

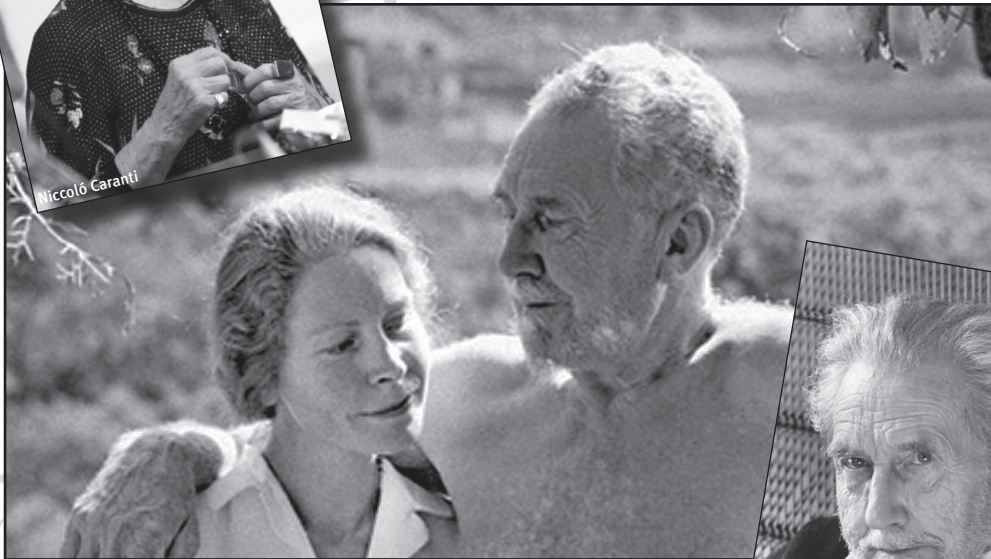
Michael Wutz

in Conversation with Mary de Rachewiltz on Ezra Pound

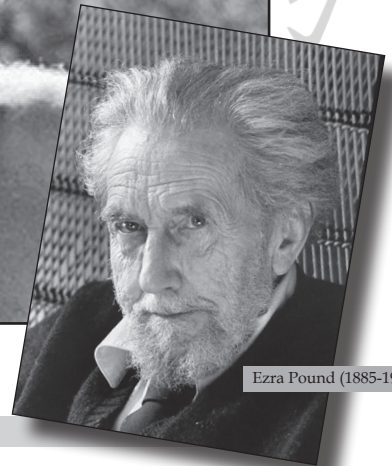
Mary de Rachewiltz

From Idaho to Confucius, or, from the American West to the Far East—

On Explaining a Poet Misguided or Misunderstood



Mary de Rachewiltz and Ezra Pound, following his release from St. Elisabeths Hospital and his return to Italy, at Schloss Brunnenburg, ca. 1958.



Ezra Pound (1885-1972)

INTRODUCTION

Ezra (Weston Loomis) Pound may well be the most famous (and perhaps misunderstood) American literary figure born west of the Mississippi. Born in Hailey, then still the Idaho Territory, in 1885, he is often considered to be among the chief architects of classical Anglo-American modernism, who helped launch the careers of T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Robert Frost, and Ernest Hemingway, among others. Influential as the foreign editor of several literary magazines in London, he is credited

(in collaboration with the poets H.D. and William Carlos Williams, and in competition with the poet Amy Lowell) with developing the poetic aesthetic of Imagism, and of importing classical Chinese and Japanese poetry into the modernist canon. During his further migrations, first, to Paris, and eventually to Italy, where Pound would spend most of his life (and where in 1972 he would be buried near Igor Stravinsky and Sergei Dhiagilev in Venice), the Chinese philosopher Confucius resides likes

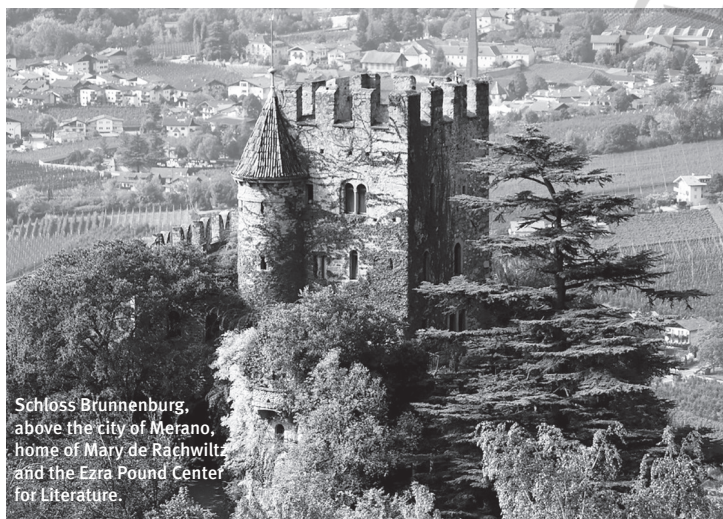
a tutelary deity over much of his thinking, particularly in his unfinished 120-section epic *The Cantos* (1917-1969), but also in his writings on economics and politics.

It is these writings – especially in the form Pound delivered them in a series of more than one hundred broadcasts over Radio Rome, pre-recorded and typically about 10 minutes in length, during World War II – that have tarnished his reputation, just as they have invited reflection on the, always uneasy, co-existence of politics and art. Inspired and perhaps confused by Confucius' call to order, Pound lambasted especially President Roosevelt and what he saw as an international conspiracy of bankers, who, in his view, used their financial leverage to propagate a war for the benefit of their own enrichment; he concocted a dizzying and vitriolic anti-semitic brew that is one-of-a kind in the annals of modern literary history. Conversely, he praised the fascist leadership of Benito Mussolini for creating a stable and well-ordered form of government that ensured contentment for all and fostered respect for artistic creativity.

