

# **And They Played Tennis in Hell: A Screenplay**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

In 1955, a young Jewish Canadian sociologist named Erving Goffman began a year of fieldwork at St. Elizabeths, a federal institution for the insane. Goffman's time at St. Elizabeths would eventually lead to the publication of *Asylums*, a text highly critical of institutions and psychiatry, which became a key text in many areas of academia. At the same time, Ezra Pound, an American poet was well into his tenth year of confinement at St. Elizabeths, having been found of unsound mind and thus incapable of defending the charges of treason leveled against him by the United States Government. This is the imagined story of the circumstances surrounding their meeting, and the subsequent development of an unlikely friendship forged on a tennis court in "hell". It is also the telling of a tale in the form of a screenplay that encompasses the multiple layers of madness, genius and beauty captured within the confines of St. Elizabeths. It is a work of fictional truth that has carefully woven together allusions to many of the works that influenced Pound's writing of *The Cantos*, such as the *Odyssey* and the *Divine Comedy*. In the end, it is also a story of how life's circumstances can propel one in a direction that may not have seemed likely at the time.

**Keywords:** Ezra Pound; Erving Goffman; image; beauty; madness; genius

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Amanda Hill who supported my educational journey, listened to my ideas and willingly gave up the use of the dining room table as my work expanded throughout the house.

For beauty, wherever you may find her.

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to express my many thanks to Professor Michael Kenny and Professor Tom Grieve. This thesis would not have been complete without their patience, guidance and willingness to impart their expertise throughout my journey.

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## Preface

### *Into the World of the Dead*

Over the past four years I have been often asked two questions. The first question more often than not seems to be “where did you get the idea to write about these two very different individuals?” The second question then becomes “what is the purpose or the reason behind writing about these two very different individuals?” I will attempt to answer both questions below as well as provide some general insight into the structure and dialogue of the screenplay which follows this preface.

For some time now I have pondered the exact circumstances of where the idea to write a play about the meeting of Ezra Pound and Erving Goffman at St. Elizabeths originated. I should like to mention before I get too far underway that St. Elizabeths is referred to without the apostrophe “s” as one may expect, but that is the way Goffman referenced the setting of his fieldwork, as did those working within the institution, and that is how I am intending to keep it. This little side step then brings us to how the idea came about in the first place.

Over fifteen years ago, I attempted to get a small paper titled “The Kitchen: An Architecture of Power” published. The paper was returned with several comments and suggestions, one suggestion being that I should take the time to read Erving Goffman’s *Asylums* as it might be of use to me in the future. Taking the suggestion seriously, I proceeded to search for the text in used bookstores, a habit that I gained from my undergraduate years. It only took a couple of weeks to locate a used copy of the text, which I immediately bought and plunged into once I had it home. It then took another fifteen years to actually finish reading.

I was fortunate enough to have read the Preface of *Asylums* before tossing it aside for something a little more interesting at the time. Little did I know that within ten years the first three pages of Goffman’s seminal work would put me on the path to something that I would never imagine undertaking: the writing of a screenplay.



But what was it in the first three pages that stuck with me? It was this exact sentence: "In 1955-56 I did a year's fieldwork at St. Elizabeths Hospital, Washington, DC, a federal institution of somewhat over 7000 inmates that draws three quarters of its patients from the District of Columbia" (*Asylums IX*). This seems like a fairly banal start to a project that would capture my imagination and take over my thought processes for the better part of four years. Yet this was the start of what was to become what I refer to as sheer happenstance.

After putting down *Asylums*, I immediately returned to my old habit of searching through used bookstores for anything that caught my eye, and five years ago something did just that. I found myself in a used bookstore in Steveston, combing through the literature section, seeking I don't know what, but something always seemed to draw my interest to whatever caught my attention. On one occasion it was Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, and on another occasion it happened to be J.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. On this day, it would be an author's name that caught my attention. As I scanned the ragged spines of the used books that lined the shelves, one name almost leapt from the sagging overloaded bookshelf and that was "EZRA POUND." I had never heard of him before or even remembered seeing such a fantastic name as Ezra. I have always been fond of any author with a "z" in their name. For some odd reason it just seems to seize my eye and demand attention. I pulled the little Penguin text from the shelf and scanned the back cover due to a bad habit of wanting to see the backside comments before looking to the front cover for the title of the text. However, upon turning the book over, I was immediately struck by two intense black eyes glaring back at me from what I think is the most haunting of images. It was a black and white photograph of Ezra Pound in all his dazzling glory, his white greying hair cresting like a wave on his high forehead and the intensity of his stare almost demanding that I take him home. I immediately put the book back on the shelf and walked away. The experience just seemed too intense - almost wrong - as if I picked up something dirty and needed to wash my hands of the experience.

A couple of weeks passed and I found myself back at the same bookstore in Steveston. Once again I was absent-mindedly scouring the titles of books in the literature section when there he was. He had not moved and the name still struck me as intensely intriguing. I hesitantly picked up the little book and flipped it over in my hand,

noticing the weight and density for such a small text. I then once more looked into the eyes of the author that glared back at me. He seemed to be tempting me to open this particular book and discover his world, a world I did not recognize. For some reason, I felt guilty for not knowing who this character, Ezra Pound, was — almost as if I should have known of him all along.

I flipped the text open to order to scan the table of contents. What I encountered was a list of names that I should have been able to recognize but did not, except for a few, such as T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats. Yet now that I think back on why I didn't recognize authors such as William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Wyndham Lewis and Hugh Kenner, I realize that my education was too specific. I learned a great deal about sociologists and criminologists but very little about those other great men that briefly inhabited our world and provided us with such beauty, difficult though it may be.

So, there I was gazing at a list of names that meant nothing to me, yet for some reason I closed the book, walked briskly up to the counter and purchased *Ezra Pound: Penguin Critical Anthologies*. How could I have realized at that moment just how profound an effect Ezra Pound was going to have on me? Even now, when I look back on the process of my re-education, I still find it hard to comprehend. Yet my story has just begun.

