

STUDIES

Ezra Pound in Canada: the Cases of Louis Dudek and Timothy Findley

by Frank Davey

Louis Dudek is the only major Canadian poet to have had a personal relationship with Ezra Pound. That relationship took place over a twelve-year period, from 1949, when Pound was in St. Elizabeths Hospital and Dudek was a doctoral student at Columbia, to 1961 when Dudek visited Pound in Rapallo. For Dudek it had several dimensions: a literary friendship, a personal friendship, a kind of discipleship, and an education—direct and indirect—in literary and cultural politics. As one can expect, the relationship was in the long term much more important to Dudek than it was to Pound, although Pound did carry on a correspondence with Dudek from 1949 to 1967, which Dudek published in 1974 as *Dk/ Some Letters of Ezra Pound*. In his introduction Dudek wrote, “That I loved Pound is perhaps apparent from all this scribbling. That I have loved him for the joy and the dazzling luminosity of his rich compacted poetry... was made clear in a poem (“for E.P.”) I wrote for him way back in 1949” (145). Dudek also worked in the 1950s to get Pound released from St. Elizabeths, publishing a number of short articles including, in 1950, an account of a visit with him; broadcasting on CBC national radio, on the occasion of Pound’s seventieth birthday, a tribute which included readings from *The Cantos* and “Mauberley” (Gnarowski 1991, 151n); and broadcasting in 1956, also on the CBC, a documentary which has been said to have had influence on Pound’s release the next year.

Timothy Findley is the only Canadian novelist to have made Pound’s life and writing major intertexts of his own work. Almost a generation younger than Dudek, he published in 1985 the novel *Famous Last Words*, which adopts Pound’s ironic self-characterization Hugh Selwyn Mauberley as its central character, and in 1994—possibly in response to speculation about the extent to which his Mauberley had been intended as a portrayal of Pound—wrote a dramatic script, again broadcast on the CBC, “The Trials of Ezra Pound.” In contrast to Dudek’s CBC script, Findley’s

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was enigmatic and problematizing, and directed its attention as much to questions of justice in post-war America as to Pound himself.¹

Dudek's public admiration for Pound complicated the reception of his own poetry and may have contributed to his being regarded by critics as outside the main currents of Canadian poetry, and to his receiving none of the literary awards and few of the anthology inclusions that less innovative members of his generation received. Reviewers who disliked his book-length poems often attributed what they saw as shortcomings to Pound, as did Northrop Frye when reviewing Dudek's 1954 long poem *Europe*:

I find large stretches of the book unrewarding. In the first place, the influence of Pound is oppressive. Pound is everywhere; the rub-a-dub three- and four-accent line, the trick of snapped-up quotations and allusions, the harangues against usura, the toboggan-slide theory of the decline of Europe after the Middle Ages, and so on. (*BG* 54)

Fellow poet and anthologist A.J.M. Smith spoke of the poem as "Pound cake" (quoted in Dudek 1991: 17). At another extreme, Terry Goldie in his 1982 monograph on Dudek omitted all mention of Pound in summarizing Dudek's biography. Dudek's biographer, Susan Stromberg-Stein, introduced Pound as a minor part of Dudek's New York years—"a further event at this time was Dudek's correspondence with and eventual meeting with Ezra Pound" (38). Although she acknowledged the numerous introductions Dudek received through Pound—to Williams, Marianne Moore, Paul Blackburn, Michael Shayer, Cid Corman, Peter Russell—she ignored any possible aesthetic or ideological influences he may have also received, constructing Dudek's interest in Pound throughout their relationship as primarily charitable—"Dudek had the compassion to somehow alleviate a small portion of this great man's suffering"—and Pound himself as a tragic and pitifully ill person of "tenderness and gentleness" (42).

