



E-ASIA
university of oregon libraries

<http://e-asia.uoregon.edu>

EZRA POUND AND HIS ITALIAN CRITICS

Angela Jung Palandri

Reprinted from *Tamkang Review*
Vol. III, No. 2 • October, 1972

EZRA POUND AND HIS ITALIAN CRITICS

Angela Jung Palandri

Since no consensus has yet been reached regarding Pound's ultimate position in the literary Hall of Fame, and since the personal destiny and the literary career of the poet have been intricately linked with Italy and the Italians, critical opinions on Pound voiced by prominent Italian authors require special attention of Pound scholars. Clearly a poet of Pound's stature should not be limited to one national literature. (Indeed Pound had tried to broaden the scope of comparative literature long before academic institutions recognized its relevancy.) As Donald Gallup has deftly demonstrated in "Section D" of his *Bibliography of Ezra Pound* (London, 1963), Pound's writings had already been translated into twenty languages years ago. Significantly, of the 246 items belonging to the section of "Translations," 113 are listed under the sub-heading "Italy."

That Pound was infatuated with Italy and Italian literature before he became an expatriate in 1908 is a well-known fact. Although he lived in London for twelve years (1908-1920), and in Paris for a considerably briefer period (1920-1924), to make Italy his permanent home and settled in Rapallo in 1924. The major part of *The Cantos* and most of his mature writings were produced during his years in Italy. It was not until 1945, after six months' incarceration in the Disciplinary Training Camp of the U.S. Army near Pisa, that Pound was flown back to the United States to stand trial for treason on account of his shortwave radio broadcast from Rome during war. And after thirteen years of confinement at St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C. he returned to Italy in 1958, in the custody of his wife. He probably will spend his remaining years in Italy, dividing

page 42

his time between Rapallo and Venice.

Although Pound made his literary debut in London in his early twenties, it was in Venice where his first volume of poetry, *A Lume Spento* (April, 1908), was printed. With its title derived from *Purgatorio* III, 131, the book could be regarded as an open acknowledgment of Dante, whose *Commedia* was to become a model for his own epic, *The Cantos*¹ Aside from Dante, Pound has special reverence for Cavalcanti. Professor Glauco Cambon in his

Dante's Presence in American Literature (Minneapolis, 1969) comments: "With Guido Cavalcanti and *Stilnovisti*, the Provençals seem to form for Pound, a Dantesque constellation—which sounds historically plausible enough, and even more so stylistically" (p. 129). Viewed from the various aspects stated above, Italy had provided Pound with a congenial environment in which to carry on his literary and critical activity, and with historical source materials, intellectual stimuli, and stylistic models with which to create his *magnum opus*. Italy nurtured his literary development; Italy was also the cause of his personal tragedy. I should like to suggest that Italy was hubris as well as nemesis for Pound. (The fact that Pound had considered his use of the Rome radio as a private platform from which he could propagandize his ideas to save the human race is an excessive pride abhorrent to the gods on Olympus as well as those in Washington.)

If Italy played an ambivalent role in Pound's life, Pound's attitude toward Italy is likewise ambivalent. To be sure, he admitted the early influence of Dante and those who form the "Dantesque constellation." But after the Trecento, with the possible exception of Leopardi, whom he considered "splendid" (*Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige, London, 1950, p. 61), he showed little interest in Italian literature, and almost none in the contemporary Italian poetry. His judgment of Italy and the Italians was one of generalizations and grossly unfair. In a letter to the Editor of *New England Weekly* (1934) Pound mentioned that there were three Italys existing side by side—i.e. the Italy of Mussolini and his technicians which was materially and economically up to date (1934); the Italian "intelligentia," or literati who seemed to be living still in 1890's; the Italian university faculties or the "cultural Italy" which were even more backward

page 43

(dated to 1860). (See *Letters of Ezra Pound, 1896-1947*, TS, No. 1127, Yale Library.) It is curious that Pound, who had almost an unerring sense in detecting literary talent, could be so misled by Mussolini, even though Pound was not "alone among artists in his admiration of 'strong men,'" as Dr. Thomas S. Szasz, a noted psychiatrist observed.²

