

# A Visit With Ezra Pound

DAN PINCK

ONE OF THE BEST views of Washington is that from St. Elizabeth's Hospital, a mental institution in Anacostia. The dome of the Capitol is only a little higher than one's line of vision, and during the summer the distractions of the city's traffic are concealed beneath the orderly rows of trees that line the streets of the city. The only noise is the occasional droning of planes arriving and departing at three nearby airfields.

The lawns at St. Elizabeth's are wide and gently sloping, and the grass is well cared for. Thickly shaded paths circle out to softball fields and tennis courts and then back to where they started. The red-brick buildings are of a gaunt, Gothic style, resembling nothing so much as an abandoned permanent army base. Rain dust is so thick on the tall barred windows that only a face pressed close against a pane can be seen outside. In the distance a great white dog ambles aimlessly among the trees. A trusty in a green Alpine hat mows the same stretch of lawn over and over again. Another seems to be counting bricks on the sidewalk. On a clothesline a garment that looks very much like a strait jacket hangs drying in the sun.

Nearby a family of determined squirrels squat on their haunches by a low foliage border, their eyes nervously imploring a pittance from St. Elizabeth's most renowned resident, Ezra Pound.

SINCE his incarceration in St. Elizabeth's Mr. Pound has got used to such begging; regular streams of pious disciples, untalented largely and, in marked contrast to Mr. Pound, quite humorless, have imposed them-

selves on his visiting hours. They all want to feel that they share his misery, and they hope that some of his talent and fame may rub off onto them. As an English critic has noticed, Mr. Pound has a remarkable talent for attracting people of ordinary ability, infusing them with ambition, and then watching ordinary productions presented to the world. Although he has always had a reputation for being accessible and helpful to young people, especially



writers and artists, one feels that if he were not confined as he is, many of the present retinue might not be welcome a second time.

Not all of Mr. Pound's visitors—disgruntled civil-service aesthetes, political housewives, and the rare possessors of real talent—either understand or agree with his political views, but a good many of them respect him for his steadfastness to literary ideals and for the almost infallible literary judgment that discovered and helped to shape the tal-

ents of Joyce, Eliot, and Hemingway.

For the few hours of freedom on the lawn that he is allowed each afternoon, Mr. Pound has compartmentalized his regular visitors into the days of the week. "You," he will say with good humor but finality, "will be a Wednesday." Each day is devoted to a special interest: research, poetry, politics, or the translations of Confucius he is now working on with the help of a Chinese girl studying at Catholic University. His guests know themselves and one another as Wednesdays or Mondays, and these names are badges.

With his disciples gathered around him on the lawn, pleasant but damning in his digressions, generous but rarely constructive, Mr. Pound could be talking around a cracker barrel in his native Hailey, Idaho. Listening to him, one understands how Gertrude Stein could have said of Pound that he was "a village explainer, excellent if you were a village, but if you were not, not." One also suspects that perhaps Mr. Pound is remembering special stupidities of his audience to tell to Mr. Eliot on his next pilgrimage from London and possibly reserving the loudest laugh for himself at the expense of his pompous disciples.

## Vengeance and Grief

Mr. Pound, who was declared insane in 1945 after he had been arrested for treason because of his propaganda broadcasts from Italy during the war, is confined in the building reserved for the violently insane. "I met a very pleasant chap," he once said in a reference to a fellow inmate. "We had many interesting conversations. He seemed no crazier than I. When I found out that he

had been committed for killing his wife, I reconsidered my position." Mr. Pound's visitors laugh with him, anxious to show that they have no doubt of Mr. Pound's sanity.