Having purchased the book and taken Ezra Pound home, I still felt awkward even handling the book. It seemed to be electric in my hands, almost as if I was about to read a book banished from polite society, and yet there it was in my hands waiting to be read. So I placed it amongst my other books that were also waiting to be read and walked away from what seemed to be an ill-gotten treasure. In the days and weeks that went by I would pick up the book and flip through the pages, wondering just where and how to begin reading this intriguing little text. I decided that the best thing to do was read about the author and so looked at the "Table of Dates" whereupon I happened to read, "1945, Flown to Washington, where he is reindicted for treason. Found medically unfit to stand trial, he is committed to St. Elizabeths Hospital for the Criminally Insane, Washington, DC" (Critical Anthologies 18). It was at that very moment I knew that this man was trouble, and that I should never have purchased the book. However, something else happened in that instance; a flash of name recognition struck me at the back of my mind:

St. Elizabeths, I have heard that name before. But where have I heard it? I went back to the books on my shelves that remain partially read and waiting for their completion.

Ah, yes... that is it, *Asylums*, by Erving Goffman. I knew I recognized the name. But wait, when was Ezra Pound incarcerated at St. Elizabeths? Here it is, yes... from November 1945 to April 1958, almost thirteen years in the mental hospital. Now, hold on a second, I seemed to recall that Erving Goffman was also at St. Elizabeths, when he was conducting his fieldwork. Yes, of course, from 1955 to 1956, the same time that Ezra Pound was an inmate. Then the question struck me between the eyes: I wonder if the two ever met during Erving Goffman's time at St. Elizabeths and if they did what would be the result of such a meeting. The idea fermented in my mind for over a year or so before I actually had the nerve to present it to anyone.

That moment occurred in April 2008, when I was being interviewed for acceptance into the GLS program by Stephen Duguid, the Director of the Graduate Liberal Studies program at Simon Fraser University. At that time, I think I was asked if I had any idea of where I wanted to go with the program, or if I had an idea that the program may be of assistance in helping me to complete. I started to outline a rough concept of a play that would introduce and somehow manage to explain the happenstance behind the meeting of Ezra Pound and Erving Goffman at St. Elizabeths. It was the very first time that someone actually took the time to hear me out and to demonstrate some interest in my idea. I am very appreciative of the time Stephen took that day to listen to my ramblings, especially since I didn't tell him that I hadn't actually read anything from Ezra Pound, nor did I even know if the two actually met. But, there it was... my idea was out of the bag and in the open.

I needed to get to work immediately if I was going to be able to complete this project, and the first thing I needed to do was establish whether or not the two actually met and if so, what the circumstances of their meeting were. I started reading *Ezra Pound: A Critical Anthology* and quickly came to the realization that I may have bitten off more than I expected when I was introduced to Pound's theories on art and poetry and particularly when I came across this passage:

There can be little doubt that it was this extension of his interests about this time that led to his formulation of the main poetic modes: melopoeia, phanopoeia and logopoeia. (Anthologies 25)

Well, this nearly put a complete stop to my readings. Once again I began to not only question my education, but my ability to understand the poetry of Ezra Pound. But then again, I realized that I didn't have to fully comprehend Pound's poetry. All I needed to do is understand the man (this was to be just as challenging an endeavor) and his time at St. Elizabeths so I could connect him with Erving Goffman. It was in the same section of Pound's *Anthologies* that I knew I was on the right track when I happened upon the comment by J.P. Sullivan in his "Introduction" regarding "Pound's theory that the poet has to put on a series of poetic masks in his search for reality, for a way of truly expressing himself" (Anthologies 24). The concept of masks and of personae played an important role in Goffman's dramaturgical theory, which I was hoping to pull from Goffman's fieldwork at St. Elizabeths. However, I was not prepared for the lack of background information available on Erving Goffman due to the sealing of all records and fieldnotes upon his death.

What I was able to ascertain from my research on Goffman and his method was very much an individualized project that he continued to develop and refine over his lifetime. It is interesting to note that although Erving Goffman is one of the most cited sociologists of our time (Thomson Reuters' ISI Web of Science, 2007) there is no school of Goffman. There is no one undertaking the work that Goffman started nor is there anyone that can duplicate his literary style and presentation. Goffman as a man and as a sociologist is an enigma. His contribution to sociology is without question, indeed profound, but exactly where he stands amongst the greats seems somewhat uncertain. He is certainly most well-known for his dramaturgical perspective and his subsequent use of the theatre as a metaphor for developing his front stage and backstage references to everyday life. However, Goffman is much more than that as a social scientist; he was also a first rate ethnographer. As stated by Dmitri Shalin, "many of Goffman's friends, former students and colleagues suggested that he seemed to have the ability to see right through people; almost as if he had x-ray vision" (Goffman Archives – interviews conducted by Dmitri Shalin). It was this vision that provided Goffman with the ability to recognize that the individual was very much a constellation or

a constructed self — a self that consists of actions, gestures, emotions, mannerisms, behaviours, tics and verbalizations, all of which are components of the self being constrained and constructed within the parameters of a given social situation. Goffman was as much a sociologist as he was an anthropologist. In the end he was an especially astute participant observer of the everyday life. But did he ever happen to meet Ezra Pound while conducting his fieldwork at St. Elizabeths?

This question caused a great deal of digging around on the internet so that I could ascertain the possibility that these two men met. I proceeded to send emails to anyone that happened to have had any contact with Ezra Pound or Erving Goffman during the timeframe when Goffman was conducting his fieldwork at St. Elizabeths. This was a difficult task because most of those who knew either man were long dead or if alive, were not able to remember such a meeting. Yet I persisted in my haphazard attempt at what I call research. I came across two names that turned out to be particularly useful in my search for a connection. The first was Lee Lady, who happened to be a fairly regular visitor of Ezra Pound from 1955 to 1956. The second was a very reluctant contributor to my cause, Tom Goffman, Erving Goffman's son. Tom remembered that his dad told him stories about meeting the great American poet, Ezra Pound, while working at St. Elizabeths and that he (Erving) happened to play tennis with Pound. I then confirmed this with Lee Lady, who remembered Ezra Pound often playing tennis with the assistant athletic director at the time. He remembered this not because of the tennis so much but because the two men were so dissimilar in age and stature. Goffman was in his 30s and was relatively short, being roughly 5 foot 2 to 5 foot 4, while Ezra Pound was in his 70s and was much taller at 5 foot 11.

Finally, I had enough of a connection to build from; by happenstance these two men of great intellect met: a young Erving Goffman — already recognized as a genius by many in his peer group, and Ezra Pound, the aging poet, a man of unquestionable genius in his own right living within the confines of Washington, DC's notorious, imposing and sprawling mental institution — St. Elizabeths. That they crossed paths at St. Elizabeths has certainly been confirmed as I have established that they played tennis together on at least one occasion. What they talked about I can only speculate; perhaps they spoke about great books, women or nothing more significant than the weather. No matter what it was they happened to discuss during their time together I am sure it was

strained, not only because of the circumstance surrounding them at St. Elizabeths but also because both men were very well read and very prickly in nature. This was a combination that I am sure made for some extremely interesting conversations that I am attempting to bring forth to the reader of my screenplay.