Brian Trehearne, generally a measured admirer of both Dudek's poetics and poetry, has argued that in some passages, such as Section IV of Dudek's late long poem *Continuations*, Pound's influence on Dudek is such that "we are witnessing in part the possession of one fine mind by another damaged one," and that "the result is painfully destructive" to Dudek (259). He offers praise of the "Poundian classicism" (298) of Dudek's early lyrics and of the "'Poundianism' that helps to explain...the delicacy" of their formalism (303), but suggests that Dudek's most important poetry, and most important contributions to modernism, come in work in which he innovatively moves beyond Pound's poetics. Recently Tony Tremblay, in an article specifically on Dudek's relationship with Pound,

has offered a simplification of this view, a simplification in which an “independent” Dudek emerges as implicitly a better poet and more astute thinker than Pound—because he ultimately rejected Pound’s influence: “Dudek was the deeper thinker. His mind had the greater philosophic reach and curiosity....” (43). Tremblay’s argument in a sense is not all that far from the early ones of Smith and Frye in that all three writers disvalue Pound and value Dudek mainly in terms of how much he resists Pound’s influence.

Findley’s reputation, in contrast, has been, if anything, enlarged by his attention to Pound. *Famous Last Words* was simultaneously published in New York and Toronto, and later reprinted in England by Macmillan and translated into French and German. A paperback edition remains in print and is frequently studied in college courses. Linda Hutcheon in *The Canadian Postmodern* has hailed it as a model of “historiographic metafiction” (13, 63-9).

Perhaps because, like an earlier Findley novel, *The Butterfly Plague* (1969), *Famous Last Words* is openly anti-fascist, it has sometimes been read as implicitly, in its portrayal of Mauberley, staging the trial of Ezra Pound that the US courts declined to hold. “The case against [Findley’s] Mauberley,” writes Stephen Scobie, in an essay in which he details the novel’s indebtedness to Pound’s poem, “on both political and literary grounds, is also, substantially, the case against Ezra Pound” (211). This is also Donna Krolik Hollenberg’s view, in her 1999 article “Art for whose sake?: Reading Pound’s Reputation in Timothy Findley’s *Famous Last Words* and *The Trials of Ezra Pound*”—an article in which she uses Findley’s works to call for a reconsideration of Pound’s inclusion in the modernist canon. Throughout the latter parts of her discussion of *Famous Last Words* she refers to the character Mauberley as “Pound/Mauberley” or “Mauberley/Pound,” and describes the disagreements that the characters Quinn and Freyberg have about Mauberley as mimicking the disagreements between “Pound’s supporters during and after the Bollingen award controversy” and their opponents. She associates Mauberley’s New Critical understanding of art as autotelic both with Pound—quite wrongly, Dudek would say—and with the arguments of supporters who would separate “his poetry from his politics.” In doing so she contradicts her own observation earlier in the essay that Findley appears to have included Pound himself among his novel’s characters in order to distinguish the two—a distinction noted by Barbara Gabriel in an essay published a decade earlier in which she observed that Findley’s Mauberley “is drawn

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as the artist-poet whose formal values spiral back to fin de siècle aestheticism”:

Framed within a modernist poetics, he is the inheritor of an autotelic ideal in which the work of art seeks no external referent. Yet this thematics also poses a problem for the Pound Mauberley palimpsest at the heart of the novel, for the American poet and wartime traitor could hardly be accused of retreat from the world. (155)

Readings that conflate Mauberley and Pound are also problematical because of another element in Findley’s novel—his characterizing of Mauberley as sympathetic toward Germany and as associating with German agents, including Hitler’s foreign minister, von Ribbentrop. Many critics have, like Hollenberg, and like Findley himself, assumed that because Pound admired Italian fascism and expressed frequent, crude, and flagrant anti-Semitic views, he must also have admired Hitler and German National Socialism. Hollenberg cites approvingly Findley’s remarks in an interview “How could writers advocate what Hitler was about?...What was Ezra doing there—or any of these people?” The interviewer here, E.F. Shields, in her essay on the novel, similarly had accepted without question the characterization of Pound as an advocate for Hitler (89).²

Louis Dudek’s long poems—*Europe*, *Atlantis*, *En Mexico*, and *Continuation*—were described by San Francisco Renaissance poet Robin Blaser in 1988 as both an extension and a critique of Pound’s work. Blaser called Dudek “Canada’s most important—that is to say, consequential—modern voice” (9), and his poems, because of Dudek’s “practice of openness,” “a correction to those aspects of modernism that thought to solve the order of things by authoritarian structures, political and social—always a concern, to name only the most obvious of our forebears, in Yeats, Pound, and Eliot” (8). The similarities between Dudek and Pound that are evident in these poems are substantial, and include not only the highly imitative passages that have distressed Frye and Trehearne but also:

- * a wariness of the lyric because of its inwardness and lack of engagement with history and materiality;

- * a view of both poetry and civilization as collective projects—“CIV/n not a one man job,” a phrase Dudek has attributed to an unspecified Ezra Pound letter,³ became the title of one of the literary magazines, *CIV/n*, that Dudek sponsored. Like Pound, Dudek throughout his life gathered numerous other writers and artists around him, and helped them find audiences;

- * an understanding that literary production is a part of general cultural production, and that cultural history and economic history have been deter-

miners of its forms. Dudek's doctoral thesis, written at Columbia under the supervision of Lionel Trilling and Emery Neff, during the early years of his correspondence with Pound, had been an examination of how changes in printing technology and in the economics of printing had helped change the kinds of texts that were written or considered literary;

* a preference for metonymy over metaphor or symbol—something disapproved of by Frye in the passage quoted above in which he laments “the trick of snapped up quotations and allusions.”

But Dudek also seems to have kept some distance between himself and Pound's social agenda, and often struggled to reconcile the elements in Pound that he found distasteful and those that he admired and envied. In the beginning, one of his main ways of doing this was to deceive himself into believing that Pound's extreme views may have been no more than determined expressions of Jeffersonian republicanism.⁴ Later, however, Dudek's struggle seems to have been to reconcile how the poetics and poetry he believed to be the most significant of the century, and the most nourishing of his own writing, could also be those of someone who often appeared a madman.

There are six Dudek texts in which this struggle is especially evident: a 1953 note in which he demands that Pound be released from St. Elizabeths; the script of his 1956 CBC broadcast; the headnote to Pound's poetry which he writes for his 1966 Macmillan anthology, *Poetry of Our Time*; his 1963 essay “Art, Entertainment, and Religion”; the edition he publishes in 1974 of the letters he had received from Pound; and finally a rather astonishing review he publishes in 1994 of John Tytell's book *Ezra Pound: The Solitary Volcano*.

The first of these, a half-page note in *CIV/n* 4, is notable for its misrepresentations of Pound's situation, such as describing him as “incarcerated without legal grounds,” and its almost amusing minimization of Pound's offences when arguing that he “has always served [his country] in its best tradition of radical self-criticism” (*Dk/* 107). Dudek declares here that Pound's “insanity is...questionable” and describes him as having in hospital “translated difficult poetry and prose into imperishable English” and “carried on a voluminous, practical, benevolent correspondence with scores of writers young and old” (*Dk/* 106). The latter remarks enraged Pound, who replied “God bloody DAMN it save one from ones friends. SHUT UP. You are not supposed to receive ANY letters from E.P. [...] Who the HELL told YOU that E.P. has carried on correspondence?” (*Dk/* 106). If Pound here is insane, he is not sufficiently so to be unaware of the dangers he could be in were he legally found sane.⁵

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In the 1956 radio script which Dudek constructed to help achieve Pound's release, and which he also knew Pound would eventually read (Pound liked it so well that he asked Dudek to publish it in Noel Stock's journal, *Edge*), he foregrounds Pound's importance in defining the early goals of modernism, the accuracy of his views that misunderstandings of economics "corrupt[] the culture of the arts," and again his generosity to other writers (1974: 128). He tries to sidestep Pound's anti-Semitism and support of Mussolini, in part by declaring Pound "irascible" and in part by arguing that because of his special achievements "understanding" him is more useful to our culture than condemnation:

Pound has been accused, rightly or wrongly, of many intellectual crimes, of advocating so-called crackpot schemes associated with social credit, of anti-semitism and of fascism. It would be impossible here, and with only his letters for evidence, to clarify the position of this irascible man on these subjects. With more time, this could be done, and a sympathetic reading of his ideas could be encouraged. Not that one would want to whitewash him, but that the **understanding** of such a mind as Ezra Pound's is more useful than condemnation would be. (1974: 127-8)

Here he appears to decline, or at least evade, the possibility of Pound's insanity, and minimizes the significance of his wartime radio broadcasts: "[T]oday, incarcerated in a hospital for the insane as a result of some radio broadcasts he made from Italy during World War II, broadcasts dealing largely with poetry, Confucius, the Greek Classics, and the other subjects of that great poem, *The Cantos*, Ezra Pound is the tragic case in our time of the genius misunderstood and persecuted by his contemporaries" (129).