His afternoon hours of freedom outside the building are allowed only when he is accompanied by his wife, a former student of his whose maiden name was Dorothy Shakespeare and whom he married in 1914. Mrs. Pound rents a room on a not very pleasant street near the grounds of the hospital, and every day of the year she goes to the hospital to see her husband, who is never allowed outside the grounds of St. Elizabeth's. Mr. Pound waves his hand and kisses Mrs. Pound on her cheek when he comes down and again when he has to leave at the end of his liberty. In all but the most inclement weather they spend the afternoon on the lawn, sitting on two lightweight deck chairs he keeps in his room. Their guests sit on low benches.

Mr. Pound wears an old G.I. overcoat over a sweat shirt, and long underwear covers the distance between the cuffs of unpressed trousers and heavy socks puffing out of bed-

room slippers. He peers at his guests from beneath a green eyeshade. Although he celebrated his sixty-eighth birthday last October 30, Mr. Pound moves with the athletic vigor of a young man in excellent condition. If one can picture a somewhat leaner version of Ernest Hemingway—particularly in the recent magazine advertisements of pens and ale that show him as a bewildered but defiant shaggy gray bear—one has a pretty good idea of both Mr. Pound's appearance and his mood. There is a remarkable absence of self-pity about him. Still full of erratic defiance, he is not nearly as downhearted as his visitors.

The vengeance in his eyes is missing in his wife's. His confinement seems to have been more difficult for her than for him. Mrs. Pound is regal and calm, reminding one of the figure in Saint-Gaudens's statue of Grief not far away in Rock Creek Cemetery—a beauty that is at once classic and sympathetic.

#### Back to Old Muss

Mr. Pound may begin a discussion of Spanish or Chinese culture only to interrupt himself to tell a new

visitor that his confinement is due to the malevolence of a band of traitors in high position who considered him a dangerous political foe because he saw the truth behind their deeds. In a brusque, strong voice he says, "I received copies of a government financial report in 1939 which I carefully studied. Roosevelt and Morgenthau bought six billion dollars' worth of foreign gold for ten billion. Ha! Where did the four billion dollars go?" Mr. Pound thinks the two men stole the money. (The critic Malcolm Cowley has reported a similar digression in Paris, where Pound told him that he had found the lowdown on Elizabethan drama: The whole business was cribbed from Italian state papers.)

Mr. Pound goes on to describe his own singular brand of economics, and then goes back to the war. "I went to London to talk to Mr. Eden." Mr. Pound chuckles confidently and, after a moment of reflection, continues: "Once Mr. Churchill and Mr. Eden were determined to have their war, I gave up in disgust and went back to old Muss."

Abruptly he drops Mussolini and

**ENJOY 4 ISSUES  
AT OUR RISK!**

You are invited to read the next four issues of THE MANCHESTER GUARDIAN, Weekly Air Edition, at our risk to savor the fresh viewpoint on British and world affairs brought to you by this famous publication. Enjoy its

**GLOBAL REPORTS • SPECIAL POLITICAL ARTICLES  
MUSIC, ART and DRAMA SECTIONS**

**BRILLIANT DISPATCHES by ALISTAIR COOKE**

(Known to Millions of Americans through TV's "OMNIBUS")

**SPECIAL LITERARY ARTICLES • CROSS WORD PUZZLE  
AND SCORES OF INTERESTING**

**FEATURES including**

**LOW'S FAMOUS CARTOONS**

## The WORLD-FAMOUS MANCHESTER GUARDIAN NOW ON FREE TRIAL OFFER!

If you'd enjoy a whole new world of reading experience, you'll welcome the lucid editorial style, the courageous thinking and the sincere, outspoken journalism of The Manchester Guardian.

It is one of those rare publications that offer clear, unbiased thinking on critical issues. Because The GUARDIAN is willing to face facts and be guided by them, rather than to succumb to mob hysteria or special interest, the great opinion makers of the greatest nations temper their judgments by what they read in its sparkling pages. Learn why more and more Americans have become regular readers of The Guardian . . .

