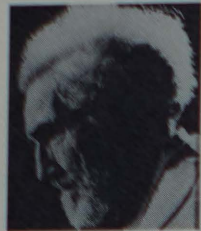


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IDAHO CENTER FOR THE BOOK NEWSLETTER

"...because people read t-shirts."

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(Idaho Biblio Controversies)

CAN EZRA POUND COME HOME?

by Troy Passey

Conclusion:

I do not think Weinstein's quarrel with the conference was that Pound-as-bigot was entirely neglected, but rather that the conference flagrantly lacked balance.

Weinstein's spirited participation in the conference probably compromised his role as "objective evaluator." This is not a fault—humans are subjective creatures. What I do fault is the pretense of objectivity. It is ironic that Weinstein's written commentary reproached the Hailey gathering for being deficient in balance, when that same commentary lacked a balance. By focusing solely on Pound's anti-semitic/fascist association in every portion of the conference, Weinstein overlooked other constructive inquiries into the life and work of Ezra Pound.

Other Views

In order for me to better understand the ethos of a literary conference that took place ten years ago, I read *Rendezvous at the Ezra Pound Centennial Conference*, edited by Project Directors Robert G. Waite and Henry (Hank) Nuwer—a compilation of papers that were presented at the Hailey conference. *Rendezvous* includes an introduction by Waite, "Some Remarks on Ezra Pound" by Mary De Rachewiltz and eight scholarly papers. *Rendezvous* does not include material from BSU English Professor Dale Boyer's "mini-course" offered in Boise prior to the event; it does not include a keynote address by Olga Rudge; nor does it contain Robert Waite's "Pound and the Dilemma of the Intellectual of the Twentieth Century"; also missing is a copy of Patricia Quinn's discussion of British Vorticist artists.

The eight papers included in *Rendezvous* are: "Hear/Say: Ezra Pound and the Ten Voices of Tradition," by Thomas Eastman; "Ezra Pound and Ernest Hemingway: The Dynamics of a Literary Friendship," by Rick Ardingner; "Man of Anger, Man of Peace: The Poetic Politics of Ezra Pound," by Peter Dale Scott; "The Rhetoric of Ezra Pound's World War Two Radio Broadcasts," by Bernard K. Duffy—the sole paper at the conference to deal exclusively with anti-semitism and fascism—(Duffy's paper actually begins on page 48 in *Rendezvous* not page 58 as the Table of Contents claims); "Pound and the Independent Presses: A New Renaissance," by Ford Swetnam; "The Reenchantment of the World," by Carroll Terrell; "An Appreciation of Ezra Pound, Editor," by Hank Nuwer; and "A Profession of Folly," by Kevin Oderman.

I list all these titles and names for two reasons: first to give the reader of this paper a sense of the topics that were covered at the conference, and second, because I wrote each presenter a letter asking their view of the conference. With slight variations this is the letter I sent to all eight participants:

Dear X,
I am a graduate student at Boise State University researching Ezra Pound and Idaho for a paper I am writing. In October of 1985 you presented a paper at the Ezra Pound Centennial Conference in Hailey, Idaho. This conference was sponsored by the Idaho Humanities Council (then called the Association for the Humanities of Idaho). The IHC routinely dispatches a person to evaluate the events that they support financially.

The evaluator of the Pound conference was highly critical of the Hailey gathering for obfuscating Pound's anti-semitism, almost to the point of conspiracy. As a participant in the conference I am interested in your views. Do you feel that the issue of Pound and racism was sufficiently addressed at the conference? In your view did the presence of Pound's relatives thwart a genuine dialogue concerning this issue? I am curious to know if the official evaluator was alone in his dissatisfaction with the conference. Did you hear other complaints regarding Pound's anti-semitism being adequately addressed?