Charged with treason on account of his controversial radio work, and related publications, Pound was, in 1945, first transferred to the U.S. Counter Intelligence Corps headquarters in Genoa, Italy, where – in another gesture of affinity for Asian cultures – he asked that a telegram be sent to President Truman offering his personal diplomatic intervention in negotiating peace with Japan. While there, he referred to Adolf Hitler as “a Jeanne d’Arc, a Saint,” before being transferred further to the United States Army Disciplinary Training Center north of Pisa, where he was confined to a six-by-

six-foot outdoor cage and where he wrote the first drafts, often for days and nights on end, of what later came to be known as *The Pisan Cantos*. Eventually, he was further transferred to the United States and, for 12 years, incarcerated at a St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C., before returning to Italy in 1958. During his incarceration, aided by influential friends that included T. S. Eliot, e.e. cummings, W. H. Auden, Katherine Anne Porter, and others, Pound was being recognized with the first Bollingen Prize for Poetry, which unleashed a contentious national debate about Pound's poetic merits, his political convictions, and the general (in)separability of politics from art. Indeed, Pound's dubious associations, and the controversy surrounding the award, may stand for all the writers, painters and artists – and there were many – who pledged allegiance, not to the forces of democracy and liberation, but to those of dictatorship and totalitarianism.

In the conversation below, Pound's daughter, Mary de Rachewiltz, is graciously giving us a glimpse into her father's complicated politics, as well as into his role as a father, teacher, poet, and much more. An accomplished poet in her own right, with several volumes of poetry, in



Schloss Brunnenburg, above the city of Merano, home of Mary de Rachewiltz and the Ezra Pound Center for Literature.

both Italian and English, and numerous translations to her name, she also authored the memoir *Discretions — Ezra Pound, Father and Teacher* (1971), in which she reflects on the complexities of Pound the person, her own experience as a witness to the twentieth century, and the complexities of Pound's relationship with the historical moments he traversed, and indeed, helped shape. The tenor of Mary's observations, articulated in at times nuanced insights, is clear: if my father may have misconstrued, and been misguided by, some of the darker implications of *Il Duce*, so has the critical community misconstrued, or misunderstood, his intentions. A deep and careful reading of *The Cantos* (which runs like a fugal counterpoint through many passages of *Discretions*), she suggests, reveals the true man behind his work.

Let me add some brief explanatory words about the complexities of Pound's family affairs, which could be said to reflect the complexities of this politics and which are necessary to understand some of the references in the conversation below: Pound was married to Dorothy Shakespear, an accomplished Vorticist painter, who assumed legal guardianship of her husband while at St. Elizabeths (1945-1958) and again after his death. During an extended trip to Egypt, from December 1925 to March 1926, she returned pregnant and gave birth to a son, Omar, whom Pound — a man with chivalric sensibilities — took as his own. In the meantime, beginning in 1923, Pound had fallen in love with the classical violinist Olga Rudge, who became his life-long lover. Olga gave birth to their child, Mary,

in 1925 in the Italian Tyrol, where she was raised by German-speaking foster parents and where Pound and Rudge visited her, as the occasion allowed, before bringing her for longer periods to Rapallo and Venice. There she was educated in a convent and often schooled by her father. Eventually, Mary would get married to the Egyptologist Boris de Rachwiltz, who purchased Brunnenburg Castle in the village of Tirol in the Italian Tyrol. There, now aged 94, she resides to this day and is actively engaged in helping to promote scholarship on her father — and to rectify his reputation.

The interview, compressed and redacted below, took place on 15 June 2017, at Brunnenburg Castle. I want to thank Mary for her time and hospitality — including a fine bottle from their own vineyard — in receiving us, and my friend and colleague, Professor Dr. Klaus Benesch at the Ludwig-Maximilians University of Munich, for helping me arrange the visit. To this day, Mary is possessed of impressive vitality and spirit and a virtually encyclopedic knowledge about her father and his life's work. She was the curator of the (never completed) Ezra Pound Center for the Study of Ezra Pound and His Contemporaries, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, at Yale University. For a full record of her own literary achievements — translations, poems, and editions, among others — see the official site of the Ezra Pound Society, <https://www.ezrapoundsociety.org/>. Given the at times allusive nature of the conversation, I have allowed myself to contextualize some of these references in a series of explanatory footnotes.

CONVERSATION

Given Pound's profound interest in technology, what were Pound's writing practices? When would he write by hand, and when would he make the transition from handwriting to typewriting?

As long as he had to write by hand, he wrote by hand. When he got a *Füllfeder* [fountain pen], he was glad that there was a *Füllfeder* instead of having to use pen and ink. In Venice, when he was writing *Indiscretions* (1923), he speaks of having had problems with the pen. He was always glad for the mechanical. He immediately got a typewriter. If he had had a computer, God knows, there might have been a world revolution. (Laughs) Like the lines in *The Cantos* where he said that the South American Revolution was made possible because the leader traveled on a train, and he could speak because there was a train going from one place to another. Pound was interested in everything. "[F]ree speech without free radio speech is as zero," says one of the lines in *The Cantos*.¹ Therefore, he thought that since mail didn't work anymore, or nobody would publish him the moment he started to harp on money . . . which, granted, was not the banker's language.

I'm thinking about the way in which in some of The Cantos he has Chinese ideograms embedded in the English text.

If you take down [pointing to book shelves]—well, not only books but also the facsimiles of the copybooks of his last *Cantos*. That's the way he wrote—using several colors, like James Joyce did. There are two or three, by now, facsimiles of *Ulysses*. There is no facsimile of *The Cantos*. I am horrified by scholarship.

There is a published facsimile of T.S. Eliot's The Wasteland. But not of The Cantos.

Yes. Valerie Eliot came, and there is a picture of Pound and Valerie in Palazzo Cini signing *The Wasteland*. Yes, I know, America and the world are still not reading what Pound wrote. And how Pound wrote. These were the last gasps.

I find Pound's The ABC of Reading to be a really fascinating text—a writer using reading and the reading process to talk about writing, basically. It might be interesting to ask how Pound read? Was there anything special about his reading habits?

Yes, we have examples of his reading. My mother [Olga Rudge] really was one-track minded. She had her God incarnate. She wanted her God incarnate. She never let go. (Laughs) She would put on what you have done here now—a tape recorder—in the house in Venice, and let it run and record whatever happened. She thought that because Pound was *entmündet*, only the German language gives the idea: *entmündet*?...And in *The Cantos*, we have that Aboriginal Australian father who takes the mouth away from his son, because the son, by speaking, created clutter, and clutter is no good for bushmen—and they were still bushmen. If you think of these—almost premonitions—of the poet, I still shudder when I think of this. But people don't know this is in *The Cantos*, that it's all there already. So, my mother did what you are doing now, but only the understandable and best pieces are recorded. She had a whole little valise of cassettes, because in those days it was cassettes. She thought that because Pound being *entmündet*, and us not being the legitimate heirs—the legitimate heirs were Pound's wife, Dorothy, and her son, Omar, and I was a Rudge—my mother thought these tapes will be the family fortune. (Laughs)

¹ *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, (LXXIV 452: 14). Further references to *The Cantos* are to this edition and will appear in the text.