**Mail this coupon today to sample  
this unusual newspaper at no risk!**



**"... the most literate and  
entertaining newspaper in  
the English language."  
SATURDAY REVIEW,  
Aug. 8, 1953**

#### MAIL COUPON FOR SPECIAL FREE OFFER!

The Manchester Guardian X5  
53 East 51 St., New York 22, N. Y.

Please enter my subscription to the Manchester Guardian, Weekly Air Edition, as checked below. If not satisfied after seeing the first four issues, I may cancel and get a full refund. My payment is enclosed.

1 year, \$7.00  16-week trial, \$2

Name .....

Address .....

returns to economics. "I made a special trip to the United States in 1939 to warn the country. I got a few ears to listen but too many Congressmen were under the full sway of Mr. Roosevelt to listen to old Ez."

He talks from behind a mask of objectivity, with high humor occasionally warping his face, vindictive only when pronouncing certain names and words, studying the serious faces in his audience and noting the nervous concurrence in their eyes. "London was less interested in the affairs of the world than in Mr. Eliot's distich."

### 'Old Ez in a Cage'

With stopovers in two or three countries, Mr. Pound is back in Italy. War has come. Old Muss has his chance. And Mr. Pound has his chance to return to America, but he chooses to stay in Italy so that America will have someone there to tell her the truth about conditions in Italy. "I was not forced to say anything over Muss's radio," he says. "No scripts were prepared for me by anybody, and I spoke only when I wanted to." He and his visitors solemnly agree that his broadcasts really contained valuable information, presented in a code of cerebral doubletalk, for American intelligence. Mr. Pound becomes angry as he declares that certain American leaders refused to take advantage of his broadcasts and that when Italy fell, he was arrested on malicious and false charges of high treason. He dismisses the specific accusations, which included holding an official position in Mussolini's government and broadcasting the Fascist party line to Americans.

"They didn't know what to do with me, so they put old Ez in a cage and flew him back to the United States. Ha, I was a dangerous criminal! They kept me in confinement on a starvation diet when I first got here, and I didn't see the sun for months. But when they took me—" Mr. Pound stops, regains his energy, and then continues. "When they took me in Italy, they thought I was a dangerous wild man and were scared of me. I had a guard night and day, and when they built a cage out of iron mats from airplane runways and put me in the cage for the merriment of all, they posted a

guard outside. Soldiers used to come up to the cage and look at me. Some of them brought me food. Old Ez was a prize exhibit."

The visitors steer the talk away from treason and insanity. His friends explain the sudden leaps and continental gaps in his conversation by saying that while most people struggle along on the level of simple addition and subtraction, Mr. Pound proceeds on a level of higher calculus.

**S**UDDENLY he remembers Wabash College. "Ha, ha, imagine that!" he says. "If I'd been a good boy, I might today be the head of a department at Wabash. After four months they had enough of old Ez. They—ah, well, they described me as *too Bohemian* for their tastes." Mr. Pound strokes his gray beard and all his visitors laugh.

"Remember the first time we saw Hem?" Mr. Pound turns to ask his wife, who is quietly occupied in feeding crumbs to the squirrels.

She stops. "Who?" she asks.

"Hem," Mr. Pound urges.

"Hem," she repeats. "Who is that?"

"Hemingway," Mr. Pound reminds her in a kindly tone.

"Oh, Hem."