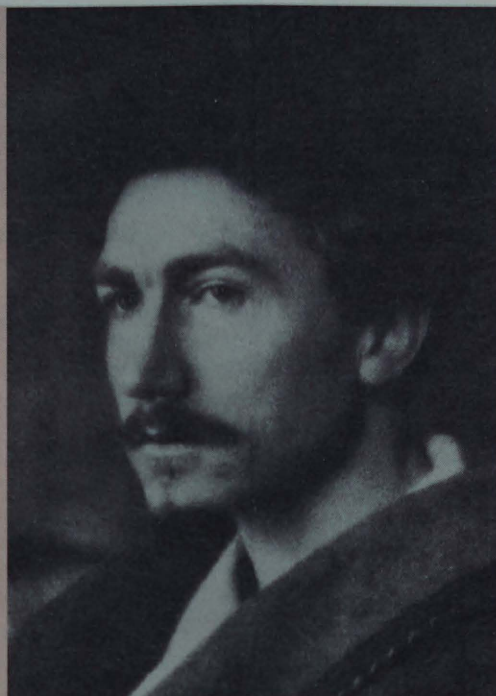
I am interested in incorporating any thoughts you have concerning the Ezra Pound Centennial Conference in my research paper.

I included a SASE and my E-mail address. Of the eight conference participants I wrote, four replied: Ardingner from the IHC in Boise; Scott from the University of California, Berkeley; Swetnam from Idaho State University; and Terrell, from the University of Maine, Orono. My letter to Thomas Eastman came back from Western Maryland College. Scrawled in pencil across bottom: "No such person at West, Md." Because of the fact that Bernard K. Duffy's paper focused on Pound's racism I was particularly disappointed not to hear from him. I called information at Clemson University and was told he was not there. I have no idea what happened to my letter to Oderman, and during the process of revising this paper I have learned that Nuwer is no longer at Ball State where I wrote him. In any case, I am grateful to those who took time to respond to my query. I include their four letters with this paper.

While a few of the responders were dissatisfied with certain aspects of the conference—one was particularly concerned that I not misquote him, or misrepresent the context of his reply (I have endeavored not to)—there was a general consensus that the Hailey conference did not disregard Pound's bigotry. In his letter, Rick Ardingner writes:

No serious scholar of Pound's work can ignore the stupid things he said over Rome radio.... The purpose of the conference was not to debate whether Pound was anti-semitic or whether he had committed treason.... Bob Waite and Hank Nuwer wanted to commemorate Pound's birth in an obscure Idaho town perhaps to invite people to read Pound again.... The presence of Olga Rudge and Mary De Rachewiltz was a bonus.... True, those who attended the conference might have been different to them, perhaps avoiding questions about his politics just as they avoided questions about his marital infidelity.... I do believe that [Weinstein's] criticism was far too severe and unwarranted.... As I remember, Norm's constant questioning about anti-semitism—after nearly every presentation—did make the conference tense. I think there were some harsh words exchanged between planners and Norm.

Peter Dale Scott replied to my questions via E-mail:
I should begin by saying that probably no two people would give you the same answer to the question of whether or not Pound's anti-semitism was sufficiently addressed at the 1985 Hailey Conference.... I believe that Pound's anti-semitism presents a real problem to the organizers of any Pound conference,



Idaho Historical Society Photo

not just the three I have attended. On the one hand you can never deal adequately with it; on the other it is hard to come up with something new to be said....

According to Scott, Bernard Duffy—who gave a presentation on Pound's broadcasts from Italy—knew very little about other aspects of Pound. Many participants who accepted Pound's vitriolic anti-semitism castigated Duffy for his unfamiliarity with Pound's poetry. Scott continues:

This led to a heated discussion, and not just the ritual vote of condemnation of Pound which I suspect your evaluator would have preferred.... I myself would say that genuine dialogue, far from being thwarted, did take place, not only in the conference room for that particular heated session, but perhaps even more after it. No doubt many, myself perhaps included, were somewhat inhibited in their mode of expression in the presence of Olga Rudge and Mary De Rachewiltz.... I certainly do not fault your evaluator for being upset after the anti-semitism session. It was very upsetting. I was upset.... So to answer your question, a lot of people were dissatisfied and should have been. But, far from this representing a flaw in the conference, it is a credit to it. We were dissatisfied, not because the issue was obfuscated, but because it was discussed and it was unpleasant.

Swetnam responded to my query about the presence of Rudge and De Rachewiltz frustrating discussion. He wrote, "At table, yes. I don't think centennial conferences generally deal with the evil their subjects do, though, at least not enough to satisfy the evaluator. Perhaps they should. I can assure you, however, that there was no conspiracy of silence.