² Literally, the verb *entmündigen* (Ms. de Rachewiltz uses the Tyrolean version, *entmünden*) means to be deprived of one's mouth. In its figurative, juridical sense, it signifies legal incapacitation, the inability to speak for, or represent, oneself in a court of law. It can be understood as a form of incomplete legal entity.

Iou Wang, 770	幽	
King Jou	王	
killed by barbarians		
"I	義	
	和	Houo
in angustis me defendisti,		
"Millet wine, fragrant,		
and a red bow		
with a hundred arrows		
and a black bow		
and a hundred arrows.		
ne inutile quiescas."		end quote.
"Will not rustle cattle,		
will not take oxen and horses,		
will close all traps and pitfalls		
that they have set for wild game"		
Pe	伯	
K'in	禽	
order for mobilization against insurrection		
by tribes from t'other side of the Houai river		

Ezra Pound, *Cantos*: New Directions edition, tenth printing, p. 567.

Oh, that's why she was doing it. I thought it was to correct you.

Well, she wasn't doing it for that. It was because she really felt that everything my father did was precious. She worked with him on the *Shih-Ching* (1954).³ For instance, there's a note which said that *The Cantos* were to end with the *Shih-Ching*. Scholars are still debating the end of *The Cantos*. There is no end to *The Cantos*—silence.

Speaking of silence, speaking of Pound reading, part of the attraction that we had for Olga was her musicality. She was a concert virtuoso.

Yes, *The Cantos* are music.

It goes back to a profound interest in Provençal and the minstrelsy tradition of the Middle Ages. But there is also the other Pound who is very interested in industrial noise and how to make that noise into music. I'm thinking of George Antheil, who was championed by your father and also composed three violin sonatas for your mother, and who wrote the score for Ballet Mécanique (1923-4) and numerous other industrial noise-based compositions. Do you think there is tension in Pound's work?

Well, you see, I'm really not competent enough to speak like a professor. There is *Machine Art* (1996), which has been translated into German. I know that Pound was very interested in photography, for instance, and what they are able to do with photography now is mind boggling. They can change your face. I sometimes wonder if the person speaking is really the person.

Part of my sense about Pound is how to get meaning out of noise.

Yes, and that's the way to read *The Cantos*. This is what worries me now with these little awkward things, the smart phones, that children have all the answers in their pocket. They don't know who Homer is; they just click "Homer" and it tells them. That's one of the reasons I can't teach anymore: children mumble and I am *schwerhörig* [hard of hearing]. I don't want gadgets.

Mary, you mentioned economics at the beginning of our conversation, and how that is important for Pound. He doesn't speak the language of bankers, but he's interested in economics. Early, as a child, he moved to Philadelphia, where his father worked for the U.S. Mint. Is that a kind of primal scene, the first contact with money to

³ A reference to the book of classic Chinese poetry variously translated as the *Book of Songs*, *Book of Odes*, or known as the *Odes* or *Poetry*, comprising 305 works dating from the 11th to 7th centuries BCE. In 1954, Pound rendered (but didn't technically translate) this collection in English.



Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Sketch of *Bird Swallowing a Fish*, 1914.

which much of Pound's interest in economics can be traced back to, in a sense?

Well, it's an interesting speculation. One can but speculate.

Pound had a steady stream of visitors and admirers at St. Elizabeths hospital, where he was held for a number of years after his return to the United States. One of these admirers was the young poet W. S. Merwin, who would later rise to international prominence as a poet, translator, and all-round man of letters. He is still alive.⁴

Yes, I know. I don't think I ever met him.

And your father is a crucial figure in Merwin's evolution as a writer. He said that without Pound, he wouldn't be where he is. As in your instance, where your father encouraged you to hone your craft through translation.

Translation is just impossible. I've come to the conclusion that it can't be done. It just can't be done. Here I've spent fifty years

translating.... It's ridiculous. It can't be done. Unless you do it the way Pound did it. The way we started, when I said *non si dice* to him [Italian for "you do not say," in the sense of, "you don't say things that way"]. I tried to correct him, his Italian, and he said, "Well, it's time they did!" (*Laughs*). You have to be Pound. So we're waiting. Tell Merwin, when you see him, we are waiting for another *grand translateur*.

Merwin said that what Pound told him in St. Elizabeths was that he should be working on about fifty lines of translation a day. That was sort of the daily task. Hone your poetic ear, and you would be able to move more nimbly from one language to another. Is that something you feel as well?

You said fifty! Wow! He told us five lines a day. My son had to do five lines a day of Jean Giono's story, *The Man Who Planted Trees* (1953), and grew happiness, which of course was translated for the journal *Mother Earth* into English, though Giono wrote it in French. It was a continuous preoccupation for Pound.—Achilles Fang described Pound as a *pédagogue manqué* (*Laughs*). He was an obstinate Chinese professor. He did his thesis on *The Pisan Cantos*—four big volumes. Still, he never allowed them to be published. It is still the most consulted thesis at Harvard—or was in those days. He lived in a kind of igloo of books. He bought every single book and he bought all the Baedekers.⁵

Mary, you mentioned that I'm sitting in the William Butler Yeats chair.

⁴ Beginning at Rapallo, but especially during his institutionalized years at St. Elizabeths, Pound had a steady stream of visitors—mostly friends and disciples—while holding court. These audiences, "a system of learning based on reading and a kind of loose tutorial discussion with Pound as presiding Confucian master," is often referred to as "Ezuversity" (Tytell 218).

⁵ Achilles Chih-t'ung Fang (1910–1995) was a Chinese scholar and translator known for his contributions to Chinese literature and comparative, esp. German, literature. He moved to the United States and studied and taught at Harvard University. Fang's correspondence with Pound helped Pound understand the Chinese language and its culture and history. Fang's doctoral dissertation, "Materials for the Study of Pound's *Cantos*" (1958), to date remains a major source for Pound scholarship.