"But there was a writer," Mr. Pound says with professorial conviction,

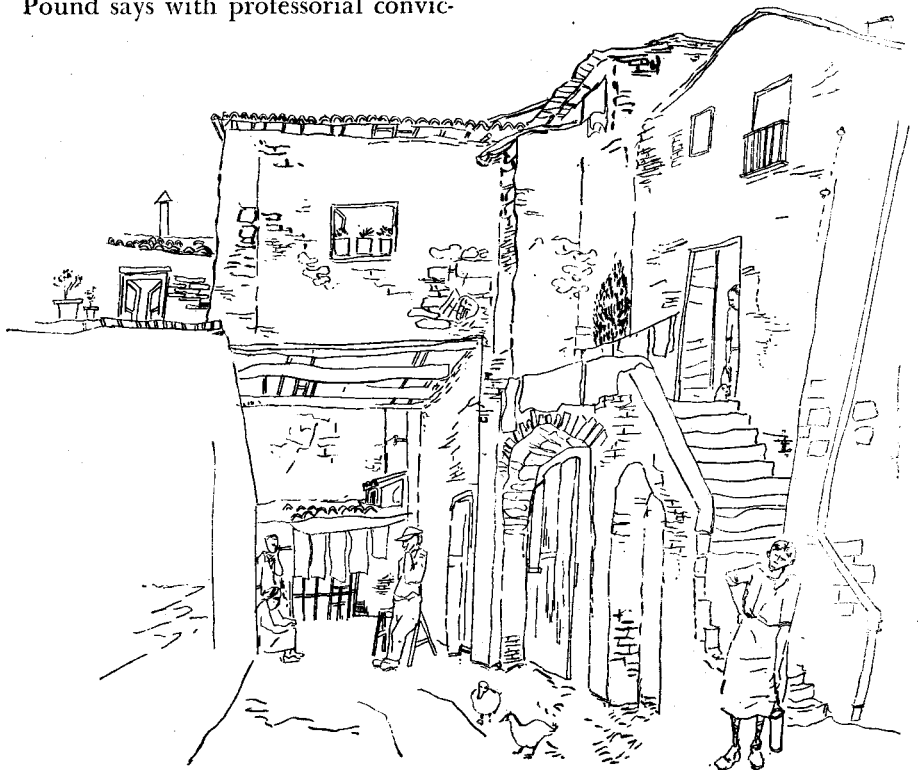
"who was a better writer than Hemingway. I mean Bob McAlmon. He wrote a better book than Hem. You can find some of his stuff in the Library of Congress. He wrote some fine stuff in Paris in the 'twenties. I think he stopped writing."

Mr. Pound informs his listeners that he is forty years ahead of his time and always has been.

"I told Harriet Monroe to print something forty years ago in Chicago. When she finally printed it, she said, 'When Ez tells you to do something, you might as well do it, 'cause you'll end up doing it anyway.'"

Mr. Pound believes that Wyndham Lewis is a writer who deserves fame and a wide sale of his books. "Lewis gives the best picture of postwar English society I've read. He wrote a memorable book about that. Its name is *Rotting Hill*." Impatiently, he returns to France and wonders, "Why is it that all, or nearly all, good French writers are over seventy-three? Not exactly snows but yesteryearly with perennial persistence."

After a quick flight to California, Mr. Pound praises the work of the late Jaime de Angulo, a Spaniard whose fables and drawings about Indians have lately been published, and whose anthropological studies





among the Indians of California Mr. Pound admires.

One of Mr. Pound's visitors mentions his own anthropological research in Africa. Mr. Pound seems pleased to hear this. "Frobenius, the German anthropologist, had the right idea," he says. "Read his explorations into the different Negroid types. Ha! There're twenty-seven different types of nigger. Can you imagine that? Twenty-seven different types in Africa. You'd have to have a segregation law for each type!"

### 'They' Are Against Him

The social researches of the United Nations are mentioned, and Mr. Pound tells his audience that he knows the muralist Fernand Léger. "Some wise guy, or maybe it was a great French painter, admired Cézanne for the determination he put into bad painting—*son obstination a faire de la mauvaise peinture*. In the matter of obstinacy Cézanne was a mere flatfish in comparison with Fernand Léger, who's doing the murals for that horrible sugar lump set up on the wrong end, the U.N. monstrosity in New York. For fifty years Léger has been painting ladies with faces like frying pans, ladies with mugs like croquet balls, and has now made them like it. And if you like frying pans, etcetera, there is not one who can make them as well as Monsieur Léger, *chef d'école*, but very much boss of himself."