Now all I needed to do was structure the play so that it would flow cleanly from my mind. Pound provided me with the way in which to accomplish this task. I would structure the play along the lines of a fugue, the very same structure that Pound explained in a letter to his father dated April 11, 1927. Pound's very own architectonic structure of *The Cantos* would serve as my guide:

... the whole dam poem is rather obscure, especially in fragments. Have I ever given you outline of main scheme::: or whatever it is?

1. Rather like, or unlike subject and response and counter subject in fugue.

A. - A. Live man goes down into world of Dead

C. - B. The "repeat in history".

B. - C. The "magic moment" or moment of metamorphosis, bust thru from quotidian into "divine or permanent world." Gods etc.

(Anthologies 93)

Hopefully, what the reader will discover is that both Ezra Pound and Erving Goffman are the two live men who descend into hell — hell being St. Elizabeths, the total institution and the psychiatric treatment being undertaken within. The "repeat in history" will occur as both men move through the carefully constructed and restrictive environment of St. Elizabeths, where we as the reader bear witness to the formation of madness and the production of the insane. Pound often uses the "repeat in history" as a means to maintain continuity within the *Cantos*, which he does by referring to the repeated patterns of great texts and great figures within his ever expanding historical experience. However, what I suggest within the context of the screenplay is that as Pound and Goffman engage each other in dialogue, Pound draws upon his literary tradition and his own works to punctuate his present with a suggestion of truth which only those in the know would fully realize. Pound's textual references become in a sense historical artifacts or "objects of representation" as suggested by Richard Sieburth (Bernstein 40). Therefore Pound's age-old habit of filling conversation with literary and

textual references then creates the sense of madness attributed to him during his time at St. Elizabeths. Yet the image Pound presents to the psychiatrists monitoring his behaviour and to his many guests is the personae of Pound the artist, the creator, the poet and the master. He takes on the role of the many within the body of the individual and it is for Goffman to realize that Ezra Pound, as subject within the insane asylum, is also just one more object contained within the very ragbag of history that pertains to the ongoing development of *The Cantos*.

The “magic moment” alluded to by Pound materializes when Goffman comes to realize that St. Elizabeths as the land of insanity and Pound’s land of the dead begin to merge into one and the same. The story lines of both characters’ play out independently of each other, yet because of the environment and the forcing structures contained within the psychiatric model, such as batch living conditions, a highly structured routine and behavioral rewards, their story lines are interconnected. Pound and Goffman as characters within the screenplay and in life had to have crossed paths, thereby providing the interconnectedness between subject question and subject response, and thus completing the nature of the fugue.

Yet, in order to make this work, I needed a solid foundation on which to build my structure, for as Pound suggested, “It is a foolish thing for a man to begin his work on a too narrow foundation” (Anthologies 84). So I used the two overlapping texts found throughout Pound’s Cantos: the first textual layer is found in Book X of the *Odyssey* in which we find Odysseus landing on “Aiaia, the island of Circe” (Homer 169). Upon landing Odysseus and his men discover the “House of Death” (Homer 170). The land that surrounds Circe’s home is described as a “landscape, covered with woods and scrub, and puffs of smoke ascending in mid-forest” (Homer 171). Circe’s home itself is described as a “smooth stone house... wolves and mountain lions lay there, mild in her soft spell, fed on her drug of evil” (Homer 171). St. Elizabeths is the carefully crafted allusion to the house of Circe for within the walls of St. Elizabeths we too will find that men are turned into docile beasts. Yet Pound, like Odysseus, retains his manhood because he never is provided with the antipsychotic drugs that would have affected his mind. The drug regime not undertaken by Pound is an ironic twist to the situation that faced Odysseus, who was provided with the drug, molü, by Hermês that enabled him to withstand the deadly charms of Circe.

The second textual layer is Dante's *Inferno* with attention placed on Canto I. In Canto I, we are introduced to the pilgrim and the initial setting for Dante's epic by the following lines of text: "I woke to find myself in a dark wood, for I had wandered off from the straight path when I first strayed, leaving the path of truth; but when I found myself at the foot of a hill, at the edge of the wood's beginning" (Dante 67-68). Erving Goffman makes his appearance at St. Elizabeths in a similar manner for he is the pilgrim. It is interesting to note that like the pilgrim this would also be Goffman's midway point in his life, which was unfortunately cut short by a brief battle with stomach cancer. Both Pound and Goffman are being drawn into a journey of discovery, a journey where Goffman will discover that what may constitute the constellation of self actually lies somewhere among the various roles that individuals are expected to play, the masks they must don within particular social settings and the societal guidelines that delineate polite behaviour. Pound quickly discovered that playing the role of the madman not only saved his life, for if he happened to be found guilty of treason, he may have faced the death penalty. His incarceration in St. Elizabeths also provided him with the time to focus on bringing the *Cantos* to conclusion. However, I am not sure if Pound would consider nearly thirteen years of forced confinement as equivalent to a rest break, which may have been all he needed to complete his epic journey. Over the time that Goffman spent conducting his fieldwork he became acutely aware of those socio-environmental factors within St. Elizabeths that both curtail and enable social behaviour. He would realize that what one may consider normal may be a fine line between mental illness and genius.

Much of the play, which is now a screenplay, is a work of fiction based around and upon the ideas, concepts and theories that over the duration of a lifetime Ezra Pound and Erving Goffman pursued. Like Ezra Pound, I found myself dredging up connections contained from disparate texts and language, which charged words with a sense of timeless power, words that have the ability to craft images within the mind. Some words, such as usury or Jew and their direct affiliation with Pound's anti-Semitism, should have remained in the conceptual scrap heap of time because they detract from the intended focus of my story. For I was concentrating on the emergence and possible crossover of ideas that may have sprung from this unusual friendship, and did not intend to defend nor denigrate Pound's thought patterns as he crafted his epic poem. However, the words and ideas spouted by Pound tend to overshadow the greatness of the poetry



contained within *The Cantos* and in the end minimize the genius of the man. Yet as we will soon discover, words, actions and their meanings, be they intentional or not, can and do form the constellation of personhood. For it is the interactions of the individual with his environment and those others that populate that environment that formulate the person he is perceived to be. Both Ezra Pound and Erving Goffman were such individuals. One could not put a finger on their identity because they were truly multiples; each was his own carefully crafted persona. I hope that the following screenplay does them justice.