It has a story, of course; it's not invented. The Yeats came to Rapallo, as everybody knows, rented an apartment with furniture in it, or maybe they just bought bits and pieces, that I do not know. But my grandparents moved into the Yeats' apartment when the Yeats went back to Ireland. The Yeats evidently left chairs

By the end of 1942, I was already steeped in the translation of the Cantos. Their sound, the way Babbo [Pound] had so often read them in Venice, without my having understood a word, was somehow embedded in me, something very harmonious and beautiful. But reading them myself came as a shock. I was like a hungry person with a basket of exotic food in front of me, not knowing where to start, the flavors being totally new.

— Discretions 155

behind. When, finally, my grandparents died, and all this stuff, like my father's chairs, were left behind, it was decided, in 1954, that it was ridiculous to continue paying rent on the Rapallo apartment and that I should just pick up everything I wanted. It contained all the Gaudier-Brzeskas, it contained all the furniture, the frames, it contained Wyndham Lewis' *Red Duet* (1914/15), the relics of two generations left behind by previous generations.⁶

Well, I had a ruin, Brunnenburg Castle, that needed furniture. That's why you sit there, that's why you see what is called a Morris chair. I even have a chest over there, which comes from the Rossetti House in London. William Michael Rossetti, the practical man in that family, had two daughters. Both daughters married an Italian and moved to Rome and brought some of the furniture. The chest

comes from Olivia Rossetti Agresti, who said that chest once contained the printing press for the—what where they called—all those revolutionaries that used to gather . . . the Pre-Raphaelites, William Morris.

The Fabians?

Yes, they were sort of revolutionaries; Marxism was in that house. I mean it's there, so.

That's rather apropos, given Pound's own interest in the Pre-Raphaelites. — Mary, you mentioned Wyndham Lewis and William Butler Yeats, of course. I am also thinking of T.S. Eliot and others. Do you remember any particular encounters that you had?

Well, they all did come to Rapallo sooner or later. Eliot came to Rapallo and my mother



Henri Gaudier-Brzeska carving *Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound*, photographed by Walter Benington, ca.1914.

⁶ Born in 1891, French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska is often considered one of the most innovative figures of European modernism. Following his move from London from Paris in 1911, he collaborated with prominent figures such as Pound (who considered him a genius and in 1916 wrote a memoir, *Gaudier-Brzeska*), fellow sculptor Jacob Epstein, the painter Wyndham Lewis and the philosopher T.E. Hulme. Together, partly in response to Italian Futurism, they in 1914 created Vorticism, Britain's first and short-lived avant-garde movement. Gaudier-Brzeska was killed in action in 1915, at age 23.

met him there. But if you read the correspondence you know that that was not known because my mother was not supposed to be there. However, that's their business. I mean, I can't go into all these stories. No, I saw Eliot the first time I went to England when I went to stay with my uncle Teddy, Edgar Rudge. And Pound wrote to Eliot and to Wyndham Lewis and all his old friends, and hoped that I would go see them. I obeyed as usual. I did go to see Eliot and mention it in *Discretions* (288). That was the first time I saw Eliot. But I never met Wyndham Lewis. Omar was in London at that time, and I gave him a copy of my father's first published volume of poems, *A Lume Spento* (1908). Which proud Isabel, Pound's mother and my grandmother, wanted him to have because he was Omar "Pound." So I gave him a copy and he told me that Wyndham Lewis didn't want to see me, because he wasn't feeling up to seeing people, which was probably true. He was already blind at

that time. He "chose blindness rather than have his mind stop" (*Canto CXV*). You see why I can't write anymore. Because I am afraid of using Pound's words. If you know *The Cantos*, and I say he chose blindness rather than having his mind stop, you know I am quoting *Cantos*. It's becoming a problem.

Are you saying that your father's work and words are inhabiting you to a point where it's difficult for you to separate?

Well, it's so obvious. You can't say it any better. He said it once and for all

Le mot juste?

Le mot juste. And if you have heard it, it's music.

You spent a significant amount of your life trying to rectify your father's reputation, but you've also been an active poet of your own, with considerable gifts.

I can't finish anything. I mean, there can be moderate talent; I have moderate talent. But what is important is the honesty of mind. The honesty of mind compels me to refuse gifts or invitations that are due to him. Does that make sense? My gifts are very modest. Pour yourselves some wine and you'll see more clearly. (*Laughs*)

I am teaching in Utah at a university that is pretty close to Idaho, and I've been to Pound's birthplace in Hailey. I know that Pound left Idaho early and sort of turned away from it . . .

Well, at least in Moscow, Idaho, they did invite me, and that I did accept. They have given me an honorary degree in Moscow, Idaho, when Marshall McLuhan was there. That is when I met Marshall McLuhan.

He was an early Pound scholar. He actually corresponded with Pound. There are letters.



Henri Gaudier-Brzeska *Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound*, 1914
© 2011 National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.. A copy of this head greets guests at the inner entrance to Brunnenburg Castle.

Well, I don't remember the letters but I remember him. Meeting him in Hailey, Idaho. It was very funny at the airport in Milan, where the Italian football team departed for Moscow. In *partenza l'aereo per Mosca* [Italian for "Departure for Moscow"], I thought that Moscow was a football team. I was rooting for Moscow, Idaho. Pound wanted to be buried in Hailey, Idaho. He really wanted—he didn't quite say so—but my mother thought it would be good to have his original Gaudier-Breszka head in Hailey. They couldn't find a place for it.

What a shame.

They were afraid it might get destroyed, and it could have been destroyed by some idiot.

I know at least publicly, he always claimed to turn away from the American West to make his life, which is what he did, in Europe. Do you remember him making any commentary about his life as a child in America?

He would have liked to go back to America. He would have liked to go back and be buried in America in the end. I think, I still haven't been able to find the lines, but I know there is a line somewhere. "Lonely as a lonely child." I can't find it but I know it's there. And "Lonely as a lonely child" is that little boy on his grandfather's knee in that four-generation picture which has been reproduced everywhere. And that is Thaddeus Coleman Pound, who was born in Philadelphia, is buried in Wisconsin, had discovered Chippewa Falls in Hiawatha, the spring water there, and wanted to build a big sanatorium

the way they have here in Metano, the spa. Who tried to put through a railway. The honest well-meaning American who wanted to do things. I think my father remembers his grandfather sitting in a chair holding his

I am writing without hope for an English or American notice of the citation from Confucius made by Hitler in his latest talk, and I don't even think Hitler himself cited it. The Führer has arrived at a millennial truth through his lively interest in the events of the day: "The place of a country abroad depends exclusively on its organization and on its internal cohesion." It is thus that history enters in the human mind.