Dudek expresses this notion of a persecuted Pound in a somewhat larger way seven years later in the essay "Art, Entertainment, and Religion," published in the Autumn 1963 issue of *Queen's Quarterly*. Here he appears to describe Pound as indeed insane, but to have been indirectly "driven" to this condition not merely by "contemporaries" but by western society's materialism and "vulgarity." Pound may be insane, but this insanity is more an indictment of his society and country than it is of him personally:

...the fiercest of social critics, Ezra Pound, was driven to an insane asylum by his rage against usury—money values—and the destruction of the arts by modern vulgarity. (179)

But Dudek hasn't literally called Pound insane—he has only described him as driven to “an insane asylum” and not necessarily to insanity. Whether Pound belongs in an asylum he has again left open. He has also left open the responsibility for Pound's situation. By writing that he was driven to an asylum by his “rage” he has left undetermined whether that rage was a justified response or an irrational overreaction, while also creating the possibility that any courageous critic who ‘fiercely’ opposes western society's materialism and vulgarity will necessarily go mad because of the futility of the task. For in the sentence before this passage he had placed Pound's “rage” in the company of Carlyle's “raging...against the age of entertainment.” That is, by the early twentieth century to take a heroically ethical stand against such things in our society may have become sheer madness.

In Dudek's 1966 Macmillan poetry anthology, which—like the *CIV/n* note and the CBC script—he may have thought that Pound might read, he again seems to dispute or cast doubt on a construction of Pound as mentally ill. Here he describes him as “[t]he most controversial dynamic, and stimulating figure in modern literature,” who has written “the most astonishing and complex poetry of our time.” He minimizes the wartime broadcasts by describing them as the “ill-considered” actions of an American patriot:

Living in Italy, he became a partisan of Mussolini's Fascism which he saw in the light of his Renaissance theories of the heroic leader and the economic doctrine of social control on behalf of art and culture. Guided by these ideas, he accepted an offer to broadcast without pay to American troops during the Second World War. This ill-considered action earned him the charge of treason from his own country, to which he was always deeply devoted, and when the war ended he was brought to America for trial. He was conveniently declared of unsound mind, however, before the trial could take place.... (73)

Pound's ‘insanity’ in this passage is for Dudek ultimately a construction of the court, made for its own convenience—indeed, he appears to be hinting that the court may have wished to avoid having Pound raise embarrassing issues in a public trial. Historically, however, the most likely reason for Pound's being declared insane was that both his supporters and the prosecution saw advantages in avoiding a controversial conviction and possible execution. In his letters to Dudek even Pound, insane or not, seems to have believed this, particularly in when he indignantly accused Dudek of having endangered him in his *CIV/n* 4 note by having discussed the extent and importance of his correspondence.

Dudek writes a short obituary for Pound in the *Montreal Gazette* on his death in 1972. He deals with the questions of Pound's sanity and anti-

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Semitism much as he has before—excusing them by minimizing them. Avoiding the word ‘illness,’ he writes “there is a strain of mental pathology interfering with his extraordinary imaginative grasp of reality—in all essentials his ideas have a profound core of truth.” He writes of his anti-Semitism only conditionally, “If Pound is guilty of anti-semitism...this is a periferal aspect of his economics, and not a racial hatred” (20).

