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Ira B. Nadel
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Chapter 1

Life

> People quite often think me crazy when I make a jump instead of a step, just as if all jumps were unsound and never carried one anywhere.
>
> Pound, 1937–8

Ezra Pound loved to jump, from idea to idea, from culture to culture, from lyric to epic. Whether on the tennis court or in the salon, he remained energized by ideas and action. He was also outspoken and insistent: "I have never known anyone worth a damn who wasn't irascible," Pound told Margaret Anderson in 1917 and he fulfilled this *dicta* completely (*SL* 111). His agenda as a poet, translator, editor, anthologist, letter-writer, essayist and *provocateur* was clear, his plan precise: "Man reading shd. be man intensely alive. The book shd. be a ball of light in one's hand" (*GK* 55). Vague words are an anathema, the hard, clear statement the goal. And he does not hesitate to instruct: "Against the metric pattern," he tells the poet Mary Barnard, "struggle toward natural speech. You haven't *yet* got sense of quantity" (*SL* 261). The best "*mechanism* for breaking up the stiffness and literary idiom *is* a different meter, the god damn iambic magnetizes certain verbal sequences" (*SL* 260). "To break the pentameter, that was the first heave," Pound announces in *The Cantos* (LXXXI/538).

These statements against complacency and convention reveal the man as much as they do his literary practice. Everything about Pound was unorthodox. Born in the western town of Hailey, Idaho, on 30 October 1885 – his father, Homer Pound, worked as registrar for the US Federal Land Office, recording claims and assaying the silver and lead brought to him for its purity – Pound became part of a family with broad American roots. A memoir by Homer Pound celebrates *his* father, US Congressman Thaddeus Pound from Wisconsin whose public life would enter his grandson's poetry. But US politics that saw the Democrats replace the Republicans made Homer Pound's job in Hailey tenuous. With his wife Isabel's happy approval – she hated life in the rugged West – they left in 1887, first for New York and then, after securing a job at the US Mint in Philadelphia in 1889, Pennsylvania.

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After a series of homes, they settled in the suburb of Wyncote, the numerous moves adding, perhaps, to the young Pound's sense of restlessness. Throughout his life, in fact, Pound would variously live in Indiana, Venice, London, Paris, Rapallo, Washington DC (admittedly, a "guest" of the government), Brunnenburg in the Italian Alps, Rome and, finally, Venice again, where he would die in 1972.

Homer Pound's responsibilities at the Mint increased as Pound's admiration for his father's work grew, often recalling visits to the Greco-Roman-styled building in downtown Philadelphia in passages of his prose work *Indiscretions*. Gold bars and coins stacked in vaults were part of the imagery of Pound's youth and in Canto XCVII he recalls watching silver coins being shoveled into a furnace.

Pound began his formal education at Wyncote, although the absence of a public high school meant he attended the Cheltenham Military Academy, beginning in 1897. The local paper proudly recorded a 'Ray Pound' (Ray or 'Ra' was an early nickname), enrolling at the academy which required uniforms and daily drill. But the pride of his parents was unwavering, returned by the son who at one stage referred to his supportive father as "the naivest man who ever possessed sound sense," while satirizing his mother's pretensions to gentility (*Ind* 8). And like his own father who became a generous head of the family, Pound became a kind of *paterfamilias* to the modernists, offering advice, editorial instruction, support, and, when possible, money.

Before he graduated from Cheltenham, Pound made his first trip to Europe, traveling in 1898 with his Aunt Frank Weston and his mother. It foreshadowed his later fascination with European culture and his eventual move to Europe ten years later. Pound, his aunt and his mother went mostly to Italy and Spain, with a stop in Tangiers where Aunt Frank bought him a green robe which he later wore at Philadelphia social events. The first of Pound's *Pisan Cantos* (1948) recalls these early adventures. In 1902 at the age of sixteen, Pound made a second visit with Aunt Frank and his parents, stopping at London and Venice. In fact, between the ages of thirteen and twenty-six, Pound made five trips to Europe, extraordinary for a young American, but loosely duplicating the early trips made by the young Henry James. These voyages instilled in Pound a love of European culture, absorption with first-hand research and incorporation of European life in his poetry.