— Ezra Pound, in *Il Meridiano di Roma*,
14 May 1939.

head in his hands, because he was broke. You know, I think it's that loneliness of the American, the well-intentioned settler. Because that's, after all, what we were. We may have come with the second boat, the *Lion*, but still, that's what we were, settlers.⁷ The honest settler. That's I think where economics come in, and Pound's economics.

What about Pound's economic politics?

Well, Mussolini at the very beginning was a socialist. After all, he was instructed by Angelica Balabanoff,⁸ and Donna (Margherita) Sarfatti, who is famous in Italy and who wrote

⁷ In one of her maternal grandmother, Mary Weston's, genealogical treatises, "Pound read about his predecessors, sturdy, independent Puritans, who landed in New England twelve years after the *Mayflower* on a ship called the *Lion*" (Tytell 11).

⁸ Angelica Balabanoff (1878-1965) was a legendary Russian-Jewish-Italian communist and social activist. She joined the Bolshevik Party during the Russian Revolution of 1917, became secretary of the Communist Third International, and worked alongside Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, and Emma Goldman. She became disillusioned with Bolshevism and, following her return to Italy in 1922, rejoined the Italian Communists before (under pressure from a rising Fascism) going into exile in Switzerland, where she edited *Avanti!*, then the daily newspaper of the Italian Socialist Party. At the end of World War II, she returned to Italy and joined the Socialist Workers' Party, which eventually became the Italian Democratic Socialist Party.

Dux.⁹ Donna Sarffati was *the* literary queen in Italy, and she was Jewish. The Sarfattis are a famous Jewish family. She taught Mussolini how to wear a shirt and a tie and made him presentable. There's a postcard of Pound to Donna Sarfatti. But anyway, Pound read *Dux*. So these were the people who didn't want war. The socialists were interested in breaking up the *latifondi*.¹⁰ Then Mussolini got a swollen head. When he invited my mother for a private audition, the Mussolini family was not in. Pound saw him, not in Palazzo Ducale, but in Palazzo Venezia. See how the mind works. I said Palazzo Ducale, because Palazzo Ducale is in Venezia, but actually it's Palazzo Venezia in Rome. That's the way *The Cantos* work.

They're very associational.

It's always the association. And the association of sound. Anyway, with Olga Rudge Mussolini talked about Antonio Stravinski, and was very proud that there was an ancestor in England who played the fiddle or was a composer.

And he wrote poetry also.

Yes, that's the problem. Mussolini wrote bad poetry, and Mussolini wrote a very bad novel. It was stupid. *L'Amante del Cardinale* (1910) [*The Cardinal's Mistress*, 1928]. Si, I've read it. Vanni Scheiwiller would of course rub it in:

Well, Mussolini at the very beginning was a socialist. After all, he was instructed by Angelica Balabanoff, and Donna (Margherita) Sarfatti, who is famous in Italy and who wrote Dux. Donna Sarffati was the literary queen in Italy, and she was Jewish. The Sarfattis are a famous Jewish family. She taught Mussolini how to wear a shirt and a tie and made him presentable. There's a postcard of Pound to Donna Sarfatti. But anyway, Pound read Dux. So these were the people who didn't want war. The socialists were interested in breaking up the latifondi.¹⁰ Then Mussolini got a swollen head. When he invited my mother for a private audition, the Mussolini family was not in. Pound saw him, not in Palazzo Ducale, but in Palazzo Venezia.

⁹ Born Margherita Grassini (1880-1961), Donna Sarfatti was a writer and critic of Italian art and especially known for her (political and romantic) relationship with Benito Mussolini. In 1925 she published a personal memoir and biography of *Il Duce, The Life of Benito Mussolini*, in an English edition, which was released a year later in Italian under the simple authoritative title *Dux*. The book—a hagiography, in effect, in whose composition Mussolini had a heavy hand—was translated into 18 languages and a big commercial success. In 1934 Sarfatti went to the United States and was officially welcomed to the White House by Eleanor Roosevelt with honors typically reserved for the wife of a head of state.

¹⁰ The tradition of *latifondo*—land tenure on a large estate—existed especially in southern Italy well into the 1940s. Partly analogous to the sharecropping system in the American South, such estates practiced an essentially feudal system in which the landowner was entitled to most of the crops raised on his land. Tenants had no permanent right to the terrain, but typically rented thin strips of land for cultivation. In a kind of agricultural pyramid scheme, richer peasants often sublet such strips to poorer ones. Among the social costs of this system were impoverished living standards (which lead to increasing immigration into the United States); the lack of a viable entrepreneurial class that could have financed an economic resurgence; and the rise of the mafia, whereby landowners anxious to retain their economic privilege hired so-called “men of honor” to intimidate upstart laborers.

On the CONFucian system that if you start right, and then go on, start at the root and move upward, the pattern often is simple, whereas if you start constructin' from the twig downward you get into a muddle.

My politics seem to me SIMPLE. My idea of a state OR an empire is more like a hedge hog or porcupine, chunky and well defended. I don't cotton to the idea of my country being an octopus WEAK in the tentacles and sufferin' from stomach ulcers and chronic gastritis. . . .

What I am ready to fight AGAINST is havin' ex-European Jews making another peace worse than Versailles with a new two dozen Danzigs. . . . And the sooner all America and ALL England wake up to what the Warburgs and Roosevelt are up to, the better for the next generation and this one. . . .

And as an American I do NOT want to see my country annihilatin' the population of Iceland, as the British annihilated the Maoris. And as for the Australians, they deserve a Nippo-Chinese invasion. Criminals were their granddads, and their contribution to civilization is not such as to merit even a Jewish medal. Why the heck the Chinese and Japs don't combine and drive that dirt out of Australia, and set up a bit of civilization in those parts, is for me part of the mystery of the orient. . . .

Roosevelt is MORE in the Jew's hands than Wilson was in 1919. . . . Eight years ago he was a-sayin' nothing to fear but fear. Well, what has become of that Roosevelt? What has he done for three years but try to work up a hysteria on that basis?