In 1974, however, in his substantial annotations to the letters he’d received from Pound, Dudek begins trying less to celebrate Pound than to distinguish himself from him. Quite possibly this is because Pound is now two years dead and Dudek is becoming accustomed to no longer needing to please him. When in letter 6 Pound calls Franklin Roosevelt “the defiler” Dudek writes, “I think of F.D.R. as one of the great men of history; it is painful to find Pound so much in the wrong” (17). In the lengthy letter 7, Pound asks Dudek to become one of a group who would monitor the public media, send reports to Pound, and “penetrate the CHANNELS of communication print and air” by each writing “four letters a week” (19), Dudek comments that “Pound...was very intent on organizing his propaganda machine. [...] I was interested in doing a lot for poetry, but not for an economic or a political idea. My correspondence with him was therefore at cross purposes, and I don’t think I ever tried to hide this from him. I simply ignored things that did not concern me, or that rubbed me the wrong way” (17). In letter 30, Pound includes a draft of a letter that he wants Dudek to sign and send to Karl Shapiro for publication in *Poetry* (Chicago). Dudek writes that he had not wished to be seen as Pound’s parrot (elsewhere in his comments he implies that Eustace Mullins and Noel Stock had become such) and so had written his own letter, “using as much of Pound’s material as I could manage.” Shapiro had rejected the letter, Dudek tells us, “naturally enough” (59). When in letter 37 Pound berates Dudek for having written a “USELESS” letter, for being “ignorant of Europe,” and for not having bothered to “LEARN...what my econ. or politics are” (71), Dudek tells his readers “I never wrote about Pound what I myself did not believe to be true” (70).

Again berated by Pound in letter 48 for showing little interest in Pound’s activist plans, Dudek comments that, while he was in agreement with Pound’s “general motives and significance,” he was appalled by the “narrow specific program which he was determined to impose on his followers.” Here he makes his first explicit statement about Pound’s mental health.

I found this dogmatic program repugnant and absurd. [...] I believe that this narrow dogmatism was a product of his mental illness, but this illness, though

devastating and tragic for him, did not penetrate very deep, it was a surface mania. Behind it, within it, surrounding it, was the brilliant and generous intelligence with which I wanted to communicate.

He adds, however, “I regret the private quarrel I had with him, and the provocation I must have given him” (90). Even though Dudek can now unequivocally declare Pound mentally ill, he still must minimize this illness, declaring it a “surface mania,” and also “regret” having distressed him. The problem of reconciling mental illness with a “brilliant and generous intelligence,” an intelligence which has vitalized Dudek’s own writing, is now out in the open, but far from resolved.

When Pound complains in letter 56 that a new issue of *CIV/n* is insufficiently polemical, Dudek laments that Pound “only recognized as rightly polemical and ‘useful’ those magazines which parroted his little program to the letter, magazines like *Mood*, *Four Pages*, *Edge*, *Strike*, *Three Hands* and so forth (103).” But for letter 57, in which Pound expresses more interest in *CIV/n*, Dudek’s comment goes in quite another direction, becoming a Poundian apologia:

It should be remembered in all this that Pound was never tried for treason, and was no more guilty than most of our students who have paraded with placards against the Viet Nam war. Nor has he been proved guilty of anti-semitism... The real objection to Pound was probably his vigorous rejection of both communism and socialism, ... and his frontal attack on the cancerous corruption of our society, which is the manipulation and exploitation of money. (103-4)

When an attempt in 1967 to have Pound come to Montreal, visit Dudek, and read from his work at Expo 67 collapses because their doctor forbids Pound and Olga Rudge to travel, Dudek writes, however, “I must confess I was relieved” (145). This remark occurs in Dudek’s final commentary on the letters, a passage in which he also writes of Pound, “He was a very great poet. The greatest in our time. Even when he wrote ranting poetry and prose, even in confusion and disorder of mind, his words had more glory...than any other poet of the modern age” (143). Once again Dudek labours to save Pound the poet and teacher from Pound the anti-Semite and irrational and incoherent fascist—and implicitly to defend his own mentorship by Pound, and fascination with him.

There are a number of problems in *Dk/*. One of course is that Dudek does not have copies of his own letters to refer to (they have since re-surfaced; see Tremblay 40), although by and large Pound’s intermittent scold-

ing of him operates in *Dk/* to confirm Dudek's reconstructions of them and his self-portrayal as resistant to Pound's assertions about politics and economics. But a more important problem is the way that Dudek's recurrent attempts to separate the "glory" of Pound's texts from the ideas they convey, to pronounce Pound a "great poet" but a confused and disordered thinker, and to be himself interested in Pound's "poetry" but not in his "political or economic ideas," serves to aestheticize those texts. This is a problem which has bedevilled Pound criticism, and is especially ironic in Dudek because one of the reasons for which he admired Pound, as he wrote in a 1952 letter to Raymond Souster, was because Pound had insisted that "poetry is about something, says something" (cited in Davey, 41). Twice in *Dk/* Pound makes precisely that point, decrying in letter 7 attempts "to put literature on the mantle piece with the blue china" (19), and telling Dudek during a visit "Literature not an addition to the art shops" (35). "The death of poetry is its reduction to a purely ornamental...function," Dudek writes in his 1952 manifesto "Où sont les jeunes?" (*Selected* 25). "True technique...consists in *skill in achieving a real end*, not just in making a poem," he writes in another essay in 1958 (*Selected* 106). In 1959, in his major essay on poetics, "Functional Poetry," he argues that poetry must be made once again "capable of dealing with philosophical and metaphysical questions" (3), and calls for it to be written in "straight language" and with "relevance to our real concerns"(6).