Undoubtedly some of Pound's Italian critics have overreacted to his attitude toward Italy and Italian literature. On the whole, however, either because of their geographical or spiritual propinquity to Pound, or because they are heirs to a great cultural and humanistic tradition, most of them tend to ignore personal or ideological differences and have made lasting contributions, through their particular insight and critical acumen, toward the thought-provoking issues of Poundian criticism. According to Professor Agostino Lombardo, who edited a special issue of the *Sewanee Review* LXVIII (Summer 1960), entitled "Italian Criticism of American Literature," Pound's "own exaggerated success in Italy" before the war was due to the "Introduction" of Carlo Linati, author of *Scrittori Anglo-Americani d'oggi* (1932, 2nd ed. 1943), and to the "translations of Pound's poetry which accompanied it (p. 355). And Lombardo quotes in part Linati's description of Pound:

Pound is a dilettante and a scholar, a Classicist and an Imagist, a lover of the most incompatible historical and spiritual climes and one of the most audacious free verse writers; he is as strong in

the science of the line as a professor of metrics, and a clever mixer as fragmentary as an Alexandrian, at times as hermetic as Rimbaud, or as harmonious as a Pre-Raphaelite Notwithstanding this, this "Voluptuary of Diversity" reveals throughout his work a remarkably frank nature full of enthusiasms. His restlessness and the ease with which he transplants his Muse into different times and climes betray the Yankee in him, the frequenter of wide-open spaces, of violent movement. There is still, I should say, in him the same need to embrace the world which fired the genius of Walt Whitman, the thirst for immensity descended by degrees in the thinner and disenchanting blood of this son of the crisis of democracy . . . (pp. 355-56).

Such is the manner in which Pound was first introduced to the cultural world of Italy. But what about Pound after his tragic fall following the defeat of the Fascist regime? Speaking of American poetry in general, Lombardo sums up in his own

page 44

"Introduction":

... in the period after the second world war Italian culture has taken an ever-growing interest in American poetry, not only that of Whitman, Poe, Sandburg and Masters, but also of Melville. and Emily Dickinson, and—much more—of Eliot and Pound Certainly it is possible to make a number of reservations as to the way in which American poetry has been and often is examined, above all in connection with the indiscriminate way in which certain poets (Ezra Pound is a case in point) have been exalted ... (pp. 372-73; italics are mine).

As to be expected, the essay "Pound and Italian Literature" by G.N.G. Orsini, selected by Lombardo for the special issue of *Sewanee Review* is far from exalting Pound. Orsini concludes his article with this diatribe: "The best description of Pound among the Italian poets is that of the famed bull in a China shop" (p. 472). Such reaction is only natural since Pound had commented that "the best period of Italian poetry ends in the year 1321" (*Spirit of Romance*, London, 1910, p. 192). The most relevant point Orsini raised in his essay concerns with Pound's inaccuracy and lack of scholarship in his translations and annotations of Cavalcanti, a charge that had been forestalled by T. S. Eliot in his Introduction to *Ezra Pound: Selected Poems* (London, 1928):

One of Pound's most indubitable claims to genuine originality is, I believe, his revivification of the Provençal and the early Italian poetry. The people who tire of Pound's Provence and Pound's Italy are those who cannot see Provence and medieval Italy except as museum pieces, which is not how Pound sees them, or how he makes others see them ... Any scholar can see Arnaut Daniel or Guido Cavalcanti as literary figures; only Pound can see them as living beings (pp. xii-xiii).

Another defender of Pound against his alleged inaccuracy in utilizing his source material is an Italian scholar, Giuseppe Galigani, whose essay "Montis Pascuorum" in the *Yale Literary Magazine* (December 1958) explains Pound's way of using his sources: "He seems to be leafing through his documents with the quick and skilled hand of the specialist, neglecting secondary sections, summarizing, stressing what he feels to be important" (p. 19).

Judging from the Italian writers just cited, it is not difficult to surmise that Pound studies in Italy have been as lively as those in the United States, so much so that Professor Lombardo

page 45

comments in a note to his essay on Pound: "A Pound legend is developing, and whoever fails to believe this legend completely ... risks being considered a reactionary" (Lombardo, p. 10).³