Swetnam expressed his own dissatisfaction with the conference in a way that may help explain Weinstein's views and expectations of the conference. Swetnam asserts that the conference:

...turned from a presentation for a general audience (which is what AHI [now IHC] funds) to a relatively specialized conference.... I think that people designing a conference for a public audience would have to be sure to cover (anti-semitism). For a scholarly audience, familiar with Pound's racial politics (a much larger issue than anti-semitism), this question certainly would not be relevant to every paper. Thus it is possible that one side-effect of the specialization may have been what the evaluator perceived as an agreement not to talk about Pound's racial politics.

In his "Introduction" to *Rendezvous*, Waite writes:

...we invited well-known Pound experts to present keynote addresses, as well as younger scholars from various fields of interest to write and read papers that explored Pound's life and work. The conference sponsor [IHC] and we two co-directors [Waite and Nuwer] agreed that the purpose of these papers was to make Pound understandable and meaningful to a broad audience of non-specialists.

Conceivably, as the designated date of the conference approached and the design and organization of the conference progressed, the planners may have lost sight of their original intent. It seems somehow incompatible to invite "experts" and "scholars"—who by nature stretch the edge of ways of thinking about their area of specialization—to lecture those who may know nothing or at least very little about that area. This may reflect a fundamental flaw in the IHC strategy, and may help explain Weinstein's dissatisfaction with the conference.

If Weinstein viewed the conference in the context of a general audience, then his criticism of the conference, in terms of what messages did it send the public, seems legitimate. In his evaluation, Weinstein wrote, "I might add that the newspaper from Twin Falls had as its headline as this second day of the conference opened: POUND NOT ANTI-SEMITE. The reporter was quite content to take Rudge's comment on her absolute authority." [No such headline exists. Headlines from the Twin Falls newspaper are reversed out on this page. (ICB Director).] How embarrassing the conference organizers—and even conference participants—must have felt when they were confronted with such an erroneous yet scary headline. It raises an interesting question: how responsible are conference organizers for the perceptions engendered by their conference? Through silence did they send a tacit message of acquiescence to Rudge and De Rachewiltz's declarations that Pound was not anti-semitic?

At least the Twin Falls headline is an error of ignorance. One might expect Pound's family to champion Pound, and one might expect a small town journalist to accept their statement as true, but what is more frightening is how easily a knowledgeable Pound scholar may be understood to hold a similar view. According to Weinstein's evaluation, after Carroll Terrell finished his keynote address, "The Reenchantment with the World," Terrell asserted "So much for talk of Pound as a racist." This phrase does not appear in the transcript of Terrell's presentation. Of his presentation in Hailey, Terrell, in a letter writes: "I reacted to most of the other papers before me for only about ten minutes because not much time was left. I did not mention the person who spoke rather violently about Pound's presumed anti-semitism [italics mine] whose name I forget." I am not sure if Terrell is referring to Duffy's presentation or Weinstein's questions in this response, nor do I charge Carroll with anti-semitism, but the phrase "presumed anti-semitism" make me uncomfortable. All serious Pound scholars (including Ardingner, Scott, and Swetnam in their letters to me) agree that Ezra Pound was undoubtedly anti-semitic. And a bit further in his letter, Terrell does acknowledge this certainty. I use the example of Terrell to illustrate how easily a person of considerable authority can be misinterpreted. There is, for good and ill, an amazing responsibility with being declared a "considerable authority."

Of course, there are those who would go further than simply denying that Pound was an anti-semitic. These people proudly proclaim his racism. An example is Idaho's own Aryan Nations' "The Poet as Hero: a Tribute to Ezra Pound" in *Calling Our Nation*. At least a few of these "ilk" were present at the Hailey conference. In his E-mail to me, Peter Dale Scott writes:

As a scholar, I was interested to encounter one of Pound's former political disciples, a man in my view more dangerous than Pound, and without any insanity defense, who let drop in a private discussion that he had his doubts about the holocaust!