### ***The Dark Forest of History***

This brings me to the second question I am most frequently asked; what is the purpose or reason for undertaking this project? It was and has always been first and foremost a personal project that I originally set out to complete more as challenge to research and write a play. However over the course of time my project has turned me toward a renewed interest in scholarship as I perused with more rigour the connections between Pound and Goffman at St. Elizabeths. The influence their meeting may have had over the subsequent work of these two men of genius could do with greater research, which was beyond the scope of this project. Originally, this project was going to focus more on Erving Goffman; however the more I read, and the further my research progressed, I soon realized that Ezra Pound was going to overshadow Erving Goffman, as he did with many the writers and thinkers that came into contact with him. Ezra Pound was truly a man who cast a large shadow, even during the twilight of his career. He did so even at the age of seventy and with many restrictions placed upon him because of the environmental circumstances of living within the confines of an asylum, like the enforcement of even the simplest of daily routines such as when to get up and when to turn out the lights. Nevertheless, Ezra Pound was in the midst of one of his most prolific periods of writing in his career: his time in St. Elizabeths saw him complete two sections of *The Cantos* (“*Section: Rock Drill*” and “*Thrones*”), the translation of two Greek plays, and the writing of thousands of letters all mailed at the expense of the United States. How Ezra Pound managed to do so while living within the confines of hell, St. Elizabeths, is truly amazing and a testament to the strength of his character.

If anything, Ezra Pound was just one character among many characters living within the walls of St. Elizabeths, who, because of happenstance, Erving Goffman was fortunate enough to observe. I am fairly confident that Goffman would have been deeply stimulated intellectually by his observations and conversations with Pound. Goffman's use of the theatre and his metaphor of the mask to describe the individuals living under the influence of the asylum would lattice neatly with Pound's own concept of persona. During his time at St. Elizabeths, Goffman witnessed the slippage and chinks that evolved in the masks those inmates wore. He was also witness to the changes in his wife's own persona, as she swung back and forth between states of manic depression.

Goffman's exposure to Ezra Pound was also timely in that Pound provided yet another example of the constructed self, which Goffman could then use to further describe and construct the image of the individual, as a constellation of the self. Pound, however, more than likely gained more from their friendship. For with Goffman came a recreational release, the person with whom Pound could achieve some reference to normality, even if it was only framed within the context of the tennis court. Tennis was Pound's game and it allowed him the opportunity to relax and step away from the oppression of the institution. He could simply be himself, even though it meant stepping into yet another cage.

Ezra Pound and Erving Goffman were both men of great genius within their own fields of influence. They also knew their craft very well. They were both well read and quick to use their wit as a source of defense, as well as a tool for an offensive attack on those who may have stepped on their intellectual toes. This provided Pound and Goffman with an air of prickliness, which one would quickly discover if not careful. However, they were both extremely loyal to those they referred to as friends, those individuals who could fend off the sharp spines used to keep others at a distance. Yet, what I discovered about these two men went far beyond their similarity in personality.

It seems that Ezra Pound and Erving Goffman were fairly athletic in their own right. Pound was fanatical about tennis and fencing. He was known to play cards and chess when so inclined. Erving Goffman was also a solid tennis player; however skiing was to become his sport of choice, as he rather excelled at downhill skiing. He also enjoyed playing cards, and it was well known amongst his friends that although he

thoroughly liked playing poker, he did not have a poker face and so lost more often than he won. More intriguing is that both men were very good at sizing up their adversaries and recognizing a fraud when they happened upon one. This would have made an interesting twist into the dynamics of their meeting at St. Elizabeths, where I am sure Ezra Pound would have recognized Goffman as not being who he claimed to be. And Erving Goffman would have instantly realized that Pound was playing the role of a mental patient rather than actually being mentally ill.

This brings me to the question of role playing, which I think is the most intriguing idea that comes from my research. What are the roles we play in a lifetime and how does one maintain these roles, especially when confronted by a difficult time and place? These are questions that I think both men tackled from very different perspectives. Pound sought to understand the role of those men he considered to be of influence throughout history, such as Odysseus, Jefferson and Dante, by seeking connections with them from historical texts; Erving Goffman, on the other hand, sought to understand the roles men play within the context of the everyday circumstance. It is from their seeking to understand these roles that both established the use of “image” as a means to describe what their observation determined was the nature of these roles. Pound presented the image textually to his reader as beauty, which was always difficult to fully comprehend because beauty stems from the trials and tribulations of lived experience and not only from the way words as text are aligned and juxtaposed on the page.

Goffman on the other hand presented us with the image of the individual as an archive of the flesh: beauty it seems stems from social interaction constrained within a constellation of self. The individual we then portray results from this seemingly unscripted social dance, a dance that the individual as a social actor attempts through a loosely defined set of choreographed verbal and non-verbal communication, to craft the mask of one’s personae. Goffman seemed to have the uncanny ability to see through and beyond the masks of personae. It is from these observations that Goffman created an archive of the self that is based upon his observations, perceptions and images of the body, as the subject represented himself throughout his everyday interactions. These interactions then formed the rituals of the everyday. Thomas Scheff, a Goffman scholar, suggests that Goffman’s “method of investigation was to engineer a continuing clash between the taken-for-granted assumptions in our society and his incongruous

metaphors and propositions... otherwise known as a perspective by incongruity” (“The Goffman Legacy”).

Goffman’s time at St. Elizabeths exposed him to a world in which interaction may have seemed at first stunted by the constraints of the institution; however, by the end of his fieldwork he came to realize that the individual “within the forcing house of change” (*Asylums* 12) comes to play a role — that of the insanely normal. As Goffman suggested, “normality is never recognized since abnormal is the expected norm” (*Asylums* 85), and the individual begins to accept this fiction within the “framework of imagery that surrounds the judgment of self” (*Asylums* 128). I believe we can witness this construction of self in Ezra Pound. Pound plays several roles and takes on different personas, such as inmate, teacher, father, husband and friend throughout his time at St. Elizabeths. Pound seems to become more and more an object, almost a curiosity during his time at St. Elizabeths. However, who was the real Ezra Pound, and does it really matter? I am not sure. I would hazard the guess that he was both all and none of these roles. Perhaps the true Ezra Pound was to be found where the “self and the person collide” (*Insanity of Place* 361), to be understood not from “what he said but what he means” (*Letters of EP* 60). Similar to Goffman’s suggestion that the individual may be found in the “coded actions of self, their stream of expressions, the outward and inner man, and their syntax of conduct” (*Insanity of Place* 360-375).