Many of the Italian critics of Pound have an excellent command of the English language. But since they write mainly for an Italian audience, few take the trouble to translate their writings into English. Consequently, aside from the essay by Orsini, which was translated for *Sewanee Review* by Barbara Melchiori Arnett, and that of Galigani, which was originally written in English, rarely are works on Pound written by noted Italian authors available in English. Among those accessible in English are "Pagan and Magic Elements in Ezra Pound's Works" by Boris de Rachewiltz, which is "a substantially condensed but at the same time somewhat amplified version" of his *L'Elemento Magico in Ezra Pound* (Milan, 1965) published in Eva Hesse's anthology, *New Approaches to Ezra Pound*, (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1969), and Alfredo Rizzardi's "Mask of Experience: a Chapter upon Ezra Pound's *Pisan Cantos*.." The purpose of this essay is to introduce Pound's Italian critics through translation to readers who are not familiar with the Italian language. A preliminary search yielded a vast amount of material. After careful weeding I have concentrated only on those that might have something to add to the current Pound scholarship. Without taking sides in the polemics, I am inclined to agree with Nemi D'Agostino's dictum:

Naturally, a true critical judgment will not come from the enthusiasts who place themselves before *The Cantos* as before a sacred text, nor those who let themselves be convinced of a mechanical interpretation modeled on the mechanical quality of the poem, but from those who succeed first of all in distinguishing between intentions and results and then tracing the latter, as if tracing a face behind a mask, the true Poundian spirit (D'Agostino, pp. 23-24).

But Italian critics, like critics of any other nation, are not expected to be completely free from personal bias, they are discussed here to represent a broad spectrum of opinions.

Agostino Lombardo, who uses John J. Espey's study, *Ezra Pound's Mauberley* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1955) as a springboard to launch into the dangerous water of labelling Pound "The Last Decadent" (which is the title of his essay), states that "the

page 46

entire disposition of *Mauberley* is typical of decadentism." Lombardo's essay, according to its author, has stirred up a great deal of controversy among Italian critics, mainly because his opponents fail to understand that the term "decadentism," when applied to art, possesses the positive as well as negative functions (see Lombardo fn. 17 & 19). What he intends to demonstrate is its aesthetic usage among writers of fin-de-siècle France, characterized by an irrational and aesthetic vision of life, and by a consequent

introspection of all aspects of man, and above all, by the sense of dissatisfaction with the present society in the moral sense.

John Espey in his "source hunting" for Pound's *Mauberley* draws the conclusion that much of the poem derives from French sources, especially from Flaubert's *Salammbô* and Gautier's *Émaux et Camées*. In agreement with these findings, Lombardo considers *Mauberley* "The epitome of the decadent experience ... since the feeling for the art and the defense of the artist are ... the most sincere and profound traits of Ezra Pound." Moreover, he claims that Pound has never overcome the conceptual and formal limits of decadentism, for *The Cantos* are only an amplification of *Mauberley*, dealing only superficially with a more complex problem. He finds the world in *The Cantos* still that of art for art's sake, and their protagonist still the artist, not man in general (Lombardo, p. 7).

In spite of the "positive function" attributed to "decadentism"—purification of poetic language, deepening of the musical value of words, study of techniques, and the intransigent defense of poetry—it remains derogatory, especially in the English language, as a literary term. Among those who object to Lombardo's generalizations that Pound is essentially a decadent poet is Giovanni Sechi, whose essay, "Decadence and Avantgarde in Ezra Pound," is a clear refutation of Lombardo's interpretation. Sechi goes into definition and classification of the two terms and asserts that "decadence and avantgarde, both last descendants of romanticism, find mutual justification, and they frequently borrow from each other forms and characteristics (Sechi, p. 2). While Pound exhibits certain traits of the French decadents in his search for poetic language and its perfect form, he is essentially an avantgarde of

page 47

contemporary poetry. Sechi, moreover, finds debatable Lombardo's assertion that art and the artist are the main themes of *Mauberley*. Neither *Mauberley* nor *The Cantos* can be regarded as a decadent work, since, according to Sechi's definition, "decadente" is above all a matter of style. And Pound's poetry is far removed from formalism. Instead, Sechi sees Pound among such avantgarde notables as Joyce, Schonberg, Kafka, and Picasso, who broke new paths for contemporary art, burning themselves in the attempt to overcome the uncertainties of our age and to regenerate a language that has lost its creative vigor (Sechi, p. 17).