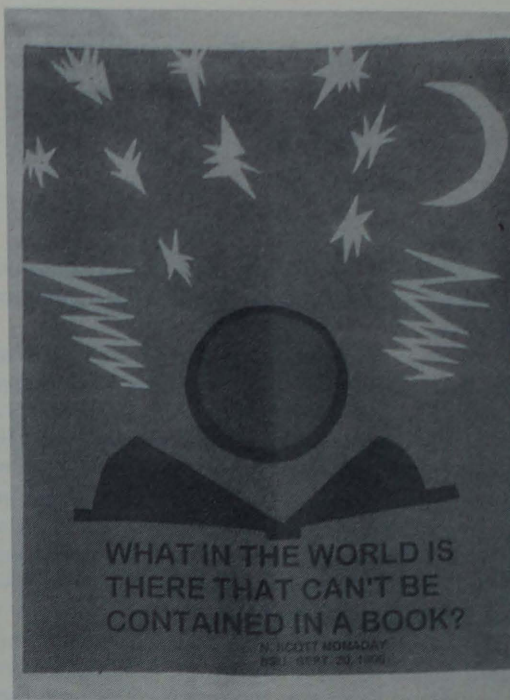
Perhaps Weinstein sensed this presence when he wrote that the conference "was fascist apogetics [sic] in the guise of scholarship in the humanities." Even though there is an extremist element in Idaho, it seems absurd to accuse the IHC of a fascist conspiracy. In my opinion, racists would be interested in arrogantly announcing Pound's anti-semitism to the world, not couching it in pedantics and showcasing it in a tiny Idaho town.

Bring Idaho's Prodigal Son Back Home, But...

As I was researching the conference, I realized one thing hindering the reconstruction and understanding of the conference was time. Perhaps there should be a statute of limitations on memories that are ten years old—they either congeal or evaporate in ways that probably are not necessarily an accurate reflection of reality. Everyone I contacted—excluding Weinstein—disputed the idea that the conference was a "whitewash" of Pound and anti-semitism or Pound and fascism. They concur, and I agree, that one entire paper dealing with this issue was sufficient—considering the conference was a commemoration of Pound. However, in my view it is a bit paradoxical to simultaneously celebrate and investigate.

We must not allow our esteem for Pound's accomplishments to override our condemnation of his faults. Nor should we give neophytes the impression that our admiration of his incredible contributions to our culture cancel his dreadful and suspect convictions. Weinstein's active presence at the conference ensured that Pound's anti-semitism was not neglected. It is an irony of the conference that Weinstein, attempting to present and clarify Pound's anti-semitism by publicly questioning Rudge about it, unintentionally caused the converse to be made promulgated. Instead of Weinstein's question being quoted by the Twin Falls paper, Rudge's answer was: POUND NOT ANTI-SEMITE.

We must be vigilant against even the most subtle forms of bigotry. (My concerns about my associations with a hillbilly from Deliverance when I telephoned the Aryan Nations compound are examples.) All people, and academics in particular, have the imposing responsibility of constantly checking both themselves and others for subtle and not so subtle forms of erroneous beliefs and prejudice. Perhaps Weinstein had an agenda for portraying the conference negatively. Perhaps the other participants had agendas for representing the conference in a positive light. But by raising the issue, Weinstein made all concerned reexamine and question themselves, the conference, and their views of the conference. And questioning is the fundamental charge of academia.



THE CASE OF THE CROSS-DRESSING LIBRARIAN

by Jon Winegarner

Conclusion:

Other than a visit to the bar on Halloween with fellow revelers, I had never made a public appearance cross-dressed in Challis.

I guess seeing me New Year's Eve was too much to handle. City council told the good citizens their concern should be taken up with the library board, since the council did not handle library affairs, and personnel was the library board's job. A library board executive session was called at the regular board meeting the following night. I was excused as the board and the city council liaison to the board discussed the previous night's city council confrontation. When I was called back in, I told them I knew of their concerns (the reporter for the local paper had called me that morning to clue me in on the previous night's city council meeting and had warned me the library board would be "gunning for me"). I also informed them, if they believed there were grounds for dismissal, they had a lawsuit coming their way for unjust termination. The board offered no directives or reply except to say, finally, that it was in reference to my cross-dressing and assumed sexual preference for children. They stated my case was not a topic for discussion with anyone.

