

***The Ese'Eja People of the Amazon:  
Connected by a Thread***

**DOUBLE FEATURE**



***James H. Gipson***

***and the Effort to Free Ezra Pound***

July 16, 1958

1958

Mr & Mrs Ezra Pound

Italy



home of  
I'd need is a story  
His Richmond host, H...  
forthcoming literary work.  
I shall always feel a sense of shame that my  
of living poets as they treated you, sir.  
With warm personal regards, I remain

  
THE CAXTON PRINTERS, LTD.  
CALDWELL, IDAHO

April 1, 1952

Mrs. Dorothy Pound  
3215 Tenth Place, S.E.  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mrs. Pound:

It was hard to reach the decision which I felt we must reach, in justice to you and to your great husband, and that is to send back the pamphlets which you have been kind enough to submit to us, because it isn't often that small publishing houses like the Caxton Printers have the opportunity of bringing out a book authored by the greatest living poet, but after giving these a reading I just didn't see how we could successfully put them over, in view of the existing condition and our present commitments.

I have probably explained in past letters that production costs, as far as Caxton books are concerned, are astronomical—they are three times what they were prior to World War II.

In addition we have our schedules filled with items, two of which we were in correspondence about prior to the time that we started writing you about these monographs, and there would be no chance for us to bring this out for a year or more.

We felt, therefore, that we should return this material to you. You will find it enclosed, and we again want you to know that we appreciate your kindness in offering it to us, and we are making a note of Peter Russell's name and address so that we can order these from him in London.

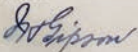
If you and your husband could find time to read them, I would like to send, with my compliments, as a token of appreciation, the monographs by Garret, *THE REVOLUTION WAS*, *EX AMERICA* and *RISE OF EMPIRE*. I am sending circulars descriptive of the two latter titles, and the other title is briefly described in our folder, *Books for Libertarians*.

I thought you both might enjoy reading Garret, as he is one of the greatest of modern pamphleteers, in which field your husband, of course, is interested.

With every good wish, I remain

Yours truly,

The CAXTON PRINTERS, Ltd.

  
J. H. Gipson, President

# James H. Gipson and the Effort to Free Ezra Pound

by Alessandro Mereaglia

On May 3, 1945, armed partisans arrested Ezra Pound in Italy. This began the extradition process to the United States, where, two years earlier, Pound had been indicted in absentia for treason. The charges were based on the content of radio broadcasts he made in Italy, where he had lived for the past twenty years. Pound was brought to the United States, declared mentally insane, and sent to St. Elizabeths, a government hospital in Washington, D.C. Pound vehemently maintained his innocence; his wife, Dorothy Shakespear Pound, moved to D.C. and rented a room near the hospital so she could visit him daily. He would remain incarcerated there for more than a dozen years. During his time at St. Elizabeths, Pound continued to write and publish new poems for his *Cantos*, his life's work. He also received visitors on an almost daily basis. Well-known artists and poets and writers—T. S. Eliot, Robert Lowell, Marianne Moore, and Allen Tate, among others—all visited Pound in his cell. (See Daniel Swift's 2017 book *The Bughouse: The Poetry, Politics, and Madness of Ezra Pound* [Farrar, Straus and Giroux] for an excellent account of Pound's years at St. Elizabeths.) But Pound also received less famous visitors. These included James H. Gipson of Caldwell, Idaho, founder of Caxton Printers.

Founded in 1907 in Caldwell, Caxton Printers is well known as a regional book publisher. Caxton has published (and continues to publish) hundreds of books about Idaho and the Pacific Northwest. Less well known is Gipson's political activism on both the state and national level. He campaigned for Theodore Roosevelt and the Bull Moose Party in 1916; toured the U.S. giving speeches advocating libertarian and free market principles; and was actively involved in Republican politics almost his entire life. Those views dovetailed somewhat with Ezra Pound's politics: a shared concern about economic policy, foreign policy, and the rights of individuals. (Gipson, to be clear, did not share Pound's fascism or anti-semitism.)

The friendship between Pound and Gipson was not particularly close, though both men respected each other. Pound's status as a native son of Idaho—he was born in Hailey, though his family moved to New York City when he was just eighteen months old—buoyed the unlikely relationship between a world-renowned poet and a regional publisher. In the course of their ten-year relationship, they met in person only twice. Pound asked Caxton to publish several volumes of his work (ultimately none were,) and Gipson spent great time and energy working to secure Pound's release from "the bughouse." Indeed, Gipson took Pound's incarceration personally, viewing it as an unjust action by the government, and wanted to see his friend happy and living on his own terms.