The concept and use of the term “image” was a very powerful tool for both men. Although they may have used the concept of image somewhat differently, it did provide a common end from a different means. It is the image of St. Elizabeths, and the role of psychiatry, which continuously leads us back to the same point in time and place. Note the description Erving Goffman uses to express what he sees as the failure of psychiatry: “the dead are sorted but not segregated and continue to walk among the living” (*Cooling the Mark* 463). It is interesting to note the similarity of Ezra Pound’s description of his time at St. Elizabeths “where the dead walked and the living were made of cardboard” (*Cantos CXV*). Both men used the idea of the “dead” as a powerful tool to create an image of those subjects as they wandered the asylum, the institution or the psychiatrist’s office. These brief quotes also shed light upon the fact that both men use the “perspective of incongruity” to demonstrate ideas and images that may not be apparent to the reader. The use of Kenneth Burke’s method to “juxtapose incongruous

ideas as a means to yield new insight” (Greg Smith 21) is also a subtle connection between Pound and Goffman, a connection that I think should not go over-looked since it leads us back to the notion of the “image.”

It is the notion of and the use of the “image” that I would like to pursue a little further and in particular discuss the idea of the self as a constellation, which Goffman presented throughout his work and that Pound represented as a poet. For as a poet, Pound was working under various personae, which makes it difficult for the reader to clearly envision exactly where and when Pound the writer entered a poetic piece and when the piece actually reflected the thoughts and ideas, such as those associated with the image of beauty, attributed to a particular subject-object. Throughout the play I have presented various “images” composed of multiple layers. These images are intended to be layered in a super-positional fashion whereby textual images are layered somewhat like sediment over time, similar to the formation of geological stratum. Koji Kawamoto describes Pound’s similar use of the technique of super-position as “setting one idea (or word picture) on top of another” (Kawamoto 710). I am building each textual reference or textual image on top each other and by using authoritative texts such as the *Odyssey* and the *Divine Comedy* as consistent images of representation, I hope to provide a super-historical footing. By super-historical, I mean to implicate Pound’s sense of patterns and congruities of thought and action that keep repeating over time, particularly in those texts or authors deemed worthy by Pound for consumption.

Perhaps another way of presenting the disparate images generated from the dialogue between Pound and Goffman could have been advanced from the poetic device, parataxis. By doing so, I would have placed seemingly incongruent images side by side and forced the reader to find the connections. However, I was determined to employ Pound’s textual layering as a means to build each sequential image layer upon layer while allowing for the emotional and experiential connections to bleed through. I thought this was a more practical means to develop a sense of the historical nature of the dialogue as well as ground the images emerging from the textual references.

The dialogue contained within the screenplay is grounded within the context of *The Cantos*, the work in which Pound made manifest this belief in the “repeat in history.” What is most interesting about this layering technique is that as Pound grappled with

maintaining a semblance of control over the history contained within his *Cantos*, Goffman is also starting to realize that perhaps the individual as perceived by the observer consists of layers of perception as well as layers of deception. Each layer of *The Cantos* or of the individual as subject coheres because the author of each reproduction has attempted to remain true to the original schema set out at the beginning of the work. For almost fifty years Pound's work on *The Cantos* remained true to the structural scaffolding set down in the 1920's when he managed to find the right architecture for his long poem. Pound laid out his own structure of being when he decided to write *The Cantos*, a poem that contained history and in doing so he continuously tried to portray and maintain the image of the artist poet. The images thus portrayed become the temporary persona or mask slipped on by the elusive core of the individual, which itself may be the product of profound emotional trauma accompanied by a nagging sense of self-doubt and worthlessness. Our own myths of being are structured around this inner core.

Therefore, each layer of dialogue consists of an image composed of a subtle reference to a particular myth, a textual allusion or an historical innuendo which develops the meaning behind the screenplay. It is an attempt similar to Pound's use of "luminous detail" (*Selected Prose* 21) as a means of providing the notion of poetic truth of lived experience to erupt to the surface of his text. In this case, much of lived experience of both the past and present as interconnected thought is generated from those authoritative texts that Ezra Pound suggested be read, such as the works of Dante and Homer. I would like to further suggest that these works are like the gesso of our mind that forms a surface of common understanding or collective consciousness from which the images of the self through varied experiences are able to coalesce into what I have referred to as an archival constellation of self. This is an idea similar to Pound's suggestion of the "interpretive activity of the ideogrammic method which consists of presenting one facet and then another until at some point one gets off the dead and desensitized surface of the reader's mind, onto a part that will register" (Qtd in Yee, "Discourse on Ideogrammic Method 250). These layers then form a multiplicity of selfhood — an archive of the flesh, per se and a tool that Pound seemed to use throughout the *Cantos*. This technique has been referred to by Mathew Hofer, a Pound scholar, as a "multistable poetic image" (475) or by Thomas Scheff, a Goffman scholar,

as “cascading layers of images” (*Goffman Legacy*). All of these can be compared to the renowned eugenicist, Sir Francis Galton’s use of the “composite image” as discussed by Allan Sekula , a writer, critic and photographer(40), to create an image of the self and a tool to formulate an archive of the flesh. Ezra Pound’s own particular archive of “self” seemed to consist of a series of interwoven connections running throughout his interpretation of a specific history of ideas and texts that can perhaps be better described as a hermeneutic construction. On the other hand, Erving Goffman’s archive of self-consisted of his ability to observe the interaction of the individual as he experienced day to day life similar to what Thomas Scheff suggests Charles Horton Cooley, a well-known American Sociologist, described as “the looking glass self” or “impression management” (*Concepts and Concept Formation* N. pag.). For Goffman the composite image of the individual consisted of those actions, gestures, emotions and other subtle social behaviours that all layer one on top of each other, forming the presentation of self in that particular moment of being. However, the image of self-portrayed at that moment is very much a shifting composite, as it is formed and reformed as the subject interacts with his or her “participant” observer. But are we as subjects then the product of a certain social construct, or are we equally involved in the production of that social construct as we adapt our actions to fit and recreate the role expected of us and create the role we want to portray within various situations? I think that we as active individuals are, to a point, both the product of a social construct and directors of the role we play, and that nuances of the role we play within a particular social context are absolutely necessary, especially for those wanting to portray themselves as sane.