Mr. Pound also has it in for Winston Churchill, the late Carter Glass, the late Léon Blum, Bernard Baruch, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, the Rothschilds, Harry S. Truman, Drew Pearson, Eugene Meyer, James P. Warburg, Anthony Eden, the New York *Herald Tribune*, Dean Acheson, Henry Luce, and the late Fala.

He informs his visitors that after his commitment, the government turned his affairs over to the management of Mr. Acheson's law firm. "I cannot send my grandson five dollars without going through Mr. Acheson's law firm," he says bitterly. But then he brightens and mentions

that his son, Omar, is studying Persian in Iran.

**T**HE SUBJECT of Mr. Pound's de-tainment comes up. "That Bol-lingen Prize," he explains. "My friends thought that if they gave me that prize it would help pave the way for getting me out. Ah, of course it raised a furor, and that so-called Republican Representative from New York, Jakie Javits, gathered all his noisy little forces and saw to it that that intention was blocked." He refers repeatedly to an indefinite "they," who are against him. But the visitors gather that important people are working for Mr. Pound's freedom. "I have recordings of my broadcasts in Italy that prove I was only trying to help the country," he says.

"I tried to tell Hitler he was off on the wrong foot." And a few moments later: "They gave Hiss only five years, and I warned the country years ago about the menace that he advocated. Ha!"

Where would he like to go if he is released? Would he return to Rapallo, the Italian town that had been his home since 1924? Before answering, Mr. Pound scratches his head and leans back in his chair. "No, no," he says. "I hear there's a congenial group in England now. I think I'd go there."

When Mr. Pound looks forward, it is mainly to his literary activities. He has galley sheets to correct, and he goes on working on his Chinese translations. Faber and Faber, Eliot's London firm, is bringing out a volume of his collected literary criticism, with an introduction by Eliot, and has just published his translations, with an introduction by Hugh Kenner; both books are published in the United States by New Directions, which has eight of his other books currently in print. Mr. Pound was pleased to hear that a Washington bookstore had copies of his *Guide to Kulchur* in its window recently. He follows little magazines, some, like the *Hudson Review*, with more interest than others, but always with interest in new writing. Friends in many lands send him news and picture postcards; dispatches from Rabat, Athens, Rome, from Germany and varied sections of the United States give him the news and gossip he likes to hear. His friends have been loyal.

**N**OT LONG AGO a young man made a pilgrimage to Rapallo to find out what the townspeople remember of Mr. Pound. He reports that they remember him with affection, and they want him to know that the choral group he organized is still giving regular concerts.

## LOW-PRICED, FULL COLOR PHOTO MURALS MAKE DRAB WALLS "LOOK OUT" ON THE WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL VIEWS!



A new decorating idea that magically transforms dull rooms in your home or office! Breathtaking photographs in glorious natural colors as large as picture windows (3'4" x 5' in unpainted frame) and magnificent photo murals in black and white as large as most walls (7'6" high, up to 15' long). Creates the illusion of rooms opening directly onto utterly inspiring vistas. Choose from gorgeous seascapes, mountain, lake, sky, desert scenes and others. Apply it yourself with greatest of ease;

instantly adapted to fit any space; glorifies any decorating scheme. And the price is fantastically low, fits every budget!

### FREE COLOR REPRODUCTIONS OF OUR EIGHT SCENES

Write today for our 8 big color prints of available murals (so beautiful you can frame the prints themselves) and full details; no obligation. Enclose 25¢ to cover cost of postage and handling.

**DAMAR CO.,** 498 Damar Bldg.,  
Newark 5, N. J.

## WHY DON'T YOU WRITE?

Writing short stories, articles on business, current events, hobbies, travel, local, club and church activities, etc., will enable you to earn extra money. In your own home, on your own time, the New York Copy Desk Method teaches you how to write the way newspaper men and women learn—by writing. Our unique "Writing Aptitude Test" tells whether you possess the fundamental qualities essential to successful writing. You'll enjoy this test. Write for it, without cost or obligation.