Pound provided an early explanation of his engagement with Europe and classical culture in 1912 when he wrote of his "struggle to find out what has been done, once for all, better than it can ever be done again, and to find out what remains for us to do . . ." (*LE* 11). In this he echoes Matthew Arnold who, in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), defined the quest for culture as the search to

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locate the best that has been thought and written in the past. Both Pound and Arnold made classical literature their foundation.

Pound began the University of Pennsylvania in 1901; he was fifteen and independent. Freshmen were forbidden from wearing flashy socks but Pound disobeyed and was promptly thrown into a lily pond by second-year students, earning him the nickname "Lily Pound." But nothing would stop Pound from expressing himself, poetically or politically. His reddish golden beard also drew attention: "I make five friends for my hair, for one for myself" he once remarked (in *END* 3). At university, he compensated for his youth by being over-confident. His original goal was a Bachelor of Science degree but he gravitated to Romance languages, notably Spanish and Latin. His two closest friends were William Brooke Smith, a young artist who died in 1908 and to whom Pound would dedicate his first published work, and Hilda Doolittle, the tall, attractive blonde daughter of Penn's Professor of Astronomy, Charles Doolittle.

Pound became enamored of the woman he would rechristen for literary purposes "H. D." Both she and Pound shared a passion for classical literature and myth. His earliest volume, the vellum, hand-bound *Hilda's Book* of 1907, contains twenty-five poems for H. D. in the tradition of William Morris, Rossetti and Swinburne. They first appeared in print as the epilogue to H. D.'s *End to Torment* (1979). For a short while, the two were engaged, but H. D.'s father objected; he understood that a poet was hardly in a secure position to support his daughter and blurted out to Pound, when the poet suggested in February 1908 they might marry, "What! . . . Why, . . . you're nothing but a nomad!"[1] Also contributing to their breakup was Pound's reputation as a ladies' man. Gossip that he was involved with other women harmed him.

Pound met William Carlos Williams, a medical student, in his second year at Penn. Williams, like Pound, had literary ambitions and was exotic: his father, who was English, grew up in the West Indies, and his mother was from that region with Spanish, French and Jewish ancestry. Williams had also spent a year in Europe with his parents before beginning university. His friendship with Pound would be lifelong, Williams visiting Pound in London in 1910, Paris in the early twenties and New York in 1939 when Pound made a quick return visit. In 1958, Pound spent his last night in America at Williams' home before returning to Italy. They did not agree on everything, however, Pound objecting to Williams's defense of those poets who stayed in America, unmoved by European traditions. Williams, in turn, claimed that Pound, did little to advance US verse (*SL* 156–61). Williams would also object to Pound's racist views and anti-Semitism during the Second World War, although he defended him as a remarkable poet and worked

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to release him when he was arrested and jailed at St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, DC.

Fencing and Latin became Pound's two major interests in his second year at Penn, which resulted in mediocre grades but modest popularity. He also became disillusioned with the curriculum and proposed a transfer. He ended up at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York. This small, rural school was impressed with Pound's grasp of Latin and chess. In September 1904, he expanded his interests to Italian and Spanish, also studying Anglo-Saxon, Provençal and Hebrew, fitting in English literature when possible. Hamilton also introduced him to Dante. There, he studied *The Divine Comedy* in a bilingual edition. He also began to formulate his idea of becoming a poet, telling various professors that he planned to leave the country for Europe and begin a grand and lengthy poem, although the problem was to find a form elastic enough to include what he thought should be in a modern epic. He graduated in 1905 and returned to Penn for graduate work where, in 1906, he won a summer traveling fellowship and took off to Spain to work on *El Cid*. He also went north to southern France and visited Bordeaux, Paris and London before returning home, completing his first trip alone to Europe. On his return, he began to publish several accounts of his research and travel.

Further studies in 1906 and a renewed interest in H. D., although he was also seeing Viola Baxter and then Mary Moore, occupied Pound while concentrating on Old Provençal, Spanish drama and the *Chanson de Roland*. But he was growing impatient with academic regulations and found the university's lack of sympathy for his study of comparative literatures alienating. His fellowship was not renewed in 1907, although he was beginning to publish. "Raphaelite Latin," his first published essay, defending the pleasures of Latin, appeared in *Book News* for September 1906. The art of the language, rather than philological problems, should be the focus of study, he argued. Provincialism was the enemy, this view setting the tone for his life-long commitment to internationalism.