They did note and conclude that my first anniversary as librarian would be the following month and would be occasion for a job performance evaluation. The job performance evaluation was done in the same incompetent, clueless manner they had done everything else, even though there is, in their library board manual, a very thorough section on doing an evaluation with a three or four page checklist, fill-in the blank, ratings scale, etc. As to what their evaluation was of my job performance, I have not a clue. I was given nothing, no directives, nothing. There was some vague talk that hinted I needed to



Photo by Paris Almond

Ex-librarian Jon Winegarner working indoors . . .

repair some breach in public confidence in my presence at the library (a reference to my failure to accept that I was to be on the job twenty-four hours a day, that I need to maintain appearances at all times — thus I failed at my job with my New Year's Eve appearance, for example). But really, the evaluation was all very confused and vague and was not specific enough to be helpful.

The board really didn't get on me again until the October 1994 board meeting. (Summer is a really slack time in the library and more so for the library board — if you can imagine them being any slacker than they already were.) In October an executive session was called, again to attack me, though I am not clear why. I was told nothing — no directives were given, nothing. It was all over the Spearman book, *A Won't B4 Apple Anymore*, in the Idaho Center for the Book traveling exhibit. A certain individual complained that children could have been exposed to it. During the time of the exhibit (mid-August to mid-September), the board got outside help from the local, free-lance parliamentarian, Ruky Swigert, to rewrite its bylaws to expand its duties and power of control (for instance, all events and book purchases were now to be approved first by the board). This, of course, was also after my "No On #1" letters to the editor had appeared in the local paper.

What followed in the next three or four months, before I was fired, were accusations at monthly board meetings of misdemeanors. Again, I never received a directive or memo, just a lot of vague talk about my continued failure to repair the public confidence in the library and my apparent deliberate efforts to foster damage in the library by talking about the World Wide AIDS Day in the library column of the local paper and stating that the library was a place to get informed on a serious health issue that concerned us all.

From what I could gather, I had managed to get both the "bar crowd" and the religious fundamentalists up in arms and, to hear the board chair tell it, both groups were harassing her with phone calls of concern and dismay. I take it as a point of pride that I managed to bring together the drunken dregs of the bar crowd and the fundamentalist Christians. Sadly, I don't think either party ever really knew who they were in league with on this campaign against me, nor would they have believed it. I think it's very telling about both parties.



Photo by Tom Trusky

Ex-librarian and ex-moderator of the Challis Community Church

As for *A Won't B4 Apple Anymore*, the condom on one page was the concern. Paris Almond, a Challis artist and friend, received a call from the library board chair, Lois Rigby, regarding the book. A sign was then placed next to the piece asking those with questions or comments on the book exhibit to call Paris Almond. The conversation between Almond and Rigby was the only thing that even began to approach a public dialogue. There was never an article about the book in the paper, other than mention in the library column of the exhibit and an upcoming presentation on the concept and process of artist-made books to be given by Paris Almond and another artist, Nadine Chaffee. This presentation was attended by myself and three or four friends of Paris'. This event was also publicized in my library column in the newspaper. No one ever said anything negative to me about the exhibit. All I heard were positive, enthusiastic comments. No letter to the editor appeared pro or con. All negative comments were spoken "behind my back" and then used against me as further evidence that I was using the library to promote the sexual perversion and immorality of homosexuality. One comment that came back to me, overheard by a friend, was that I was lining the shelves with books promoting the "gay agenda" of worldwide domination.

I did write to both the Idaho and American Library Associations. I also talked to Gardner Hanks at the Idaho State Library in Boise and to the State Library's of eastern Idaho field office representative, Frank Nelson. Both Frank and Gardner were dismayed that Challis was roasting another librarian: they had seen it done in Challis on at least two other occasions with previous librarians here in the past six years. They wished they could do something, recognized my competence, and were sorry to see me getting such a load of grief. Ultimately, they were unable to do anything about the situation and were really weary of getting into it. The Idaho Library response was much the same. The American Library Association's response was to offer funds to cover legal expenses from a special account set up to defend those working in libraries that did not support intellectual freedom, but first I had to prove my case to them.

I don't know that I could have proved to anyone that I was being harassed by the board, as the board never specifically harassed me, in writing at least, and only vaguely, otherwise. The then-board chair said she was being harassed by members of the public because of what I was doing (or supposedly doing) in the library. What they did offer in writing was some nonsense on how I dared to disagree with them on occasion, threatened them with law suits, and in general did not show a willingness to work with or for them.