What's known about their relationship survives in correspondence found in Pound's papers at both the Lilly Library (Indiana University) and the Beinecke Library (Yale University) as well as Gipson's personal papers at Washington State University's Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections. In total, there exist more than three dozen letters between Gipson and the Pounds. (Gipson corresponded primarily with Dorothy; there are three letters signed by Pound himself.)

The correspondence begins in October 1951, inauspiciously and seemingly by accident. Dorothy Pound wrote a general letter (which does not survive) to Caxton Printers to order a copy of Ayn Rand's *Anthem* (Caxton published the first hardcover American edition.) Gipson wrote back confirming the order and included a personalized note stating, "I believe I am addressing the wife of Ezra Pound, who

many feel as I do to be one of America's greatest poets," and asking if she would be interested in being added to Caxton's mailing list (*October 24, 1951*.) Gipson would repeat that epithet in a dozen of his letters to the Pounds, though by the end of their correspondence it would be shortened simply to "the greatest of living poets."

Dorothy wrote Gipson back (in a letter which also does not survive) and included two economic pamphlets written by her husband—*What Is Money For?* and *Social Credit: An Impact*—with the proposition that Caxton republish them. Although they are little remembered today, Pound wrote seven pamphlets dealing with economic and monetary theory. All were published in England in the late 1930s and then reprinted again fifteen years later by Peter Russell, another English publisher. Dorothy hoped that Caxton might issue American editions of those pamphlets. Gipson offered tepid support for that idea because, he admitted, there was little market for Libertarian books "as we have found by sad experience" (*November 9, 1951*.) Nevertheless, because he was eager to publish something by Pound, he promised he would consider it more seriously.

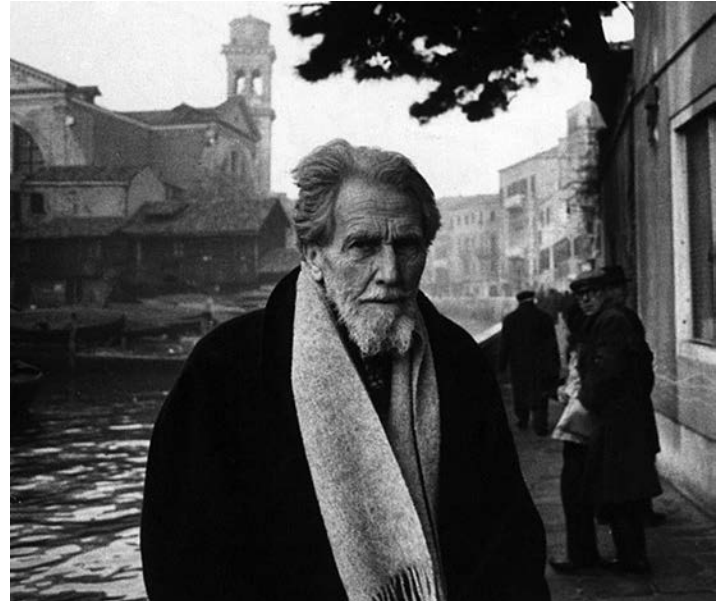
On April 1, 1952, Gipson broke the bad news to Dorothy: Caxton would not publish any of the pamphlets. Gipson's reasoning was financial: "production costs, as far as Caxton books are concerned, are astronomical;" the firm would be unlikely to recover its costs (*full letter at left*.)

Despite turning down Dorothy's offer, Gipson pushed her multiple times to secure a comment from Ezra Pound on one of Caxton's recently published works, *Unison* by H. G. Livezey, a 252-page epic poem. (Pound did ultimately provide a quotation for the book: "clean, unaffected, no left over harness" [*March 27, 1952*].) Gipson also suggested that Pound work as a manuscript reviewer for books of verse submitted to Caxton. "I want to help these authors, and there is no greater critic of poetry than E.P.," Gipson wrote (*February 19, 1953*.)

