mind-flux consciousness," and their "irritations against Buddhists, Taoists and Jews—fitted into place" in that record and its drama. "The Paradise is in the desire" to set the world right, "not the imperfection of accomplishment." But Pound quickly flips Ginsberg's compliment on its head:

"The intention was bad—that's the trouble—anything I've done has been an accident—any good has been spoiled by my intentions—the preoccupation with the irrelevant and stupid things." Pound, Ginsberg adds "looked directly into my eyes while pronouncing the word 'intention.'"

Finally, Ginsberg—as a "Buddhist Jew," as he puts it, asks Pound to accept his blessing. Will he accept it? "He hesitated, opening his mouth

like an old turtle. ‘I do,’ he said, ‘but my worst mistake was the stupid suburban prejudice of anti-Semitism, all along, that spoiled everything.’”

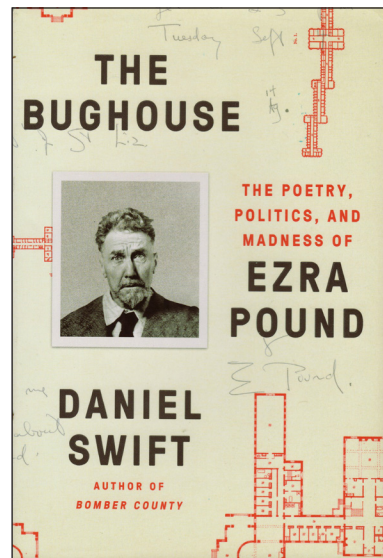
Sometime later Pound adds “I found out after seventy years I was not a lunatic but a moron.” And as for Williams, “Williams was in touch with human feelings . . .’ [Pound] said, nodding his head slightly in disgust with himself.”

One wonders if Ginsberg, with his peculiarly expansive, hairy kindness might have been the only interlocutor who could have elicited such frank and intimate confessions. The “suburban prejudice” remark has been quoted since by biographer after biographer as evidence of Pound’s remorse late in his life: Everyone seems to want to forgive him his madness and forgive him for his viciousness. But when I read Ginsberg’s account again in the wake of *The Bughouse*, Pound’s remarks seemed not sad, pitiable, lovable and depressed; they were just accurate. His stupid intentions did ruin what was good. And, we now see better than ever, the stinking residue they left continues to matter in the world.

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*The Bughouse* was published in the fall of 2017. In August of that year, well past when the book must have gone to press, white supremacists with tiki torches marched past Confederate statues in Charlottesville chanting “Jews will not replace us,” and our president said their number included many fine people. In January 2018, I read the book by the condo pool, and my very old, very longstanding feelings about Pound began to flip.

*The Guardian*, in February 2018, ran a long piece headlined “The fascist movement that has brought Mussolini back to the mainstream.” The article traces the history of Italian fascism since World War II and details the origins of CasaPound. The casa of CasaPound was a long-unoccupied state-owned building in Rome, taken over by squatters in December 2003. Posters of Mussolini,





Nietzsche, and Oswald Mosely, the British pre-World War II fascist, went up inside, along with odder, intentionally confusing choices: Che Guevara, George Orwell, Kerouac. The movement included a punk band whose fans whipped each other with belts during shows, gained friends in its gritty neighborhood by serving the poor—as long as they were ethnically Italian. In 2013 and again five years later, CPI fielded a single candidate in parliamentary elections. The second time around the party won a portion of the vote six times as high as the first, but still less than one percent. *The Washington Post* ran a story in May 2019, “Why Italy’s media fixates on CasaPound, an extreme-right party with a racist agenda.” Partly because its agenda is not only racist, is the answer—the group also offers “disability assistance and health counseling”—and partly because they’re just so good at “complying with the logistics of news production” and are thereby able to “ensure that fringe or extreme ideas drift into the mainstream.”

The most recent reporting in English I’ve been able to find about CasaPound is a *Reuters* piece from June 2020, which notes that a judge had ordered the seizure of the six-floor building and the eviction of the dozen or so families living there. The mayor of Rome declared the decision a victory, but there was no word on when or how the order would be enforced. Bureaucracy in Rome moves slowly.

In Pittsburgh, the side-by-side mansions, now part of the college across Woodland Road, still look much like they did sixty years ago. But the world beyond continues to shift. Just a quarter mile away at the Tree of Life synagogue on a sabbath morning in November 2018, Robert Bowers, a Jew-hating white supremacist terrorist from Ione, Pennsylvania, murdered 11 people and wounded six more.

And on Jan. 6, 2021, a right-wing crowd of 20,000 or so laid siege to the U.S. Capitol and 800 of them invaded it, chasing a terrified Congress out of its chambers, roaming the halls and hallways with big U.S. and Confederate flags and calling for the blood of Nancy Pelosi and Mike Pence. Congress to its great credit came back into session that evening and voted to accept the states’ counts of the electoral vote: Yes, Trump lost. But too many of them, including one of our two senators from Wyoming, voted the against that acceptance.

These events completed the flip in my feelings about Pound. We talk about fringe ideas, but we forget that even fringe ideas have consequences. Before learning of CasaPound, I could leave the old man’s politics in the dust and not think more about it. January 6 raised that zombie corpse up

out of the dirt again in American politics, waving its bloody rags. Fascism likes to appear to be on the march when in fact it's on the creep—and harder to see. Our job is to make sure we don't allow Pound's great poetry to obscure our sight. ■

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