### ***My OWN Moment of Metamorphosis***

As I have attempted to suggest, both Pound and Goffman constructed an image of the “self” around the fictional truths of a reconstructed subject and from the myths surrounding their own carefully constructed history of being. As Goffman wrote in *Asylums*, “an important aspect of every career is the view the person constructs when looking backwards over his progress [and] which derives from this reconstruction” (145) Here the term “career” is used to describe “any social strand of an person’s course through life [...] allowing one to move back and forth between the personal and the

public” (127). The construction of the person’s career or perspective of “self” is not only an individual construct, but also very much a social construct. This is a concept of self that over one’s life time of actions and experiences is not only created and recreated by the individual himself, but is also documented and recounted by those monitoring the progress of that individual. I suggest that both Erving Goffman and Ezra Pound consciously crafted their own personae and carefully donned their masks according to the image they wanted to portray, depending on the time and place. They were men carefully protecting their backstage presence by presenting a painstakingly constructed and masked front stage persona. However it was Goffman who became proficient at peeking under these masks, just enough to realize that an individual existed within the cracks and chinks of their armour.

Goffman began to see the person as constructed object represented not only by their own actions but also by their gestures, emotions and intentions. The subject became a constellation of self, a person connected by thin filaments of expressions, signs and symbols which, although seemingly disparate, form a carefully crafted whole. This constellation is rather like the little scraps of paper that hung from the pieces of string strung out across Pound’s room at St. Elizabeths comprising fragments of thoughts and ideas written hastily onto random bits of papers. However, when the fragments are drafted into a whole, the parts shattered the darkness of a mind trapped within the confines of Circe’s house, providing Pound with those moments of beauty that he used to write lines of poetry, such as

When one's friends hate each other  
how can there be peace in the world?  
A blown husk that is finished  
But the light sings eternal  
Time, space,  
neither life or death is the answer.  
(*Cantos CXV*)

Even in hell Ezra Pound was able to see beauty, and to find meaning in life suspended in time and place. He even found friendship on of all places the asphalt tennis courts of St. Elizabeths. Yet to many it was hell. And that is what has changed me. I now realize that the trees do support the sky and that their roots do indeed hold the soil tight to the earth’s core. We all need just “a little light, like a rushlight to lead back to



splendor” (*Cantos* CXVI/797). And it is the almost magical metamorphosis of me, the author, that although very much unintentional constitutes the final layer of this project, for I have become yet another counterpoint within the text. I have discovered over the many drafts and the many hours spent thinking about the intent and meaning of this project that I have become a part of the underlying structure. My own development as writer and as a thinker, as well as my greater knowledge of both Ezra Pound and Erving Goffman, have made me realize that I too walked among the dead as I read those texts and documents necessary for researching this project. I have realized that I too have emerged from the dark forest of history only to discover quite accidentally that I have changed. Pound taught me how to see beauty and Goffman taught me how to see the subtlety of those everyday actions that surround one’s being and for these gifts I am greatly appreciative.

**And They Played Tennis in Hell:  
A Screenplay**

# Dramatis Personæ

## Erving Goffman

(1922 – 1982) A Jewish Canadian, born in Manville, Alberta. He completed both his MA and PhD at the University of Chicago. He is most well-known for his dramaturgical method which provided him with a foil to study the interaction of the individual within particular social roles. His main works include *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), *Asylums* (1961), and *Interaction Ritual* (1967). It was during his fieldwork at St. Elizabeths Mental Hospital that he met and befriended Ezra Pound. He went on to become one of the most cited Sociologists of our time.

## Ezra Pound

(1885 – 1972) An American, born in Hailey, Idaho. He lived the majority of his life in Europe. He was a poet, literary critic and a promoter of some of the best known literary artists of his time such as T.S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams, James Joyce and Robert Frost. He is best known for his innovations and translations in poetry and his own poems *The Return* (1912), *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920), and *The Cantos* (1917-1969). He was arrested and tried for Treason in 1945. He was found to be mentally unfit to stand trial and was admitted to St. Elizabeths for treatment. He would spend nearly thirteen years housed in St. Elizabeths until released in 1958.

## Dorothy Pound

(1886-1973) The wife of Ezra Pound. She married Ezra Pound in 1914. She travelled to Washington DC from Italy in 1946 and made her first visit to St. Elizabeths, July 10, 1946. She would become almost a daily visitor to St. Elizabeths, ensuring that she provided the support and companionship required.

## T.S. Eliot

(1888-1965) Poet, literary critic and playwright. A long-time friend of Ezra Pound. He would visit Ezra Pound frequently over the thirteen years Pound was housed in St. Elizabeths.

## **William Carlos Williams**

(1883-1963) Doctor, poet and playwright. A long-time friend of Ezra Pound. He would visit Pound whenever he happened to be in Washington, DC. Although the two did not always see eye to eye on many things, their friendship endured.

## **Sheri Martinelli**

(1918-1996) Painter and poet. When in her early 30s, she would become a frequent visitor at St. Elizabeths. Her presence at St. Elizabeths and in Pound's life is recorded in *Section: Rock-Drill* of *The Cantos*.

## **Young Lady – Administration Building**

Allusion to Circe

## **Attendant – Chestnut Ward**

Allusion to Apollo

## **Angelica Schuyler Choate-Goffman – Aegle**

Married Erving Goffman in 1952. She was reportedly extremely helpful in editing Goffman's work. She would commit suicide in 1964. She jumped off the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge which crosses an arm of San Francisco Bay. She seemed to have struggled with mental illness for many years. It has been suggested that she may have even been treated for a mental breakdown while Goffman was conducting his fieldwork at St. Elizabeths. There has been no substantiated proof that she was ever at St. Elizabeths.

## **St. Elizabeths Hospital – A Federal Institution**

Built in 1852, St. Elizabeths is a hospital located just outside of Washington, DC. In 1955, St. Elizabeths housed nearly 7000 inmates, including those considered criminally insane. It serves as the setting for the screenplay. It also provides an allusion to Circe's home as described in Book X of the *Odyssey* and its grounds are an allusion to Canto I of *The Divine Comedy*.