Pound was also continuing to write poetry, most of the manuscript of *A Lume Spento* (1908) completed before he went to Venice. In the spring of 1907, Pound heard of a position at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana, a small liberal arts school. Hired on the spot during a Philadelphia interview by the president, he left with general enthusiasm but soon found the town isolating and the bureaucracy unbearable. He taught Spanish and two French classes. Entertaining students in his rooms was discouraged so he moved to another rooming house, where he gave shelter to a penniless girl from a burlesque show he met one night in February 1908 when he went out to mail a letter. He invited her back, letting her sleep in his bed, while he slept on the floor of his study. The next morning, Pound having gone off to teach, the landladies found the

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girl in his bed and, within days, Pound was dismissed from the college. He returned to Wyncote, Pennsylvania, and the complicated dual romance with Mary Moore and H. D., his scandalous actions preceding him. Mary Moore rejected his proposal of marriage; H. D. accepted it but her father did not. Pound, miffed and wanting to be free of the inhibitions of American morality, responded by decamping for Europe, taking his poetry with him.

But Pound needed money and asked his father, who had a simple test. He wanted some assurance that his son had talent and sought approval of his son's work from the poet and editor Witter Bynner, who agreed to see him. A dazzlingly dressed Pound appeared at Bynner's New York offices, read his poetry out loud and impressed Bynner enough (by the clothes, perhaps, as much as the verse) for him to write a letter to Homer Pound praising the son's work. Aunt Frank also made a contribution to his travel and Pound left for Europe on St. Patrick's Day, 17 March 1908, with Mary Moore waving from the dock.

Europe was both more and less than what Pound had hoped. He arrived in Venice in April 1908 after stops at Gibraltar, Tangiers, Cadiz and Seville. He initially thought his visit would be brief, but it would be two years before he returned to America. The allure, history and culture of Venice were irresistible for the young poet who recalled his arrival and early life in Venice in Cantos III, XVII and LXXVI of his long work, *The Cantos*. He wandered about and renewed his sense of artistic purpose, forgetting the distress over the Crawfordsville incident. Venice encouraged his imagination, as two early poems, "Alma Sol Veneziae" and "San Vio," recorded. His worked lacked attention, however, so he located a printer, A. Antonini, and published his first book, the 72-page *A Lume Spento* ("With Tapers Spent"), in 150 copies. It appeared in brown paper covers in July 1908. With characteristic panache, Pound told his parents that an American reprint had to be sought, to be encouraged by several fake reviews he, himself, would write so that a recognizable publisher would want to reprint the work. The plan failed and no American edition of the book appeared until 1965.

The arrival of Kitty Heyman in Venice in June, a pianist he first met when he was at Hamilton, postponed his search for work, although he continued to write, composing in what he would label his "San Trovaso" notebook, named after his neighborhood. When *A Lume Spento* appeared, he sent fifteen copies to his father, and single copies to Williams, Mary Moore, H. D. and, most boldly, Yeats, who replied that he found the verses "charming." Pound took this as approval, telling Williams that he had "been praised by the greatest living poet" (*SL* 7–8). This support, plus the absence of work in Venice, encouraged Pound to head to London, determined to meet Yeats whom, he told his father,

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"had stripped English poetic of its perdamnable rhetoric . . . he has made our poetic idiom a thing pliable, a speech without inversions" (*LE* 11–12). So, in August 1908, Pound left for London, a city he found exuberant and exciting, telling William Carlos Williams in 1909 that "London, deah old Lundon, is the place for poesy" (*SL* 7).