Nemi D'Agostino, whom Lombardo cites as one who shares his views about Pound's "decadentism," regards Pound's theme of "merciless beauty" typical of the decadent strain as the artist in search of the absolute. He finds also that the "spiritual roots" of *The Cantos* lay in Pound's "anti-romantic, decadent architectonic will," and that the first three cantos published in 1917 belonged to his "germinal aesthetic phase." By 1925, however, when Pound published *A Draft of XVI Cantos* (in which the 1917 version of the first three cantos was revised), Pound has found the definitive language and the "ideogrammic method" with which to write *The Cantos* (D'Agostino, p. 3).

Differing from those critics who categorically condemn the stylistic and technical difficulties of *The Cantos*, D'Agostino observes that the "convulsive, fractured and atonal

style is the essence of Pound's language;" that what Pound formulated as the "ideogrammic method" is in essence a "revival of various constructive expedients elaborated by avantgarde poetic tendencies" (D'Agostino, pp. 6-8, Passim) D'Agostino finds that the "failure of *The Cantos*" as an epic poem lies in a deep-seated contradiction between the poet's intention and its expressed results. In other words, he claims that Pound's subjectively contrived technique (i.e. the ideogrammic method) does not seem to carry out Pound's didactic intentions for his poem, but ironically, in the *Pisan Cantos*, when his "programme" is defeated and the poet retreats into his "true spiritual reality, the aesthetic world of the *réaliora* against his original intentions, then, and only then, does the poem achieve the harmony between style and feeling: "The more Pound violates traditional forms and principles of 'poetic purity,' the more the inner tension

page 48

of the material forms a continuum and gives a unity to that which seems formless." D'Agostino sees the structure of each of the *Pisan Cantos* repeating the unintentional but real structure of the work—a succession of tormented efforts toward the concrete restoration of a pan-aesthetic order, which is defeated each time in "an instant of beatific, mythico-sacral illumination" (D'Agostino, pp. 11-12). While D'Agostino's evaluation of *The Cantos* is on the whole equivocal, it offers certain acute observations and shrewd analyses of *The Cantos*.

An exuberant presenter of *The Cantos* with what Lombardo terms "excessive enthusiasm" is Alfredo Rizzardi, whose translation of the *Pisan Cantos* has gone through at least three printings since its first publication in 1952. Rizzardi frequently soars into song when he praises Pound's poetry in the Introduction to his own translation, *Canti Pisani di Ezra Pound* (Bologna, 1952, 1962, 1964). In his essay, which is in part his "Introduction," Rizzardi defends *The Cantos* against all of Pound's adverse critics with plausible justifications and detailed explanations. In contrasting the early cantos with the *Pisan* section he claims that in the early cantos the discourse and the song are juxtaposed, whereas in the *Pisan* series, there is a fusion of atmosphere produced by a constantly taut state of mind (Rizzardi, p. 6).

After reviewing the various literary influences and sources that went into the making of *The Cantos* and the multiple themes that the *Pisan Cantos* reiterate, Rizzardi comments:

So burning and pure is Pound's attempt to redeem and defend the human substance, twisted and forgotten in a world of commerce, that we cannot resist seeing him in the guise of a modern Don Quixote wearing a tragic armor of errors—errors first of all against himself—and of grotesque generosity. But so human is Don Quixote that we resort to laughter to avoid feeling humiliated (Rizzardi, pp 17-18).

While he does not subscribe to Pound's economic theories, nor condone Pound's alleged anti-Semitism, he calls the *Pisan Cantos* the most enduring poetry, "a poetry that time, which sweeps away and dissolves man's troubles in the sea of centuries, will preserve like a votive temple or a very ancient oak" (Rizzardi, p. 29).

Although no critic can speak of Pound without referring to *The Cantos*, his prose works have received due attention in Mario

page 49

Boselli's essay. It aims mainly to introduce and interpret to Italian readers Pound's Imagist credo (citing Pound's concepts of rhythm, symbols, technique and form), which has become too familiar to the sophisticated students of contemporary English and American literature. He delves at the same time, however, into the less obvious sources of Pound's early poetics, and observes that much of it is of "symbolist origin" (Boselli, p. 2). He explains that while Pound's critical ideas appear pragmatic on the surface, they show a certain Bergsonian influence of intuitionistic relationships. Part of the difficulty of understanding Pound's critical theories, says Boselli, lies in his constant search "for exactness and precision, for the graphic but not naturalistic 'presentations' of the object, for concreteness of the symbol." But this search is not born of a "unitary vision of reality" for his vision is fragmentary and his unity is made up of "fragments, coherent to the extent that nothing in it is left to chance and . . . everything bears the traces of an alert and constant observation, of an insight, based on personal experience" (Beselli, p. 10). While Pound's concept of literature is autonomous, and while literature occupies the highest position in his hierarchy of values, he believes in the interdependence of literature and society, and that literature cannot be divorced from language and history. Even though Boselli does not say so, he implies that *The Cantos* is an explicit illustration of Pound's later poetic and critical theories.