— Ezra Pound, excerpts from “Those Parentheses,” on Radio Rome, 7 Dec 1941 (“Pound Speaking” 17-19)

“Look, that idiot, he wrote that terrible novel.”¹¹ Yes, just as Hitler painted terrible paintings. They were not good artists, and that's where they made this mess. My mother was certainly instrumental in telling Pound, “Look, you have to go and see him [Mussolini], he's a nice man. You can talk to him.” So it was all done through another friend who was teaching, and giving private English lessons.

You mentioned earlier, Mary, and obviously it shows, that you are maybe the single most widely-read expert of your father's

work. I know you don't call yourself a scholar, but I think you are well-grounded in the reception of his work. How would you describe the current state of Pound scholarship?

Well, I don't understand it. (*Laughs*) I mean, modernism, postmodernism, pre-modernism. Well, at least I understand the scholarship, but certain terms I have to look up in the dictionary. I still have dictionaries.

So do you feel like the current scholarship on Pound has raised interesting questions

¹¹ Vanni Scheiwiller (1934-1999) was Pound's Italian publisher, the third-generation member of an esteemed publishing house with thousands of titles on its roster, including some of the most important Italian and foreign writers of the twentieth century. An editor of Swiss origin with strongly Catholic convictions—hence his critique of Mussolini's salacious bodice-ripper—Scheiwiller helped build a vast archive—including background papers, correspondence, manuscript drafts and original typographies—of eminent writers and artists, including materials by Pound.

or deals with the work of your father in ways that are adequate, or do you feel like this is going...

I can't keep up. Now there is this new book *The Bughouse: The Poetry, Politics, and Madness of Ezra Pound* by Daniel Swift (2017). Have you seen it? Practically, I won't say every day, but perhaps certainly every year there are at least three new books on Pound. And I try to read them, and I read. Obviously I've read the three-volume biography by A. David Moody, *Ezra Pound: Poet. A Portrait of the Man & His Work* [Oxford Univ. Press, 2007-2015].¹² But there are still some details missing.

I think interest in Pound is increasing. He's increasingly been read, and taught, and...

I think it is increasing. I just hope, for reasons that are obvious. . . . I know that the Frobenius Institute (for Research in Cultural Anthropology) in Frankfurt will soon publish *The Correspondence of Ezra Pound and the Frobenius Institute, 1930-1959*.¹³ That book by Nancy Cunard, *Negro: An Anthology* (1934), was not allowed into America, like Joyce's *Ulysses* was. I mean, Pound started speaking about the *Bauerntum* [farming culture] in Africa, making me translate. There wouldn't be this problem of immigrants now if there had been an increase of *Bauerntum* in Africa, and African art. Instead they went and pilfered everything. I mean, the first thing I had to

translate was "*Il contadinato in Africa*," a chapter on African farming in *Erlebte Erdteile* by Leo Frobenius (see *Discretions* 162). Well, of course, *Il Meridiano di Roma* (1936-1943), which included work by Pound, was published during the fascist regime.¹⁴ So we were seen as fascist, we were anti-Semites, we were racist. For God's sake! This is where I feel that the Pound scholars are not clear enough yet. They still deplore his racism. But it depends on how you interpret racists. Am I a WASP? (*Laughs*). I wish there was a recording, but I can still hear my father, "They don't get the irony." In the radio speeches. "They don't get the irony." He was still speaking like his grandfather spoke.

Were you listening to the radio speeches at the time, or were you aware of them?

No, he would come up to Sant'Ambrogio [the village within the municipality of Rapallo, where Pound lived with Olga Rudge] and read his speeches. In fact, that was the one correction I made to *Discretions*. Because I had written originally that as long as he was teaching me Greek, his voice was calm. But as soon as he started reading his radio speeches, his voice became shrill. I think he must have been simply influenced by reading so much of his hysterical, crazy blah blah blah.

When I went to Washington and listened to some of those recorded speeches—and they even made a wartime record of famous speeches, which they sold, which I think

¹² With Mary de Rachewiltz and Joanna Moody, Moody also edited *Ezra Pound to His Parents. Letters 1895-1929* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), which was awarded the Ezra Pound Society Book Prize in 2011.

¹³ This collection, scheduled to be released in 2018, features the complete correspondence between Pound and members of the Frobenius Institut (for cultural anthropology) over a 30 year period. The idea is to illuminate Pound's long-standing interest in anthropology and ethnography in the context of his controversial intellectual development in the Fascist era, especially how Frobenius' concept of 'Paideuma' influenced his writings, and his growing engagement with the culture of Nazi Germany. As one of Pound's biographers observes: "Like Pound, Frobenius was an intellectual outsider whose doctoral dissertation had been rejected . . . Like Pound, he was a wandering exile, spending half of his life as an active anthropologist in Africa. Frobenius has been used by [Oswald] Spengler in his study of the systematic rise and fall of cultures, and Pound felt that by going to Frobenius' writings, he was going to one of the sources of wisdom in his time" (Tytell 215).

¹⁴ From May 1939 to September 1943, Pound published more than 90 articles for *Il Meridiano*, which were, a year later, collected and printed as *Orientamenti* (*Orientations*). While most of the copies in circulation were destroyed because of their highly controversial nature, one copy was seized by the FBI in 1945 and translated into English. The copy became part of the FBI's massive file against Pound.

After reading to us what he had written, it was my turn: I had to recite five lines from the Odyssey and translate. He then read five new lines as my next assignment. And it seemed as though he possessed two voices: one angry, sardonic, sometimes shrill and violent for the radio speeches; one calm, harmonious, heroic for Homer, as though he were taking deep, refreshing plunge into the wine-colored sea after a scorching battle.

— Discretions 150

is funny—I didn’t detect the shrillness. One is influenced by what scholars write. I heard it so often, “his crazy speeches that didn’t make sense, that were so obnoxious and insulting and terrible.” Yes, he did use language that shouldn’t be used anymore.

Did he talk to you or your mother about these speeches when he came back from Rome?

No, but in the letters he would say “registered.” In a letter to me he said, *le principesse partono per Cortina*. He was referring to the wives of the two Italian princes who were working at the radio, Prince di San Faustino and Principe Alessandro Tasca (di Cutò). Their wives had departed for Cortina d’Ampezzo. Tasca has written his memoirs. Eventually, after the war, he became a film producer. What he says about Pound is very interesting.

He was Pound’s boss. It’s not an important book, it’s rather a silly book.¹⁵ If Pound had changed his nationality, like Eliot and Henry James, and become Italian, he would not have been put in the cage. They couldn’t have. It’s his roots. Now, of course, if I say roots, I may sound racist, huh? But it is his roots.