Without losing time, Pound acquired a Reader's Ticket for the British Museum to use their vast library and made his way to the Virago Street book shop of Elkin Mathews who had the distinction of publishing Yeats's *Wind Among the Reeds* and the *Book of the Rhymer's Club*. With John Lane, Mathews had also printed *The Yellow Book*. Mathews was sympathetic to the young poet's ambitions and agreed to display Pound's first book, although not to publish the poems from the "San Trovaso" notebook. Pound spent his days writing at the British Museum but, impatient, he sought out another printer and had fifteen of his Venice poems printed as *A Quinzane for this Yule* ("Fifteen for this Yule"). One hundred copies dedicated to Kitty Heyman appeared. Mathews, to Pound's delight, ordered a second printing with several additions by Pound and with Mathew's own colophon on a re-titled front page. *Personae* was the volume's new name. Pound would use the title again for an expanded edition of 1926. The dedication, however, changed: Mary Moore of Trenton replaced Kitty Heyman. And Pound began to earn some notice from reviewers.

Just before publication, but too late to be included, Pound wrote one of his best early works, "Sestina: Altaforte," a dramatic monologue modeled on Browning, actually a rendering of a war song of the troubadour knight, Bertran de Born. The aggressive tone of the opening startled readers: "Damn it all! all this our South stinks peace" (*EPEW* 17). Pound was reinventing the sestina, removing its artificiality and decorous tone (a sestina is a poem in which the same six words, falling at the line-ends of each six-line stanza, reappear in a different order in the subsequent stanza). At the same time, Elkin Mathews aided the young poet by expanding Pound's literary circle, which grew from Ernest Rhys, editor of the Everyman series, to the novelist May Sinclair and, through her, to Ford Madox Hueffer, later to be Ford Madox Ford. Pound basked in this London light.

Ford, in fact, would play a critical role in the evolution of Pound's style. When Pound went to visit him in Giessen in 1911 to show him his latest volume, *Canzone*, Ford immediately responded by rolling on the floor. Pound's "jejune provincial effort" to learn the style of the Georgians was overwhelmingly ludicrous (*SP* 432). But that roll, Pound later wrote, "saved me at least two years, perhaps more. It sent me back to my own proper effort, namely toward using the living tongue" (*SP* 432). Pound was also now socializing widely, mostly through the circle at South Lodge where Ford was living, and having an affair with Violet

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Hunt. Pound's flirtations at the time included Brigit Patmore, Phyllis Bottome and Ione de Forest. He also met D. H. Lawrence. And in 1909, through other connections, he met Mrs. Olivia Shakespear who at one time had been Yeats's mistress.

Pound began to frequent the Shakespear home, receiving, in particular, the attentions of the 22-year-old daughter, Dorothy, who quickly developed a crush on Pound who was more interested in her mother. But at this moment, he needed financial assistance not admiration; luckily, he began a lecture series in January 1909 at the Polytechnic Institute of London on the literature of southern Europe. Olivia and Dorothy Shakespear faithfully attended; others were less regular. Pound took his 5 p.m. Thursday afternoon talks seriously, often wearing a dinner jacket to provide some formality. Other times he preferred a Bohemian style with a half-opened shirt and loosely knotted tie. A black velvet jacket completed the outfit. At twenty-three, Pound at least looked the part of a poet, modeling himself on his early hero, the American expatriate painter James McNeill Whistler.

Yeats, however, still eluded him, at least until May 1909 when Olivia Shakespear took Pound to meet him at 18 Woburn Buildings in Camden. It was not until October, however, that Yeats and Pound began to spend time together (Yeats had been in Ireland throughout the summer). That October also saw Pound's new poem "The Ballad of the Goodly Fere" appear, as well as his new book, *Exultations*. But the encounter with Yeats was propitious, since the poet was casting about for several new poetic forms, although he was at first hesitant to become too involved with Pound whom he described as having a "rugged headstrong nature" and as "always hurting people's feelings." But, he added, "he has, I think, some genius and great good will."[2]

Pound encountered Yeats when the poet was questioning matters of style, seeking an unadorned method without sacrificing drama. This coincided with Pound's growing view that poetry should be "objective," eliminating excessive metaphors and adjectives. The new goal was "straight talk" (*SL* 11). When Pound returned from a short trip to America in 1910, rejecting the idea of residing there, he began to see Yeats almost daily. Monday night gatherings at Yeats's flat saw Pound play a prominent role, almost akin to host, partly recalled in Canto LXXXII. At one soirée, Pound met Bride Scratton, married but bored. He fell for her and for several years they kept up a liaison, although there were other women as well.