Really, I didn't care to take it any further at the time, though I was in contact with a civil rights attorney interested in the case who said the burden of proof rested with me, since the board gave other reasons, though vague and spurious, for firing me. Though done unfairly, i.e., not by the book, they had two versions of events:



Photo by Paris Almond

. . . and relaxing in the backyard of his home in Challis, Idaho

their "for public release" version and their in "private executive session" version where they changed the rules to meet my previous offenses. The whole episode left me feeling caught up in a Kafka nightmare, too confused and broken to really fight back.

Additional fallout from all this was that I was deposed as moderator of the Challis Community Church council the same week I was fired from the library. My troubles there began with my "No On #1" stance and my promotion of an "Open and Affirming" workshop/seminar series I got going in the fall of 1994 for the community church members and the public. I felt, as professed Christians, we couldn't stand by and let other so-called Christians promote a so decidedly un-Christian agenda as Idaho Citizens Alliance's anti-gay campaign without a challenge. As the United Church of Christ denomination had taken an "open and affirming" stance towards homosexuals as members and clergy in 1985 and had materials available for local churches to engage the issue, I took the lead in presenting this material in Challis.

The church council, after much Sturm und Drang, agreed to allow abbreviated sessions, meeting pretty much secretly in a basement room. It was pretty much a preaching-to-the-choir kind of thing with the half-dozen in attendance, although we did manage to get the local secretary/treasurer of the ICA chapter and a member of the Challis Community Church to attend. I suspect she was there more to see what the "enemy" was up to. She sat there, eyes cast down, all folded-in on herself the whole time. She had the gall to run a half-page ad for the ICA Proposition #1 in the local paper while we were engaged in our "open and affirming" subversion. She later spearheaded the revolt against me as moderator by campaigning for another misguided fundamentalist, homophobic member, as moderator for the January 1995 election of church council member and officers. I was asked not to run when the nomination committee got wind of this, and an "old-timer" of innocuous consequence was offered in my stead. The old-timer won, but only by a vote or two. The ICA lady quit the church a few months later with charges that we were Godless people who did not know to love and to fear God. (I call "to love and to fear" any certain person, place or thing a kind of inconcise definition of a dysfunctional relationship.)

I also lost my venue for the "Films for the Fearless" series I started at the Yankee Fork State Park Interpretive Center three miles south of Challis. Using the video projector in their little auditorium, I showed foreign and unique American films every other weekend through the winter. The videos came from The Flicks theater in Boise. Thanks to Flicks owner Carol Skinner, I was able to get this program, a joint effort of the Challis Arts Council (on whose board I also resided) and the Challis Public Library. This was yet another of my attempts to try and get these two groups to think and work together on projects, as I had done in bringing the ICB's "Booker's Dozen" to Challis. Their names were used for sponsorship, and it never cost them a cent.

So I hang on here. Why, I am not sure. Nothing else and nowhere else to go to, I still go to church. I preach once in a while. The Library and Arts Council are both dead in the water, although we got the "Let's Talk About It" program at the library thanks to a call I made to the State library back in January, 1996, after the program start-up date came and went without books being ordered or mention of program's existence. I am still the one who can get the job done in the library, though it has been a year since my dismissal. I'd like to think there is someplace, somewhere I could move to, be happy, get paid a decent wage for my talents and abilities, but for now I do a little carpentry work for friends, work on my own projects, do what I can within the community of friends, while hoping for an appreciative response and living one day at a time.

Upcoming Biblio Events:

- October-: Idaho Writers Connection on-line
<http://www.idahowriters.org>
- October-November: The Uncommon Book Exhibition
Sun Valley Center for the Arts
POB 656, Sun Valley, ID 83353
208.726.9491
- October 2: Ann Jones reading, 7:30pm
Jordan B Room, Student Union,
Boise State University campus
- October 10-12: Writers and Readers Rendezvous
Shore Lodge, McCall, Idaho
800.632.6586 ext.3492 (in ID)
800.842.7017 ext.3492
- October 17-
November 9: Fabulous Floating Pens
ICB Exhibition, Gallery One,
Liberal Arts Building, BSU



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Guest Editor, Vol 4, Nos. 1-2:
Rebecca Knotts