Another opportunity to publish Pound arose a year later when Pound proposed to have Caxton bring out his latest translation of Confucius. (Pound was a believer of Confucianism for most of his life; a copy of Confucius was one of two books he stuffed in his pockets when he was arrested in Italy.) Though still very sympathetic to Pound and wanting to help, Gipson declined once again. Pound was apparently simultaneously considering using Harvard University Press, which ultimately published the book in 1954. Gipson recommended that they stick with Harvard because the Ivy League press could "do better in the matter of sales" than Caxton, though he reaffirmed his desire for Caxton to publish "an item by the greatest of living poets" (*August 14, 1953*.)

Although Pound never appeared under Caxton's imprint, Gipson did work hard on getting Pound released from St. Elizabeths. Gipson met Pound in person twice. The first time came in early 1953 when Gipson took a month-long trip to the East Coast. There's no record of exactly what the two talked about, but when Gipson returned home he turned his attention to freeing Pound. Nationally and internationally, Pound's case garnered frequent attention. In an interview after winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954, Ernest Hemingway suggested "this would be a good year to release poets."

Gipson's first step was contacting the Department of Justice to get a copy of the full indictment against Pound. (Because Pound had been declared mentally unfit, the indictment was still pending; there had been no trial. Instead, the government psychiatrists at St. Elizabeths remanded him to their custody indefinitely.) After reading the charge, Gipson wrote back to the Assistant Attorney General, that "It would



seem to me that a proper punishment, in his case, would be exile from his native land. I myself could see no greater punishment" (June 22, 1953.) Gipson also corresponded with a friend of Pound's in Italy, Olivia Rossetti Agresti, about the best strategy; both lamented the lack of politicians' interest in the case. Indeed, Gipson's efforts yielded no progress.

Three years later, in February 1956, Gipson again visited Washington D.C. and again met with Pound in person at St. Elizabeths. This second meeting restarted Gipson's efforts of freeing Pound. This time he turned his attention to the media. While in D.C., he met with Walter Trohan, the Washington bureau chief for the *Chicago Tribune* and Bonner Fellers, a decorated Army officer who worked as a staffer at the Republican National Committee. Both men offered support and sympathy for Pound; Trohan even wrote a column about the case. Gipson also had success in Idaho when a reporter at the *Spokesman-Review* wrote an article about Pound's relationship to Idaho. (The article, "Ezra Pound Who Won Poetic Glory and Wartime Notoriety" from April 15, 1956, is interesting on its own; it includes transcriptions of letters that Pound wrote to the former publisher of the *Hailey Times-News-Miner* with comments on Idaho Senator William Borah and economic issues.)

Gipson himself wrote about Pound in his weekly column for Seattle's *Republican Call*, which was also picked up by the *Idaho Statesman*. In "The Strange Case of Poet Ezra Pound," Gipson publicly attested to Pound's sanity and explained his unjust committal: "...if Mr. Pound was insane, there are a lot of mighty crazy people running loose here in America" (June 8, 1958, page 26.)

In the middle of Gipson's efforts, in April 1958, the Washington, D.C. District Court dismissed the treason indictment against Pound. Upon hearing the news, Gipson wrote immediately to Pound to share his elation but also to express his "shame that my country treated the greatest of living poets as they treated you, sir" (July 16, 1958.)

Pound replied, and in his typical style he complained about Idaho newspaper coverage of his release: "I saw the shit this a.m. but didn't take note of which agent of hell was back of it, or what dirty Idaho news sheet" (sic) (May 7, 1958.) From a mutual friend of Gipson and Pound, it's clear that Pound was referring to an editorial in the *Lewiston Morning Tribune* that argued that "his treason . . . cannot be excused" (April 20, 1958.) Gipson promised that he would "see what he can do" about correcting the misleading article (May 13, 1958.)

On May 7, 1958, Ezra Pound was officially discharged from St. Elizabeths after living there for twelve and a half years. He sailed to Italy in July, where he lived with his daughter, Princess Mary de Rachewiltz, until his death in 1972.

The correspondence dwindled after Pound's release, and Gipson never heard directly from Ezra Pound again. He and Dorothy exchange a few pleasantries, and Gipson expressed concern about Pound's health, but nothing of importance transpired between them after 1958. Gipson died in 1965.

J.H. Gipson took Pound's cause very seriously, and used what reach he had to effect Pound's freedom. His relationship with the Pounds, though not close, nonetheless reveals how politically involved Gipson was on the national level as well as underscores his belief in the cause of freedom and liberty.

