

1988

Donald Pearce and Herbert Schneidau, eds. Ezra Pound / Letters / John Theobald.

Alan Golding
The University of Louisville

Follow this and additional works at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Golding, Alan (1988) "Donald Pearce and Herbert Schneidau, eds. Ezra Pound / Letters / John Theobald.," *Studies in English, New Series*: Vol. 6 , Article 44.

Available at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new/vol6/iss1/44

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Studies in English at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in English, New Series by an authorized editor of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.

professional craftsman, that in addition to his novels (these, if not extremely popular, were widely read in his day), his stories were published in the leading magazines of the time: *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Century*, *The Critic*, *McClure's* and *Cosmopolitan*, as well as in the *avant-garde* art magazines, such as *The Chap-Book*, often compared for its selectivity and impact on writers and readers of serious literature to *The Yellow Book*.

Stewart believes that despite Hardy's failure to achieve immortality, he merits some scholarly attention. I agree and that's what this interesting and illuminating study provides. Surely it makes one want to know even more about Hardy, but since I have read Stewart's fascinating account of this "Man of American Letters," I have examined the collections in two American university libraries, neither being the university I represent, and I have found not a single one of Hardy's books.

Thomas Daniel Young

Gertrude Conway Vanderbilt
Professor of English, *Emeritus*,
Vanderbilt University

Donald Pearce and Herbert Schneidau, eds. *Ezra Pound / Letters / John Theobald*. Redding Ridge, Conn.: Black Swan, 1984. 161 pp. \$22.50

In 1957, John Theobald, a teacher at what was then San Diego State College, wrote to Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeths, asking him to indicate his choices for a high-school poetry textbook that Theobald was compiling. Pound, desperate for correspondents and with a lifelong habit of looking for disciples, responded. This book records their eleven-month correspondence, gathering letters from 26 April 1957 to 19 October 1958—the last year of Pound's incarceration.

Academic industries, of which the Pound Industry is one of the more active, perpetuate themselves partly by reviving and scrutinizing trivia, and this volume of cryptic jabberings is one of the industry's less happy products. Pound is one of modern literature's great letter-writers, typically showing style, wit, verve, insight, and boundless generosity. But the Pound of 1957-58 was not the Pound who wrote those crackling letters to Joyce and Williams in the 'teens and 'twenties. Craving communication with the outside world at the same time as his sadly fragmented mind has left him only sporadically able to carry it on, Pound in his St. Elizabeths years has intensified his already manic epistolary shorthand into a sometimes inscrutable private code

REVIEWS

311

that leaves Theobald gasping “Can’t really answer your highly charged epistolary telegraphs” (p. 29). Here is a sample passage:

Thank gawd fer foto of fambly with no relations in Tel Aviv
 and possibly none in the State Dept/
 Some APO can probably get bks/from library/G.G. supplying those from Cat. Univ. Migne, etc.
 Have not seen the Nelson/Swabey unpublished on Ch. of Eng. and Usury.
 (pardon if I repeat, cant remember whom I tell what)
 GRS Mead/BlavatskiTe (no suspicion of a k) “Echoes from the Gnosis,” possibly 40 vols/
 Quest Society and Quarterly, Q.S. lectures at least monthly for part of year/ (p. 32)

A solid proportion of Theobald’s letters consists of requests that Pound translate “this fast allusory shorhand of yrs” (p. 24).

Although their correspondence concerned literary matters only occasionally, Theobald, like most people, had more interest in Pound’s literary opinions than in his economic ones, and courageously he said so: “I wd walk further and pay more for your opinions on what is happening in Lit than for your fulminations on fiscal betrayals” (p. 92). Most surprising among these opinions, even though one is used to hearing Pound mix acerbity and affection in talking of the Possum (“sniping at T. S. E. I have been doing it for years” [p. 32]), are the constant slights against Eliot. Pound comments on the “atrophy of curiosity on Eliot’s part, and an unwillingness to face specific historic facts” (p. 25)—which probably means that Eliot wouldn’t read Major Douglas. Elsewhere: “Of course Eliot never went on with his Sanskrit or with much of anything ELSE” (p. 27); “I dont think he TRIES to keep his mind closed, I think it just nacherly IS that way” (p. 54). A few comments recall the incisiveness of early Pound, as in the viciously funny summary-cum-parody of Herrick (“300 pages saying: ‘please copulate’ / in kittenish language”) and Blake (“‘Little Yamm who made thee? Bnhaaaa, Gawd he done it!’”) (p. 90). Generally, however, Pound says nothing here, amid all the admittedly well-intentioned book lists and familiar economic and Confucian preachings, that he does not say more clearly and vivaciously elsewhere.

The editors, two distinguished Poundians, try bravely to make a case for the letters’ value and interest by locating in them some of Pound’s characteristic intellectual preoccupations. In doing so, however, they pursue two strategies all too common in Pound studies. First, they hunt for all the ways imaginable in which the least Pound

utterance can be found to gloss the *Cantos*. Second, despite their denial that they are doing so, they find spurious excuses for his anti-Semitism, which they explain as a rhetorical stance, part of Pound's "habit of calculated offensiveness" (p. 8) in dealing with the public. But even if names and ideas overlap between letters and *Cantos*, the sixty-seven pages of academic apparatus that are provided to flesh out (puff up?) the one hundred and one pages of letters still can't make the letters *into Cantos*. In fact these letters show, painfully and perhaps all too thoroughly, the narrowest, least attractive, and least interesting part of Pound's mind. Pound's jabber is more readable than almost anyone's, and even lightly sprinkled with brilliance—I think of Eliot's "sapphires in the mud." But finally it is still jabber.

Alan Golding

The University of Louisville

Sanehide Kodama, ed. *Ezra Pound & Japan: Letters & Essays*. Redding Ridge, Conn.: Black Swan Books, Inc., 1987. 249 pp. + illus. \$25.00

The above work consists mainly of the correspondence that passed between Pound and his Japanese friends and acquaintances, particularly Michio Ito (1893-1961), a modern dancer; Tamijuro Kumé (1893-1923), a painter; and Katue Kitasono (1902-1978), an important Modernist poet in Japan and the editor of the *avant-garde* magazine *VOU*—together with Pound's contributions to Japanese newspapers, especially the *Japan Times*; an essay by Tami Koumé (sobriquet of Tamijuro Kumé) on his "Spirito-Etheric" art; poems written by the Japanese members of the *VOU* Club, with Kitasono's notes; and some notes of James Laughlin, Michael Reck, and Mary de Rachewiltz, Pound's daughter. Included also are the letters of Mary Fenollosa to Pound. She was the widow of the pioneer American educator and student of East Asian fine arts, Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), who lived many years in Japan. She chose Pound to be her late husband's literary executor. All this material is arranged and presented by Kodama with intelligence and clarity.

Hailey, Idaho-born, Philadelphia-bred, Pound settled in London in 1908 to begin his amazing literary career. Already committed to a passionate interest in early European culture, he was relatively ignorant at this time of the great civilizations of China and Japan. No doubt he knew something already of the Japanese *ukiyo-e* school of color-prints—Hiroshige's snow, mist, and moonlight scenes had influenced the painter Whistler in the 1870s. In 1909 Pound was introduced by