**NEWSPAPER INSTITUTE OF AMERICA**  
Suite 5824-A, One Park Ave., New York 16, N. Y.

# Uncle Gamini

## And the British

TAMBIMUTTU

**H**EARTY Uncle Gamini, Oxford double Blue (boxing and cricket), is the pride of our Ceylonese family. As a southpaw bantamweight youth he showered glory on Ceylon. The resident Englishmen and Scotsmen patronized him in a make-believe that he was near-English himself.

Uncle Gamini had been the first Sinhalese to shine in an Inter-Varsity Meet, and he had even shaken hands with King George VI during one of those cricket fixtures called Gentlemen vs. Players—the players being professionals and the others being, well, gentlemen, which was all to the good.

Under British Protection, which lasted until 1948, it was good to play cricket. "Well played, sir!" meant approval, and "That was not cricket," condemnation. It was the most democratic game invented. It all depended on teamwork. Which was the reason Uncle Gamini toiled manfully in the murderous hot sun, six hours a day, two days a week and sometimes three, as if to say he was good as any Englishman. Some thought the long-drawn-out and phlegmatic game injurious to the human system in the tropics. The shorter games like polo and field hockey, both Indian games, were being adopted by the British, along with jodhpurs and pajamas.

### Good Fellows All

Uncle Gamini flourished under the British. He swilled beer in the Colombo cricket pavilion and sang "Wrap Me Up in My Old Tarpaulin Jacket" and "Tipperary" in his fruity Ceylonese voice. When he produced his *pièce de resistance*, "Maquita, Maquita, I Love You, Maquita," it brought the house

down, and the Cockney cricketer from Cargills, Ltd., who was barred from the Princes and Garden Clubs because of his accent, soon became starry-eyed. Uncle Gamini's only regret was that he could not fox-hunt in England every year with the Much Hadham Pack, along with his friend Sir Marcellus Wijeyesinghe. However, he consoled himself by being measured for a rifle in Bond Street and popping it off on Ceylon's elephants, leopards, and wild boar. Though he does not own a fox brush like Sir Marcellus, he boasts of other trophies.

Immaculate in his Savile Row suits and bespoke footwear from Bond Street, Uncle Gamini was popular at the Lawn Club, the Orient Club, and the Havelock Golf Club, where he downed quantities of Johnnie Walker whisky in the best of company. He was real pukka. On weekdays he rode his strawberry roan round Victoria Park with the English gentry. We were all very proud. On Sundays he drove a four-in-hand down the red gravel of the Galle Face, in front of the world-famous hotel of the same name. The

glossy victoria, bound in shining brass, was English.

**I**N SPITE OF his British Rugger-type attitude, Uncle Gamini is a poet. He once showed me a poem he had written about the seaside resort of Chilaw:

*Prancing prawns and sea-shell's  
swoon,  
These at sunset Chilaw is.*

It was written in English, of course, —in the best romantic tradition, or so Uncle Gamini thought. The more fashionable Ceylonese poets had begun to write stanzas like this:

*And should an English landscape  
ever pall,  
With all its wide diversity of hills  
And trees and waters, lo! the fresh  
breeze fills  
Our welling canvas at the Poet's  
call!  
Where shall we wander? In the  
fields of France?  
Or classic Italy's wave-saluted  
shores?  
Or dearer Scotland's barren heaths  
and moors?*

—from the pen of the celebrated Govind Chunder Sutt. As always, Uncle Gamini was quick on the uptake, and always on the mark. That is why we respected and admired him.

He was irrepressible in his admiration of the British. One Sunday, long ago, I must tell you, he accompanied the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police to the scene of a crime. He was a fledgling lawyer then, about to defend a murderer.

On the way, the Magistrate's wife was dropped off at the Sunday fair.