Had that ever been a question for your father — to become a naturalized Italian citizen?

No, he never considered it. He wouldn’t dream of changing his nationality. I was given a passport, he was very concerned. In 1939, he did try to get me registered as “Pound.” But, and this I think was because a nun, an American nun from the school in Florence, Mother Francesca Chiara, told him the consequences this innocent little girl would have to face when she was an adult and had to get married. It was a shame to be illegitimate. A single mother was a disgrace in those days. So he tried but, of course, you see, he never thought of the consequences. (And I think that is what is so interesting in his last prose bit, *Selected Prose 1909-1965*, in which he reflects, “I was out of focus / taking a symptom for a cause.”¹⁶ He did not consider the consequences.) He didn’t realize that by giving me his name, I would be automatically Dorothy’s daughter. No wonder my mother became furious and slammed the door in his face. He was so innocent. That was the problem.

There’s a fine line sometimes between innocence and naivety.

¹⁵ A reference to Tasca’s memoir, *A Prince in America* (2011). Tasca (1906-2000) was born into a titled Sicilian family and a cousin of Giuseppe di Lampedusa, author of *The Leopard*. He emigrated to the United States, but returned to Italy during World War II, where he was assigned to the Ministry of Propaganda and worked with Ezra Pound at Radio Rome. Like Pound, he was interned in a POW camp—in his case in Padula in Southern Italy, run by the British military. After the war, due to his biculturalism, he worked in the film industry to chaperone Anglo-American productions through the, often byzantine, intricacies of the Italian bureaucracy, working with Orson Welles, John Huston, Elizabeth Taylor, Sophia Loren, Humphrey Bogart, and many others.

¹⁶ The full lines read, “Re USURY: / I was out of focus / taking a symptom for a cause. The cause is AVARICE,” and conclude his Foreword to *Selected Prose*. Significantly dated 4 July 1972, they are commonly seen as Pound’s belated apologia for his discriminate economics and for associating the Jewish people with what he saw as a conspiracy of bankers encouraging warfare as an engine of international finance.

Sometimes I feel that maybe I was the cause of his not taking that clipper out of at the last minute.¹⁷ And it's a horrible feeling—a horrible feeling. Because there's a letter to my mother saying "never was I so glad for having this [not audible; please supplement] of me." He was sort of born a family man, I suppose.

I have a very personal question since you mentioned the difficult situation he found himself in with his partner and lover.

"There is no rogue in this play"—remember the line in *The Cantos* (qtd. in *Discretions* 188). Like a flower reflected. But egotistical. You can't explain it any better.

What I am wondering is, this probably put a lot of stress on Pound. On this situation with your mother, on Dorothy Pound.

Yes, of course. Do you have idea what (Guido) Cavalcanti and Dante (Aligheri) and those *Fedeli d'Amore*.¹⁸ With Marcella Booth, he was quite honest with me. There were the long flanks and the firm breasts of a young woman. That's a fact.¹⁹ Certainly, no man would admit such a thing, especially in front of his wife. (*Laughs*) Come on.

Mary, you talked earlier about the way in which your father was singularly gifted with le mot juste. You don't think of yourself as having the same strength as a poet?

No, of course I don't have the same strength as a poet. But if I do want to calm

down, all I have to do is take the *Cantos* and read, or I can read even a book about Pound and I am quite happy.

What I think I am asking is, do you see, let me call it, elective affinities between your work and his own?

I wish there were. But I also know that that can't be. I have moderate talent. Let the child walk in her basilica; that's not his basilica.

Does language play a role here? When you write in Italian? You have created poems in both English and Italian.

This is the problem. I switch now; I have to write by hand. I switch from English to Italian and vice versa. What do you do? I have fifty years of notebooks.

So in order to put some space between you and your father, would you rather write in Italian?

Well, I know I did write in Italian and I was thinking that Pound would be The Great Poet. Then of course, my marital crisis arose and I wanted America. And America *intended* to have a Center for the Study of Ezra Pound and His Contemporaries. When they got the archive, they didn't want Pound. They wanted his manuscripts.

This is when they hired you, right? At the same time?

¹⁷ Reporting for *Esquire* in 1957, Richard Rovere wrote: "It's a matter of record that he [Pound] tried in 1942 to get aboard the last diplomatic train that took Americans from Rome to Lisbon. He was refused permission to board it. He had no choice but to stay in Rapallo" (in Heymann 107).

¹⁸ An expression in Dante Aligheri's *Vita Nuova*, the *Fedeli d'Amore* (The Faithful of Love) designate a group of medieval Italian poets practicing an erotic spirituality that sought to translate chivalric ideas (including courtly love) into a regeneration of society.

¹⁹ Following his release from St. Elizabeths, Pound returned to Italy with Marcella Spann, an acolyte forty years his junior who, while officially traveling as his secretary, was a new lover. She had visited him at St. Elizabeths, where they began collaborating on a co-edited anthology, *Confucius to Cummings: Poetry Anthology* (1964). Pound saw in her his last fountain of youth and, with the tacit approval of Dorothy, managed to live in a kind of ménage of trois for a while. Mary alludes to the lines from *Canto CXIII*: "The long flank, the firm breast/and to know beauty and death and despair/And to think that what has been shall be,/flowing, ever unstill."

Well, I needed a job. Very, very plainly.

So Yale decided at one point not to go through with the project? So someone withdrew the monies that were already allocated?

Well, I mean, I had friends who were the anonymous donors. Texas wanted the archive. Texas would've taken the castle stone by stone and built it up (*Laughs*). It was the famous book dealer from England, who came with the director of the center. He saw an old a copy of *The Wasteland*, all rotten away. And he said, "Princess, what have you done to it?! It was a fortune!" It was buried by Dorothy, in a bookshelf. Anyway, it's all really funny.

I was jealous. I was jealous of that beautiful young girl, Marcella.²⁰ Well, she was not up to, I thought, standards. Now we are very good friends. Yes, I was jealous. I thought this is terrible. Here I worked and now he says *The Cantos* are botched. (*Laughs*) That was terrible to me, for him not to take an interest in his own work. I wanted him to take an interest in his work. I always thought he was the greatest poet in the world. And then, he just shut up and didn't talk for ten years.

And he stayed here, in Brunnenburg, for two years?