## **Act 1.**

### **Scene 1: The Beginning — And from the Dark Forest**

**EXT. GROUNDS OF ST. ELIZABETHS.**

**DAY.**

Upon the silent grounds of the asylum steps a lone figure. He is in his early thirties, rather short in stature and dressed in a perfectly pressed dark blue denim outfit. He is Erving Goffman and through the russet gloom of twilight the figure gazes over the sea-green grass and the hilltop shrouded in the quietly thinning mist that extends out over the property that once was an arboretum and now contains St. Elizabeths. Erving Goffman, who obviously must have wandered off from the straight path, now is seen walking along a narrow dirt path between the arches formed by elm trees planted long ago as if from the “wood of wilderness, savage, and stubborn.”<sup>1</sup> His foot fall is muffled by the dampness and his form is dappled in shade of the elms and scrub oaks that line the once well-worn path. Our stranger, “having gazed out from that high place over a land of thicket, oaks and wider watercourse,”<sup>2</sup> sets forth down the slight incline towards the ominous concrete towers of St. Elizabeths. Before the stranger arrives at his intended destination, he comes across a small group of young people in an open glade; they are crouched and listening in hushed rapture to an old man. He is Ezra Pound and he is seventy years old. He is found sitting in a folding aluminum lawn chair. The grubby green and white striped fabric of the folding chair is tattered from the years of use by the old man who sits underneath the lengthening shade of an immense oak tree, his back to the wrinkled and gnarled trunk of the grand tree.

As the stranger draws near, the scene begins. There is talk about oak trees, oak leaves and acorns. The chatter shifts between language and dialects. Sometimes the

voices seem to be of a heavy English accent and then shift to a southern drawl punctuated by the odd word of Greek thrown into the mix. Yet upon approaching nearer, it becomes obvious that the voices are all coming from Ezra Pound who seems to be holding court. He is slouched backwards casually in his green and white folding aluminum throne. His grey hair, a tangled mass like an angry ocean, crests upon his head. His shirt is half open, exposing a similar mess of grey hair. He is seemingly relaxed, yet his body looks ready to pounce, like that of a cat ever watching for prey. At once the old man's chatter switches from the talk of trees to the talk of light and then a name the stranger recognizes is spoken: "and from the mere cherry stone, Santayana says to me, something there."<sup>3</sup> The old man is talking about George Santayana. It is only then that the Erving Goffman recognizes that the old man must be the great American poet. "That fount from which pours forth so rich a stream of words,"<sup>4</sup> is Ezra Pound.

**EZRA POUND**

*(spotting the stranger standing at the edge of the wasteland)*

Ahoy there young seafarer.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Are you referring to me?

**EZRA POUND**

Yes, you there you in the dinghy astern there!<sup>5</sup> Are you looking for me? Are you lost?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

No sir, I am looking for Dr. Overholser. Do you happen to know where I may find him?

**EZRA POUND**

Well, in that case I may be of some assistance. If you don't mind letting me finish up here with my class, then perhaps I can show you to where he may be found.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I think I will stand if you don't mind.

**EZRA POUND**

Where was I? Yes, as I was saying.

Look at these oak leaves.

*(holds up a handful of golden-brown leaves)*

If one looks at the acorn one can see the capacity of the entire oak tree, including the veins on these very leaves and George said, "You may have something there."<sup>6</sup>

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Hmmm, excuse me, Mr. Pound. I cannot help but ask, are you referring to George Santayana?

**EZRA POUND**

Yes, that would be of whom I am speaking.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Well, then, if that is the case, then wasn't Santayana referring to a cherry-stone and was not the implied natural design more, let us say, unconscious?<sup>7</sup>

**EZRA POUND**

I see that you know your stuff; however I will let Freud deal with the mental capacity of fruit or what have you. Just like he tried with ma chérie - HD, Mr.? I didn't catch your name.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

My name is Erving Goffman. I am the new assistant to the Athletic Director. I will be starting next week but I am hoping to get a tour of the facility which is why I am here. I am actually looking for Dr. Overholser.

**EZRA POUND**

Well, in that case I should not delay you any longer. It seems that perhaps you may have wandered off the "path of truth" and so "I think it best you follow me, for your own good."<sup>8</sup>

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I don't want to interrupt you but if you don't mind, that would be most helpful.

**EZRA POUND**

My allotted time is up, and I can now show you to the administration building where I am sure we can find Dr. Overholser.



## **Act 1.**

### **Scene 2: Welcome to Hell**

**EXT. FRONT ENTRANCE. ST. ELIZABETHS. MAIN BUILDING**

**DAY.**

The scene shifts and we see Ezra Pound and Erving Goffman walking from “a low landscape covered with woods and scrub towards a large imposing smooth stone building.”<sup>9</sup> At the main doors they stand side by side. Ezra Pound reaches up towards the black burnished door and bangs loudly with his clenched fist on the mesh covering the window. The voice of a woman calls out from behind the door. The door opens swiftly and the young lady “sighs a welcome...come, come in! And like sheep they followed.”<sup>10</sup> The two, with a sense of cold indifference, stand in the entrance.

**INT. LOBBY. ST. ELIZABETHS.**

**YOUNG LADY**

How may I help you?

**EZRA POUND**

This gentleman is here to see Dr. Overholser. Do you think you can let him know he has a visitor?

**YOUNG LADY**

Mr. Pound, is this one of your visitors or is the Doctor really expecting this young man?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Yes, Dr. Overholser is expecting me.

**YOUNG LADY**

And who may you be?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I am a little bit late because I was side tracked by Mr. Pound and his lecture, which I happened upon while walking through the grounds.

**YOUNG LADY**

And may I tell him who is asking for him?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Listen honey, my name is Erving Goffman.

**YOUNG LADY**

Exactly what business does it pertain to?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I am the new assistant to the Athletic Director. Dr. Winifred Overholser is expecting me. My appointment was arranged by Dr. Jay Hoffman.

**YOUNG LADY**

Oh, Dr. Hoffman. Why didn't you say so?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

No, Goffman. I am Erving Goffman and, if you don't mind, can you let Dr. Overholser know I am here to see him.

**YOUNG LADY**

Well, why don't you take a seat? I will go get the Doctor.

*(she walks off, her shoes clicking as her heels strike the marble tiles)*

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I guess I will take a seat.

**EZRA POUND**

I have shown you to your destination and now it is time for me to head back to my room. I hope to see you again soon. Enjoy your stay. Oh, and try to remember, as you sit upon that throne, many good men have come to these halls and many thinking of freedom have stayed.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Thank you for being my guide.