Dudek publishes his autobiography in 1991 in Gale Research's *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, but—like his biographers Stromberg-Stein and Goldie before him—gives Pound scant mention. He offers a one-paragraph account of his having corresponded with him and having acquired through this "a great curiosity about contemporary poetry—and its engagement with the cause of civilization" (131). In a brief comment on Pound's historical importance he reverts to his earlier practice of sidestepping the question of insanity and minimizing Pound's political views. He also attempts to minimize his own past understandings of these:

...he was accused of treason, but finally considered *non compos mentis*, unfit for trial. (Oh yes, there was anti-Semitism in [his Italian] broadcasts, but I didn't find out the extent of that until much later. And yes, he was arguing that America was fighting a futile war. All of which may be very foolish and mistaken – but is it treason? The case has never been proven.) (131)

The parentheses and the casual "Oh yes" seem designed to imply that Pound was at most a minor footnote to a Louis Dudek life that has been focussed on much different and more wholesome matters.

Dudek's last significant comments on Pound occur in 1994, six years before his death. The occasion is the publication—some seven years before—of John Tytell's *Ezra Pound: the Solitary Volcano*. Despite the years he has had to consider the book, what Dudek publishes in *Poetry Canada Review*, "Notes on John Tytell's Ezra Pound," is more raw notes toward a lengthy review article than it is an actual review. In his prefatory paragraph Dudek writes "my comments were written down slowly, as I read, without any intention to make use of them or to publish," that "at this stage, for me, only the striking negative points really hit home and show something new," and that "[i]f my comments have a certain acerbity it is because I write them without equanimity" (8). This preface, together with the format of raw notes, creates a bitter tone from the outset, implying that the writer currently has such disregard for Pound that he couldn't trouble himself to put together an explicitly argued essay. However, Dudek is the author of numerous poems deliberately constructed of fragmentary comments—he may not necessarily have been ignorant of the effects this casual 'review' format would have.

Dudek's indeed acerbic observations portray Tytell's book as an exposé of the extent to which Pound's life—including the self he presented to Dudek—was a charade. "[I]t could be said that Pound never had an original idea in his life," Dudek exclaims after reading one passage. Pound "created his own" reputation," he decides—"a cold eye could easily reduce it all to dust and rubble—egotism." He notes with approval H.D.'s 1922 comment, quoted by Tytell, that "Ezra is kind but blustering and really stupid. He is adolescent. He seems almost arrested in development." When Tytell reports descriptions of Pound in 1923 as being incoherent and physically out of control because of extreme hyperactivity, he observes sardonically, "This is excellent observation for a clinical diagnosis." When Tytell describes Pound and his wife's rejection of their infant children, he exclaims "These people were almost as inhuman and rotten as parents as Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This is reflected in their general inhumanity...." "Goddammit" he writes when he learns from Tytell that two of the Italian writers whom Pound persuaded him to publish in *CIV/n* had been wartime fascist collaborators with Pound. And when Tytell quotes numerous passages of extreme anti-Semitism from Pound's postwar letters, he writes "this only shows how far many of us were deceived." Near the end of his "notes" he writes that Pound had a "continuing streak of madness, which began very early on, and is apparent to anyone who wants to see, and who is not befuddled by the myth of the great poet in literature." "Great" of course is an adjective Dudek had in earlier years applied frequently to

Pound. “I leave this book with sadness,” he concludes, “as if I had seen the wreckage of my own past” (8). The “as if,” of course, doesn’t indicate that he *has* necessarily seen the wreckage of his own past, but it does signal the extent to which he had identified with Pound, and his disappointment in what Tytell has revealed about him.