A highly specialized discussion of Pound's *recherche* for metrics is given by Alfredo Giuliani, a practicing Italy poet. In his essay Giuliani insists that compared with Eliot, Pound's metrical orientation was more complex, more uncertain, and richer in prospect, because of the widely varied ingredients he had amassed on his poetic palette. In reconstructing the course of Pound's quest for a new quantitative metric, Giuliani examines a series of Pound's early essays in search of his metrical principles. He discovers that once Pound understood the inner law of "vers libre," he was not concerned with formulating rules. From his professional experience Giuliani informs us that the "quantitative" verse of which Pound speaks is "nothing but a component of quality, an 'ear' which gives form to the tendency of modern verse to epitomize in itself all of the preceding systems." He acknowledges that as "teacher,"

page 50

Pound's purpose has been "precisely that of reviving the 'art of verse' at a time when . . . the poetic figures of a metrical metamorphosis, undiscernible to most, began to stir" (Giuliani, pp. 8-9).

In a broader topic, "Poetry and Civilization," Claudio Gorlier defends Pound's role as translator against those who charge him with dilettantism and lack of scholarship. Gorlier sees Pound as a "catalyst in a process of cultural *dégagement*." Or, as he puts it more dramatically: "Pound shifts the Pillars of Hercules of the universally accepted concept of tradition, rendering the concept dynamic and effective." Further on he compares Pound's

position in twentieth-century English literature to that of Wyatt and Surrey in their time, because "he uncovers hidden monuments, not to admire them or to place them in a museum, but to open an ideal dialogue with them (Gorlier, p. 3).

Pound's goal as translator and poet, according to Gorlier, was to free a fettered language and to restore the movement and the condition of music (or of dance) to poetry. In answer to Pound's harsh critics such as Orsini and Praz, who made great sport of Pound's version of Cavalcanti, Gorlier offers the following justification: "Obviously, Pound's Cavalcanti is not at all literal, and precisely because of this it remains indisputably Cavalcanti, not a pedestrian 'rendition' or paraphrase" (Gorlier, p. 5). He is in agreement with Hugh Kenner that for Pound to translate is to perform a critical act. Through this poetic alchemy Pound finds the precise meaning of Cavalcanti which "others had either not understood or had misinterpreted" (Gorlier, p. 7). To Pound an art is vital only so long as it is interpretative. Gorlier finds that Pound interprets his authors when he translates their works, and he interprets life and history when he writes his own poetry.

If in Gorlier we see Pound's affable defender, in Mario Praz we find his scathing critic. In his "Two Notes on Ezra Pound," Praz, with his disarming informal air and brilliant flair, draws an exaggerated caricature of Pound to counterbalance Linati's over-enthusiasm for the poet:

Bohemian, capricious—those are the proper terms, are they not, Linati—an Apollo from an Offenbach operetta, with tawny goatee, flashing eyes, a Robespierre shirt, this American of remote (but very vivid) Irish origins [sic] (who according to legend, is a Jew), very

Page 51

likeable, an able creator of English verse, but a stammerer of Romance languages. . . . There is a Poundian world that perhaps only Linati could thoroughly describe in a page of picturesque prose (Praz, p. 3).

After presenting a kaleidoscopic review of Pound's career as poet and critic and of his life in London and Rapallo, Praz concludes that only two of Pound's poems, "Provencia Deserta" and "The Gypsy," merit "marginal mention in a crash course in world literature," because in them Pound has "found a voice that is truly his," while all the rest are "mimicry." Praz' "scathing" criticism is reserved for Pound's *Cavalcanti*, which he describes as "that incredible olla podrida." He compares Pound's edition of *Cavalcanti* (1932) to a probable Shakespearean sonnet which could have resulted from the actions of twelve monkeys kept "pounding away at random at as many typewriters for centuries" (Praz, pp. 5-6).