During a short trip to Paris to visit his pianist friend Walter Morse Rummel, Pound met Margaret Cravens, an American who had studied piano with Ravel. She admired Pound's writing and free spirit and began to provide a subsidy so that he could complete *The Spirit of Romance*, a book drawn from his London

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lectures. With this new source of income, he was also now able to cancel his regular payments from his father. He even felt confident enough to ask Dorothy Shakespear's father for permission to marry his daughter. He refused, citing among other things Pound's unstable finances. His association with Cravens strengthened and at one point she commissioned portraits of both of them. But on 1 June 1912, she committed suicide shortly after learning that Walter Morse Rummel, possibly her lover, was engaged to someone else. Pound's Imagist poem, "His Vision of a Certain Lady Post Mortem" (1914), records a dream about Cravens.

In 1910, Pound also went to Italy and, for the first time, visited Sirmione on Lago di Garda. This area, where Catullus had a villa, became one of his favorite spots, the land thrusting out into the large, unnaturally blue lake surrounded by the Italian Alps. It would be a site of significance, where Dorothy's own artistic inspiration rekindled, where Pound met Joyce and where he would re-launch *The Cantos* in June 1922. During his 1910 visit, he corrected proof for *The Spirit of Romance* and wrote several poems. Olivia and Dorothy Shakespear soon joined him there and, in May, all three went on to Venice. By June, however, he was on the *Lusitania* traveling from Liverpool to New York.

His visit was a time of reassessment. Should he stay in America or return to Europe? He quickly found there was less work for a poet in America than in England or Italy, and almost no inspiration. He re-met H. D. who followed him from Philadelphia to New York but he showed little interest in her. He also saw Kitty Heyman and contacted both Mary Moore and Viola Baxter. Through Yeats's father, John B. Yeats, a painter then in New York, Pound met the lawyer and patron, John Quinn. A friendship developed and Quinn would later visit Pound when he went to Paris in 1923. A memorable photograph taken in Pound's studio at that time records Joyce, Pound, Ford Madox Ford and Quinn standing together. While Pound was in the States, Walter Morse Rummel visited and Pound expanded his interest in music, which he turned into something profitable when he returned to England in February 1911: he became a music critic publishing under the pseudonym of William Atheling. Music would also play a greater part in his understanding of poetry, which in 1918 he defined as "a composition of words set to music" (*LE* 437). Arnold Dolmetsch, George Antheil and, of course, Olga Rudge, the American violinist who would have a long relationship with Pound, were all deeply immersed in music as composers or performers.

Pound spent some time in New York exploring the possibility of a literary career but he did not take to the city, nor to its writers. He felt commerce controlled its culture, while the architecture seemed inauthentic. He expanded these views in a series of articles he titled *Patria Mia* published in the *New Age* in

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1912–13. He had returned to London, but stayed briefly, taking off for Paris and the world of music. He spent time with Cravens and Rummel's brother, a cellist, as well as days at the Bibliothèque National with its collection of Troubadour manuscripts. He focused most of his energy on completing a translation of the sonnets and ballads of Cavalcanti, the fourteenth-century Italian poet of the *dolce stil novo* ("sweet new school") of poetry, and completing the manuscript of his own work he would publish as *Canzoni* (1911), dedicated to Olivia and Dorothy Shakespear. Before returning to England, he visited Milan, Freiberg and Giessen where he visited Ford.

In London, he shared his enthusiasm for Cavalcanti with T. E. Hulme who thought Pound needed to widen his views and introduced him to A. R. Orage, editor of the *New Age*, a socialist paper devoted to furthering the arts. Liberal, if not radical, in its views, the paper published Shaw, Hulme, H. G. Wells, Katherine Mansfield and others, providing a new outlet for Pound. Essays, poems, music criticism, art criticism and translations by Pound soon began to appear in the *New Age*, one of the most important works his rendering of the Anglo-Saxon poem "The Seafarer." His vigorous translation brought criticism and praise, his liberal view of translation expressed in the statement "dont bother about the WORDS, translate the MEANING."[3] By 1912, Pound seemed to be everywhere, as poet, editor, essayist and polemicist.