Dudek addresses the paradox that a confused, racist and “stupid” man has written extraordinary poetry only briefly, and resolves it in what is for him an unusually Romantic way:

You can’t write good poetry because...you can think great thoughts. Poetry is a mysterious process that happens to a very few individuals...a phenomenon we can never understand.

...

Ezra Pound, after a lifetime of raging and preaching, left only a few excellent passages.

...

The rare passages, moreover, are pure and simple, requiring no gloss. The rest is pedantry, and ego pressure, and striving for achievement.

As in *Dk/*, the effect here is to negate Dudek’s career-long arguments that poetry should be rational and functional, that it should work toward making the general culture more just and beautiful. With his echoing of A.J.M. Smith’s concept of “pure poetry” he is close to endorsing the aesthetic—“rare passages...pure and simple”—at the same time as in the “poetry is a mysterious process” statement he seems close to moving the writing of poetry back away from the social and toward individual romantic inspiration.⁶

In his earlier arguments against the aesthetic and in favour of a “functional,” culturally engaged poetry, he had joined Findley who in *Famous Last Words* appears to deplore Mauberley’s aestheticism, and whose own formally complex novels bristle with engagement with philosophical and cultural questions. Dudek’s later posing of the question of Pound’s significance in terms that celebrate the poetic on either aesthetic or seemingly transcendental grounds, while bracketing much of the content, effectively puts us back with Findley’s Quinn, who would celebrate Mauberley because of his art, and Freyberg, who would condemn him for his political crimes. Of course Mauberley has arranged and abetted murder, and attempted to assist Germany and Hitler, and not merely ridiculed on Italian radio the economic policies of “Ozzevelt,” praised Mussolini’s policies for resembling those of Jefferson, filled letters with anti-Semitism, and abandoned his children. We are also returned by Dudek’s form-content difficul-

ties to Findley's *The Trials of Ezra Pound* in which Findley has his character William Carlos Williams tell Pound that he cannot be forgiven for what he did but is forgiven for "what you are" (77)—a distinction which Hollenberg interprets as one "between Pound's noxious words and actions...and his essence as a flawed human being" (150) thus creating an interpretation which appears to leave Pound's poetry in the first category. Of course, it would also be possible to interpret Williams' "what you did" as referring specifically to the broadcasts and "what you are" as including being the author of *The Cantos*—an interpretation Findley seems to favour late in the play when he has Pound proclaim "I am Ezra Pound" (78) as if the name signifies all of his various works. Findley's personal assessment of Pound in a letter to Hollenberg, quoted in her essay, that "nothing can detract from the strength or importance of that poetic voice" (151) seems consistent with that.

"My own views were leftist and strongly democratic," Dudek declares of himself in 1974 when recounting in *Dk/* how he came to ask Pound for information on Italian fascism, and says he was "convinced at that time, and for many years after...that Pound was an American radical in the democratic tradition, passionately concerned with social justice and also with the heritage of human civilization" (1974: 46). And thus his dismay twenty years later, when reading Tytell's account, to be obliged to consider otherwise:

When Pound said things like, "Quite simply: I want a new civilization," and in an article in *The Nation* (1928) entitled "Where is American Culture?" suggested that what he was seeking would probably not occur because "Americans had forgotten the best of their former civic values and capacity for intelligent individualism" (214), the intelligent and critical reader was left to fill in the sort of "civilization" and "sound values" [sic] and "individualism" that this implies—as I and my liberal-minded friends did in the 1950s—but this may have been very far from Pound's real intention and meaning. And Pound of course encouraged the misunderstanding. ("Notes" 8)

Timothy Findley was a libertarian, who characteristically saw writers as individual "voices"—as in the letter to Hollenberg, above—and who was fiercely opposed to concepts of 'political correctness' and to cultural or 'multicultural' arguments for a writer's significance. In *The Trial*, he characterizes, through Williams' comments, the US prosecution of Pound as an attack on individual free speech ("We cannot put people on trial because of their opinions"). For both writers, then, it would seem that Pound at St. Elizabeths became a problematic test case for a politically engaged liber-

tarian modernism, one irreducible to the aesthetic, which they both were attempting to practice and aggrandize in their own writing.⁷