In his second note, though no less critical, Praz seems to accept that Pound is "like a saint who has entered Paradise by chance," and concedes that there are other poems besides the two mentioned earlier in which Pound has had some *réussités*. Instead of the analogy of twelve monkeys pounding on typewriters, he offers a more fitting symbol for Pound; this time, a *corista*, an Italian word which affords two distinct meanings. Praz thus likens Pound first to a *cortista* (meaning a member of a chorus or choir) who can sing only as

one in a group, and second, to a *corista* (meaning a tuning fork) which sets the pitch for poets and poetic movements and which vibrates sympathetically when struck by poetry such as that of Bertran de Born.

Pound has been considered by many as a cosmopolitan or a de-Americanized poet, because of his self-expatriation and his predilection for European and Oriental cultures, and because of his concern for poetry *an sich* and not merely for American poetry. But all these characteristics or idiosyncrasies, Glauco Cambon points out, are really typically American. Even his most violent denunciation of America (i.e., "the America of J. P. Morgan") sprang from the "violence of the American temperament" (Cambon, p. which led him to repudiate the complacent American isolationism in culture and American interference in world politics. His search for a cultural ideal in the Provençals, the stilnovisti, Dante, and

page 52

in Hellenic and Confucian civilizations was the repetition of the American dream as envisioned by Emerson and Thoreau—the "confluence of Walden and the Ganges." It was really American frontierism that prompted him to construct an "epic" of "boundless dimensions, crossing all frontiers and living in all times in order to abolish time" (Cambon, p. 14). Cambon's thesis seems affirmed by Pound's own words uttered in "Renaissance" (1914):

Democracies have fallen, they have always fallen, because humanity craves the outstanding personality. And hitherto no democracy has provided sufficient place for such an individuality. If you so endow sculptors and writers you will begin for America an age of awakening which will overshadow the quattrocento: because our opportunity is greater than Leonardo's: we have more aliment, we have not one classic tradition to revivify, we have China and Egypt, and the unknown land lying upon the roof of the world—Khotan, Karashar and Kan-su (Literary Essays, Norfolk: New Directions, 1954, p. 224).

Perhaps a critic does not necessarily have to be a poet, but it takes poetic insight to understand properly the workings of another poet. Eugenio Montale, noted Italian poet, writes about what he considers the success or failure of Pound as a poet. To him, Pound is a man not fully grown up, a man who has "looked at himself too long in a mirror" (Montale, p. 6). He characterizes *The Cantos* as "a mosaic broken up and then reassembled with none of the tesserae coming together again" (Montale, p. 5). He appreciates the many lyrical moments in *The Pisan Cantos* that illuminate the dark woods direly in need of an "ariadne's thread." But this new epic genre that Pound devised, according to Montale, is merely a pretext to cover a rich "series of *morceaux choisis*" that Pound has assimilated from various civilizations in different periods of history, partly through his intellectual quests and partly through his choosing to live in Italy, "the land where nature and culture are one, where even the landscape seems cultivated by centuries of civilization" (Montale, p. 2).

Despite American scientific know-how, it takes a native Italian, and not a group of eminent American psychiatrists, to provide an accurate and logical diagnosis of Pound's

mental attitude or psychological make-up. Montale regards Pound as a sort of "American Carducci, a mad auto-didact," who needed a "good

Page 53

historical rubdown" because of his desire to "give to America and the world the greatest Dantesque-Joycean significantly, ever conceived in our times" (Montale, p. 2). More significantly, Montale pinpoints the truth when he says that Pound "did not care a rap for that myth of Rome or for the Tables of Laws created by Fascism;" Pound was merely interested in "an experiment with a new state and a new civilization in which the deadly sin of usury was no longer possible" (Montale, p. 4), a fact that those who ruled in Pound's native land could not or would not admit.

Pound's letters, too, have been subject to critical scrutiny. Although Professor Luciano Anceschi's long essay served a publication greater purpose when it first appeared in 1950, prior to the publication of D.D. Paige's edition of *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, the intervening years have not lessened its intrinsic value.