And said it was the perfect frame. Yes, almost as long as he stayed in Hailey, Idaho. (At the time, his mother couldn't stand the altitude of Hailey, and they had come with the colored help. But the colored help didn't find anybody in Hailey. She was the only person who went back to New York immediately and so my grandmother—suddenly without help— would stay in a hotel.)

Then he decided to go to Venice?

Well, first of all, Ezra Pound, Dorothy Pound, and Marcella went to Rapallo after the first winter here. We all suffered the cold. We still

Scholars have come here and looked at things and written their books and made their bibliographies.

There are those eleven or twelve volumes — what was published in magazines, because I had all the old magazines and clippings and everything that was in Rapallo. Pound kept everything. He had such a sane way of filing his letters. But Yale was horrified. His papers had to be punched, you see. He had a punch, and there was a word of Joyce's that got punched out. This is the mentality of the professional. He shouldn't have punched!

suffer the cold. There was heating according to the standards of Tyrolean castles. But when the doctor came into Pound's room, it was 20 degrees (Celsius), and he opened the windows and said, "This is terrible!" because he was a Tyrolean doctor. Twenty degrees (Celsius) is considered unhealthy to sleep in. You sleep in an unheated room possibly with the windows open. Pound, the poor man, had been sleeping in an overheated institution in Washington. Americans, even Dorothy, all complained about the cold. But we couldn't get it any hotter. So they went to Rapallo, where he was with Dorothy and Marcella. My mother was out of the picture. There were four women. Never get yourself into such a mess. (*Laughs*) I don't know anything about your private lives but if you have a daughter, beware. If she loves you, she will be jealous of even the mother, and the mother will be jealous of the daughter,

²⁰ Marcella Booth was from Texas. Her collection of materials on Pound was acquired by the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/press/releases/2008/pound.html>.

let alone concubines. The way it was respectable to have concubines in Malatesta days [an allusion to *The Cantos*]. Even in Paris, you had to have a mistress to be anybody.

These days, Mary, do you engage in (daily) correspondence with Pound scholars?

It takes me all morning. I start writing and listening to messages, and it takes me all morning to write five lines. And then when I have sent them, I start to say, oh my god, this is awful.

These are Pound's books in the background.

Yes, and you don't have to read all of them, they are all in *The Cantos*. They were part of the furniture. I went down with the camion and emptied the rooms in Rapallo—Via Marsala and Sant'Ambrogio. Most of the grandparents' stuff had already been here.

They would have all gone to Yale if they had opened up the Center . . .

Yale wasn't interested in the books at the time. They wanted the papers. Donald Gallup dedicates his *A Bibliography of Ezra Pound* (1963; rev. 1983)—well, he doesn't dedicate it, he inscribed it—it says, “this book of ours.” Scholars have come here and looked at things and written their books and made their bibliographies. There are those eleven or twelve volumes—what was published in magazines, because I had all the old magazines and clippings and everything that was in Rappallo. Pound kept everything. He had such a sane way of filing his letters. But Yale was horrified. His papers had to be punched, you see. He had a punch, and there was a word of Joyce's that got punched out. This is the mentality of the professional. He shouldn't have punched! Down in the

Pound room [a small museum dedicated to Pound at Schloss Brunnenburg], there are the empty files, and when I went to America in 1953, Pound asked for files he wanted. I went by boat and arrived with a huge box of empty files for him to put all of the stuff that had accumulated in St. Elizabeths.

And all those files would eventually go to Yale as well?

Well, eventually, I guess. All those files then were empty. Their content might have gone to Hamilton College, his alma mater.

So he was quite the archivist.

He was sensible, he would keep things. His radio speeches were actually based mostly on old articles, in magazines, as he says in one of his speeches. He was envying the BBC that got all the news. I mean, all the Yale professors and Harvard professors were sitting there in London and decoding his speeches, and talking with H.D.'s daughter, and he had his old newspapers.²¹ There is a recent book, not about the radio speeches but about the propaganda, Matthew Feldmann's *Ezra Pound: Modernist Politics and Fascist Propaganda* (Palgrave 2013).

You are exhausted, right? Would you care for lunch?

I don't go out anymore. I don't eat in public. I have my rules now. I don't even eat with my family either. I get so nervous. Because they talk to each other, and I can't keep up. If I eat, I can't listen, and if I listen, I don't eat. And that isn't good! I have my bread and cheese or my doggie bag. I have a perfect cook in the house. My daughter-in-law, she's a fabulous cook. She cooks for the students [of Schloss Brunnenburg's summer school],

²¹ A reference to Frances Perdita Aldington, the daughter of H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), the fellow Imagist poet to whom the young Pound was briefly engaged in 1907 before leaving the United States for Europe. (Frances was, however, not Pound's child, neither was it Richard Aldington's, H.D.'s husband at the time. Rather, the father was the composer Cecil Gray, a friend of D.H. Lawrence, with whom H.D. had a brief relationship.)

incidentally. And I get doggie bags for leftovers. I eat them in front of the television. I have the Italian news for lunch, and I have the German news for dinner. Sometimes there are so-called cultural programs. I see things about the war. That's my way of keeping a ritual with the world. Because I don't have time to read the newspaper

Mary, are you 92 or 29?

You know, I am afraid I am 92. I just want to lie down and read and sleep. That's really all I want to do. I like to get up and make my own coffee, to be sure that I have milk in the ice box so that I can have two big mugs. I want to die in my bed, possibly asleep the way both of my parents did.

Your mother, she lived to...?

101. God help. I didn't enjoy it, I can assure you. She talked. I found her asleep in her chair at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. And I called the doctor and he couldn't believe it. The

doctor immediately called—because he had his wits about him—he immediately called the undertaker. And he couldn't believe that the person he came for was sitting there. It's all very funny. In the end, she didn't care. In the end she just lay there, I would feed her, and I would place a mint chocolate in her mouth in place of a *Hostie* [host], although she was a Catholic. And we did have a very nice ceremony down in my chapel. There was an American boy playing the saxophone with a famous tune, *You did it your way*. She wanted it in English. She wanted to get up every morning to go to Venice. She wanted to be buried in Venice. We had these enormous three spaces and I am to be there, in the middle. So the reason that I keep the Venice house, really, is so that someone will keep up the grave. When I die, just put a marble slab with "Mary, Mary, quite contrary" on it.

Thank you so much for your time and your insights, Mary.



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