One of Pound's most revolutionary acts occurred in the tea room of the British Museum. In the early fall of 1912, Pound read H. D.'s poem "Hermes of the Ways." After slashing through the text, he rapidly wrote at the bottom "H. D. Imagiste" and a movement was born. At the time, he was Foreign Correspondent of Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* magazine in Chicago, to which he sent the poem. Of course, Imagism did not suddenly emerge full-bloom in a London tea room, even one in such august surroundings as the British Museum. It was the result of Pound's study of the Provençal poets and Dante, with their emphasis on the precise, the detailed. T. E. Hulme's writing and the French Symbolists also contributed to his position, partly expressed as "go in fear of abstractions. Do not retell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose" (*LE* 3–5). Pound's 1914 anthology, *Des Imagistes*, demonstrated the Imagist work of poets as diverse as H. D., Williams, Ford, Joyce and Amy Lowell, with whom he would soon battle over the concept.

Pound's profile grew when he became poetry editor of Dora Marsden and Harriet Shaw Weaver's the *New Freewoman*, soon to be renamed *The Egoist*. This liberal journal would become an active source of new ideas and writing. In 1913, he also discovered Robert Frost, reviewing Frost's first book for *Poetry*, taking credit for boosting his reputation (*SL* 62). Pound, however, thought nothing of improving the American's poems, but when he told Frost he had

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shortened a poem of fifty words to forty-eight, Frost angrily replied that he had spoiled his meter, idiom and idea (*SCh* 201). Pound at this time also befriended the French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and Mrs. Ernest Fenollosa, widow of the distinguished Orientalist. The former would introduce Pound to a new aesthetic of direct, geometric art expressed through his own solid but expressive bust of Pound, undertaken in 1914. Pound admired Gaudier-Brzeska's chiseled work, finding in it a metaphor for his own writing, especially in "Homage to Sextus Propertius," *Mauberley* and *The Cantos*. The accumulated lines and allusions in Pound almost stand on one another, as do the hard-cut lines in Gaudier-Brzeska's work. Pound's new form is an "arrangement of masses in relation, . . . energy cut into stone," similar to Gaudier-Brzeska's style (*GB* 110). The sculptor's death in battle in June 1915 was a shock to Pound who would publish a memoir of his friend and his art the following year.

The notebooks and manuscripts given to Pound by the widow of the Orientalist Ernest Fenollosa introduced him to the world of the Chinese ideogram. Pound was fascinated and shared his interest with Yeats, while adapting a series of first-level translations by Fenollosa into the attenuated poetry of *Cathay* (1915). Pound's editing and publishing Fenollosa "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry" several years later was instrumental in advancing Pound's own aesthetic and poetic practice.

The year 1913, when Pound received the Fenollosa materials, was significant in another way: it was the first of three winters Pound would spend with Yeats, acting as his principal secretary, at Stone Cottage in Sussex. The two writers exchanged ideas about art, Pound in particular introducing Yeats to Noh drama and Chinese poetry, the result of his study of the Fenollosa papers. Pound was actually revising Fenollosa's draft translations of Japanese Noh dramas at that time. Yeats read these versions and found inspiration for his own theatre pieces. Pound, in turn, became interested in Yeats's occult studies and began to read widely in esoteric literature. He also read Browning's *Sordello* out loud to Yeats and initiated steady work on what would become his long poem, *The Cantos*. Additionally, Yeats introduced Pound to the work of Joyce, while Pound introduced Yeats to the work of Eliot. Yeats would later acknowledge Pound's help: "to talk over a poem with him is like getting you to put a sentence into dialect. All becomes clear and natural" he told Lady Gregory.[4]

In 1913, Pound wrote to the young James Joyce, at Yeats's suggestion, for a poem to include in his new anthology, *Des Imagistes* (1914). Joyce sent "I Hear an Army" and an epistolary friendship began until the two met at Sirmione, Italy, in June 1920. Pound began to play an important part in Joyce's personal as well as literary life, organizing the move of the Joyces to Paris and introducing Joyce to Sylvia Beach who would publish *Ulysses* in February 1922.

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