Of interest is what Anceschi finds in those letters that is significant as documentation in the literary career of Pound the prose writer and the critic. For Pound's letters reflect his literary activity, his critical taste, and his seminal ideas which were to become the poetics that helped give birth to *The Cantos* and *The Waste Land*, a poetics that "has by now enough force to exercise a reverse influence on the European poetry of our day" (Anceschi, p. 40). Most of all, they reflect Pound, one of the dominant figures of American humanism. By his fellow Americans, Pound has often been considered as anti-American, or a de-Americanized expatriate, or a cosmopolitan poet who advocates a world culture at the expense of his own American heritage. Ironically, it takes an Italian critic, removed from the American scene, alien to the directness and immediacy of the American approach, to see clearly that aside from his personal idiosyncrasies, Pound is typically American in his pragmatic way of selecting and rejecting what he does from classical and modern European literature. Pound wanted to set up a program that would enable American writers to assimilate only those traditions that might be useful to the organic growth of a new literary concept. "We rarely find," writes Anceschi, "in his [Pound's] critical observations that slightly detached and yet affectionate calm, that love for a work as a value in itself; that affable deliberate quality of taste which 'ruminates' a verse or a stanza with infinite attention to less obvious qualities;

page 54

and that acute sense of history, all of which are characteristics of the most discerning and mature European humanism" (Anceschi, pp. 31-32). "Because they contain much hidden meaning," Anceschi considers Pound's letters as the "Palimpsests of American poetic protohumanism" (Anceschi, p. 8), and also regards them as Pound's *ars poetica* in the making, and as his critical acumen in embryonic stage.

Unlike many Italian critics who jealously guard their lyrical tradition and condemn anyone as a barbarian if he cannot appreciate the lyricism of Petrarch, Anceschi, an

aesthete and humanist, though disagreeing in many ways with Pound's literary taste, considers *The Cantos* "truly an important landmark of contemporary poetry" (Anceschi, p. 40), and affirms that the poetics formulated by Pound has directly or indirectly been affecting the younger poets of Italy. (This opinion was reiterated by Anceschi during our interview.) Anceschi concludes with a poignant question concerning the present crisis of culture and its relationship to European and American men of letters. It boils down to a plea for mutual cultural transfusions between America and Europe.

Perhaps the most exciting essay on Ezra Pound in Italian is that contributed by Carlo Izzo, "23 Letters and 9 Postcards of Ezra Pound." Even though Pound's letters to Izzo are not all given in full, they are nonetheless valuable revelations, since only one of Pound's letters to Izzo is included in Paige's edition of *Letters of Ezra Pound*. Moreover, these letters of Pound are of special instructional value, because they concern, for the most part, problems of translation, either in the formulation of the principles and techniques of translation in general, or in the selection of *mot juste* or imagery in special poems of Pound that Izzo was in the process of rendering.

Currently, Pound has numerous Italian translators, among whom are such well-known names as Salvatore Quasimodo, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Piero Jahier, Eugenio Montale, Mario Praz, and Alfredo Rizzardi, not to mention Pound's daughter, Princess Mary de Rachewiltz, who is the most industrious and productive of all. However, during the years 1935-1938, Izzo was Pound's "favorite translator," Izzo contributes his success not to his own merit, but to "the explanations, the persistence, the demands and the stimulus

page 55

of the poet" (Izzo, p. 2). Among the poems Izzo has translated are "Ballad for Gloom," "Night Litany," "The Return," "The Coming of War; Actaeon," and some verses from the early *Cantos*. Even though most of these were early poems and some of which Pound was not particularly fond of, nevertheless, he showed painstaking care in assisting Izzo to obtain the accurate equivalent words in Italian. In his essay, Izzo recalls that Pound's "ability to suggest acceptable Italian forms was really quite limited, yet his ability to recognize . . . the form consistent with, or corresponding to, the spirit of the original was prodigious" (Izzo, p. 3). On the whole, however, Pound insisted on the total effect and not on local equivalence of words or rhythm, a principle that he followed consistently in his own translations of Cavalcanti, Propertius, and the Confucian Odes. Pound made it clear in his letter to Izzo that the "best trans. is into the language the author wd. [sic] have used had he been writing IN the translators language which leaves a whale of a space for the translator's imagination" (Izzo, p. 5).

Aside from providing suggestions, pointers, and instructions to help his translator to achieve the desired effect, his letters to Izzo also reveal Pound the humanist, generous to a fault in trying to establish Izzo either by having his translations published or by arranging for him to write and publish reviews of American and English books. A more general concern for culture is demonstrated by Pound's attempt to start an "experimentalists" project

new metric forms of a multilingual culture in order to "liven up Italian verse," and to inject new blood into English poetry. Although the proposal never materialized because of lack of interest on the part of the prospective participants, it indicates some possibilities for the future development of comparative literature. While the contents of Pound's letters are extremely interesting and basically sound, it is not only what he wrote but the way he wrote it that is intriguing.