**Alessandro Mereaglia** is an Archivist and Assistant Professor in Special Collections and Archives at Albertsons Library, Boise State University. This essay is an excerpt from a larger, archival research project, which examines the full history of Caxton Printers and its founder, James H. Gipson. His research is supported, in part, by grants from the Idaho Humanities Council and Boise State's Arts and Humanities Institute.

#### IMAGES

At left: Archival materials from J.H. Gipson's file of correspondence with the Pounds, from the Caxton Printers, Ltd. Records (MS.1984.43,) Manuscripts, Archives and Special Collections, Washington State University Libraries. Dorothy Shakespear Pound, the British wife of Ezra Pound, photographed between 1910 and 1920. Photo by Walter Benington (1872-1936) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. 1952 Letter from Gipson to Mrs. Pound, from the Pound mss.II, Lilly Library, Indiana University.

Above left: Gipson (at center) receiving an honorary doctorate from the University of Idaho in 1956, from the Publications Department Historical Photograph Database, Special Collections and Archives, University of Idaho. Above right: Ezra Pound pictured five years after his release from Saint Elizabeths, near a canal in Venice, 1963. Photo by Walter Mori (Mondadori Publishers) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

At right: Letter from Pound to Gipson written in 1956, from the Caxton Printers, Ltd. Records (MS.1984.43,) Manuscripts, Archives and Special Collections, Washington State University Libraries. Note the "Congrats Doc" scrawled at the top of the letter referring to Gipson's honorary degree.

14 July

Dear Gopson

Sorry you are not passing thru Washington.  
I take it yr/ itinerary is very close . and no use indicating  
people save immediately near yr/ hotels. This in  
ROME , be Sure to see Olivia Rossetti Agresti  
36 via Ciro Menotti

( just across the Tiber)

and Luigi Villari , 2 via Antonio Bosio /

I think they have both seen the Ollivier " Man of Yalta"  
which you said you wd/ be interested in seeing IF it were in English.

Frampton has now translated it on chance, Dave Gordon very excited  
and says it shd/ be published AT ONCE.

Frampton is trying Devin Adair, who bring out Villari ,  
and , I suppose , Regnery , but if are on the job by September and  
neither of them have copped it  
you wd/ be the natural outlet.

I could probably get you sample chapter, if you are working while you travel

I dont suppose Framp/ has had sense to do it in quadruplicate.

The Agresti would know whom else you should meet in Rome if you  
are stopping long enough to meet anyone else.

Niece of Dante Gabe Rossetii , interpreter at Versailles, etc.  
and knows the score.

As does Villari .

hope you have a present trip ."Travel broadens the  
mind " etc.

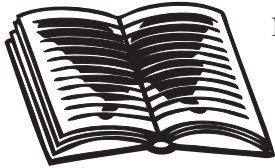
cordially yours.

Camillo Pellizzi , MAY be in Rome. 12 via de Villa Albani  
or in Paris , co/ Mme Bordes , 5 rue Henri de Bornier , Paris xvi.

I saw Agnese Agresti 5/14/52. She is to meet me in EP  
where daughter has married an Italian Prince & must look after him  
Mary E. Reiole

# Idaho Center for the Book\*\* newsletter

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\*Book, construed to include all forms of written language  
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## *A Flock of Thank You's*

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Thanks to *Exhibition Design* students **Rebecca Ballou, Emily Fritchman, Caitlin Harris, Melissa Maxey, Lukas W. Robertson** and **Aimee Rollins** for their thoughtful interpretation of the Ese'Eja material. Thanks to **Osher Lifelong Learning Institute** for ongoing support of Gallery programs at the Yanke Center. And thanks to **Brian Wiley** for masterminding the previous two issues of the Idaho Center for the Book Newsletter.—SB



Left: *The Hunter*  
Platinum-Palladium photographic print  
by Andrew Bale and Jon Cox

Below: *Eiji (Necklace)*  
Black achira seeds, red huairo soltero seeds.  
Made by Merce Shanocua.

Front Cover Above:  
Detail from *The Hunter*

Front Cover Below:  
Archival image of Caxton Printers founding  
publisher James H. Gipson, from the Historical  
Photograph Database, Special Collections and  
Archives, University of Idaho