“Time...will pardon Paul Claudel”—because he was one by whom language lives—wrote Auden of another modernist fascist sympathizer (50). Our humanist culture may wish there to be some correlation between morality and creativity, but numerous artists have left behind them both reprehensible actions and admirable artworks (or admirable lives and execrable artworks). Despite his familiarity with Eliot’s “il miglior fabbro” (in “Notes” he corrects Tytell on the source of the phrase), Dudek forgets when judging Pound that artworks are indeed constructions, and demands an impossible ethical correspondence between text and author—that is, he demands in effect one of the banes of humanist literary criticism, “authenticity.” Findley’s distinction in his letter to Hollenberg between Pound’s “voice” and “opinions,” despite the possible metaphysical implications of the first term, at least avoids that impasse.

Notes

This article expands a paper which I presented to the Modernist Studies Association conference in Vancouver, B.C., October 22, 2004.

- 1 Findley’s approach in this play to the question of Pound’s sanity is to produce a text in which the legal arguments suggest that he is sane but in which the staging produces a Pound who is distractible and impulsive to such a degree that he seems incapable of the focus necessary to defend himself in court and of the clarity of thought necessary to produce coherent political and economic understandings.
- 2 Interestingly, while there are numerous references to Mussolini in Paige’s selection of Pound’s letters, there are none to Hitler. In Pound’s letters to Dudek there are three. In one, in 1949, he asked—presumably in response to Dudek’s questions to him about usury and anti-Semitism—whether Dudek has “ever read *Mein Kampf*” and added a number of ambiguous comments including “[i]t is better than...Ozzevelt [Roosevelt] the defiler” (*Dk*/ 16). In an indirect one in 1950 he insisted that there were “DIFFERENCES of view” among fascists and particularly among the Italian fascists:

fascist militarists (VERY few), Cavourian fascists (i.e. liberals), royalists, republicans, left wingers, i.e. extreme socialists, and swine, namely capitalist corrupters, but also capitalist conservatives.

when I say ‘militarist’ even that needs qualification...
And the church etc. (56)

And in a 1953 letter, in which he railed against totalizing depictions (“monolinear systems”) such as Edward R. Murrow’s characterizing of both “fascist and bolschie” as “totalitarian,” and argued for the particularism of imagism against the presumably

totalizing “shit of symbolism,” he complained that Murrow, Roosevelt, and Churchill had made “no distinction between Mus and Hit. another squalor.” Perhaps more significantly, even Pound’s least sympathetic biographer, John Tytell, appears to have found no written advocacy of Hitler in Pound.

- 3 “The Making of *CIV/n*,” in Michael Gnarowski, *Index to CIV/n* 3. See also Aileen Collins’ introduction to her one-volume reprint of *CIV/n* in which she also seems unaware of a particular Pound letter in which the remark occurs.
- 4 For example, in the memoir he wrote after first visiting Pound at St Elizabeths on June 9th and 10th, 1950, he described him as “...very sensitive about the fact that he broadcast from Italy during the war. He says Americans can’t understand that he was doing it as a free individual and was simply given free air time to express his opinions on the air.”
- 5 Tremblay concludes, largely on the basis of this letter, and despite Dudek’s own conclusions in 1994, that “Pound kept his sanity hidden, fearing persecution for treason (with execution being a possible outcome) if he was found fit to stand trial.” Of course Tremblay, unlike Dudek, does not need to find a way to excuse Pound’s anti-Semitism or to save his poetics.
- 6 Oddly, this argument contradicts his condemnation of Pound earlier in the notes for having considered poetry to be, as Tytell writes, “a connection to the Eleusinian mysteries practiced by the Greeks in their nomadic stage.” Dudek’s comment is that “This belief, central in Pound’s thinking, is pure rubbish.... It is no better than Yeats talking to spirits or D.H. Lawrence’s crazy blood and sex theories. They all clearly derive from the Romantic transcendental tradition...”(8).
- 7 In the last line of the play, Findley has Pound identify himself to the black janitor Beatty as “Ezra Pound, Custodian,” an identification which echoes the janitor’s early self-identification as “Arthur Beatty, Custodian” (and which has led some critics to see Pound here as newly chastened and humble) but also suggests Pound’s self-assumed role of cultural custodian.

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