As I have stated at the outset, the Italian critics discussed here represent a broad spectrum of opinions on various aspects of Pound. Pound as poet, critic, or translator, *The Cantos*, *Mauberley* are topics of common interest and are frequently discussed in critical appraisals of the poet. Although these Italian critics may

page 56

discuss themes which sound familiar to us, we find their special emphases or perspectives of extreme interest. Even when they differ widely in their opinions of Pound's poetry and scholarship these critics, being European and viewing Pound from a European vantage, seem to share something in common. While it is true that Pound has assimilated a great deal of European tradition, it is the poetic results that is his American critics' main concern. Italian critics, on the other hand, seem to take special pains to point out Pound's indebtedness to European culture, or his contributions to the world culture. Despite Pound's cosmopolitan spirit and his assimilation of several cultures, to the old-world Italians, he remains the typical American, even though at time their concept of Pound's Americanism may be slightly exaggerated. If their observations are not be entirely accurate and their criticisms not entirely free from personal prejudice, their writings offer something illuminating and exciting in literary criticism and they deserve the attention of all Pound scholars.

NOTES

1. Pound explained to me during an interview in 1952 that his *Cantos* was not patterned after the *Divine Comedy*, but rather was a footnote or at best a sequel to it.
2. "Politics and Mental Health; Some Remarks Apropos of the Case of Mr. Ezra Pound," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, CXV (1958), 511.
3. All the quotations from Italian sources from now on are translated by Guido and Angela Palandri in their forthcoming volume, "Italian Images of Ezra Pound." For original sources see attached Bibliography.
4. This essay was originally a lecture delivered to an English class and published later in *Studi Urbinati di storia, filosofia e letteratura*, 35 (1960), 135-159.

page 57

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anceschi, Luciano. "Palinsesti del protoumanesimo poetico americano." In *Poetica americana e altri studi contemporanei di poetica*, by Luciano

- Anceschi. Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1953. Pp. 13-50.
- Boselli, Mario. "Alcune osservazioni sui saggi critici di Ezra Pound." *Nuova corrente*, nos. 5-6 (Jan.-June 1956), 70-80.
- Cambon, Glauco. "Ezra Pound: *Section Rock Drill 85-95 de cantares*." In *La lotta con Proteo*, by Glauco Cambon. Milan: 1963. Pp. 245-255.
- D'Agostino, Nemi. "I *Cantos*." In *Ezra Pound*, by Nemi d'Agostino. Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1960. Pp. 151-171.
- Giuliani, Alfredo. "Le ragioni metriehe di Ezra Pound (il problema della cetra)" *Nuova corrente*, nos. 5-6 (Jan.—June 1956), 105-111.
- Gorlier, Claudio. "Poesia e civiltà" *Nuova corrente*, nos. 5-6 (Jan.-June 1956), 112-122.
- Izzo, Carlo. "23 lettere e 9 caroline di Ezra Pound" *Nuova corrente*, nos. 5-6 (Jan.-June 1956), 123-154.
- Linati, Carlo. "Ezra Pound." In *Scrittori anglo-americani d'oggi*, by Carlo Linati. Milan, 1944. Pp. 89-98.
- Lombardo, Agostino. "L'ultimo decadente." In *Realismo e simbolismo; saggi di letteratura americana contemporanea*. Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1957. Pp. 75-84.
- Montale, Eugenio. "Lo zio Ez." *Nuova corrente*, nos. 5-6 (Jan: June 1956), pp. 21-27.
- Praz, Mario. "Due note su Ezra Pound." In *Cronache letterarie anglosas-soni*, by Mario Praz. Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1950-1951. Vol. I, pp. 175-183.
- Rizzardi, Alfredo. "La maschera e la poesia di Ezra Pound." In *Canti pisani di Ezra Pound*, trans. and ed. by Alfredo Rizzardi. 2nd edition. Bologna: Guanda, 1962. Pp. vii-xiv.
- Sechi, Giovanni. "Decadenza e avanguardia in Ezra Pound." *Nuova corrente*, nos. 5-6 (Jan: June 1956), pp. 184-196.