**EZRA POUND**

This reminds me of what Virgil said to the pilgrim "let wisdom, love and virtue sustain you."<sup>11</sup> And, if you ever find yourself lost again, come and find me I am more than happy to show you the way.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

*(sits and watches Pound walk away)*

Erving Goffman is left to his thoughts as Pound walks off down the hallway. Pound's once determined stride changes into that of a hesitant shuffle, as he turns a corner, disappearing from view. All at once, the sounds and smell of St. Elizabeths assaults Goffman's senses. The odor of sweat, saliva and urine mixed with ammonia fills his nostrils. The moans and weak sobs of men seem to surround him, and from the corner of his eye he is met with the glazed stare of men in white pajamas and slippers. Their eyes are upon him. Some sit with arms wrapped around their knees, others stand while steadily rocking and yet others, strapped to metal chairs, "wail and tear at their hair."<sup>12</sup> There seems to be a constant frenzy of movement along the shadowy hall; men of different colour, shape and age mill about a radio humming in one corner and a television set is gazing as intently back at those that watch its flickering picture. Goffman thinks that perhaps he has accidentally wandered into hell and tries to recall the exact saying about "no man alive having accidentally stepped into the land of Death"<sup>13</sup> or something along those lines. His thoughts are suddenly broken by the figure of an older man in a white lab coat walking briskly down the hall towards him. His hand outstretched and smiling very broadly, almost too happy, must be Dr. Overholser.

## **Act 2.**

### **Tennis Courts — Purgatory: Let the Games Begin**

**EXT. ST. ELIZABETHS. TENNIS COURT.**

**DAY.**

Erving Goffman and Ezra Pound stand facing each other at the entrance to the tennis courts of St. Elizabeths. It is early on a spring afternoon. Each man takes to his side of the court. It is an odd sight. As the two men stand ready to play, a casual observer may quickly note the age difference in the two competitors. Erving Goffman is in his early 30s while Ezra Pound is in his 70s. Erving Goffman is a fairly short man, perhaps standing 5 feet 4 inches while Ezra Pound at 5 feet 11 inches seems to tower over Goffman. Erving Goffman is impeccably dressed in his all too white tennis shorts, t-shirt, sport socks and tennis shoes, whereas Ezra Pound is dressed in his usual off-white cut-offs made from the pants supplied to all patients. His shirt is unbuttoned, his underwear hangs out below the cutoffs of his shorts and he is in slippers. Erving Goffman steadies himself on the baseline, the racket held tight in his right hand while he bounces the tennis ball casually in his left, readying to serve. As he looks across the court and beyond the net, he sees his opponent, Ezra Pound, who just happens to be a very good tennis player, although his style is rather unorthodox, much like the man. Rather than stand at the baseline awaiting the serve, Ezra bounces up and down like a marionette or, better yet, like a popcorn kernel on a hot skillet – full of potential but unpredictable. Ezra also plays well in front of the baseline and with every leap and bounce he feigns an attack on the net. The court itself is shadowed from the sunlight by the many branches of trees.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Mr. Pound, are you ready to play?

**EZRA POUND**

I am always ready to play tennis. Erving, call me Ezra or Grampa or even Ra? All I ask is that you please don't refer to me as Mr. Pound. There was only one Mr. Pound and that was Homer, my father.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Okay, how about from now on I just call you Ezra and you can call me Erv. Does that work for you?

**EZRA POUND**

Will you just serve the goddamn ball already. I only have a couple of hours of free time and I don't want it to go to waste yammering back and forth across the net.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Service

**EZRA POUND**

*(shouting out abruptly)*

Erv, did you happen to notice how "the sky is leaded with elm boughs?" <sup>1</sup>

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Ah!

**EZRA POUND**

Net!

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Ezra, will you not yell out to me while I am trying to serve. That is really not sportsmanship like. Just play the game properly or else we can just sit and chat.

**EZRA POUND**

Okay Erv, I will tell you what. I won't talk when you are trying to serve, but I do like to chat while playing tennis. I find it relaxes me, and allows me to think.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Fine, just try to limit the noise while I serve.

**EZRA POUND**

Serve the ball. After all it is only a game. Win or lose makes no difference, especially since I am twice your age.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Service!

**EZRA POUND**

Net ball. Love - 15.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Are we keeping score now? I thought we were just rallying?

**EZRA POUND**

Well, have it your way. We can just rally then which allows me to talk more.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Fine, we will just rally.

**EZRA POUND**

Erving Goffman. What kind of name is that?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

It is my name and as I said, call me Erv.

**EZRA POUND**

No, I mean, what is your background. Are you Jewish? I only ask because your name sounds very Jewish and you have that Jewish look.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Canadian.

**EZRA POUND**

Pardon?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I was born in Canada. I am a Canadian Jew, if you must know.

**EZRA POUND**

Hmmm, I thought so, not the Canadian thing but the Jewish part. I thought as much. At least I now can place the accent. Did you know that I had a good friend that was Canadian?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Really! I did not know that. Who?

**EZRA POUND**

You may have heard of him. Wyndham Lewis. Oh and come to think of it so is Hugh Kenner. He graduated from the University of Toronto. Perhaps I could introduce you, if he happens to come by for a visit.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I didn't know Wyndham Lewis was Canadian.

**EZRA POUND**

Yes, well sort of in an off-shore kind of way. He happened to be born on a yacht that was in Canadian waters. Somewhat of an aristocrat I think, being born on a yacht and all.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Interesting.

**EZRA POUND**

Jewish, and he even plays tennis. Now that is interesting.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

What does my being a Jew have to do with tennis?

**EZRA POUND**

Nothing, I just find it interesting that's all.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Well, Ezra, you are an American, a poet and from what I can gather from these surroundings obviously insane, yet here you are playing tennis.

**EZRA POUND**

What does sanity have to do with tennis?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Nothing, I am just leveling the playing field.

**EZRA POUND**

Leveling? How much more advantage do you need? You are half my age, in better shape, and with much quicker reactions.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Perhaps you are right. It was a low blow to question your sanity, but one may speculate that only an insane man would step on to the tennis court in that outfit.

**EZRA POUND**

Touché. A little rapier you are and very quick of wit too.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

And now you pick on my size. I think we need to take a bit of a break.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Let's go sit on the bench for a couple of minutes

**EZRA POUND**

*(follows and sits beside Goffman)*

**EZRA POUND**

Well, well, Erv it looks as if I may have hit a bit of a sore spot.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

All of my life I have had to live with being the shortest guy in the group and now even when working alongside those thought to be crazy, I am still the odd one, the one that stands out because of my size.



**EZRA POUND**

You may not know this Erv but we all have chinks in our armor, and it is only when these become exposed to others that our masked bravado slips and our true identity is revealed.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Hmmm, masked bravado. Is that another one of your references to Santayana?

**EZRA POUND**

No, it is something I said a long time ago. "The poet has to put on series of 'poetic masks' in his search for reality, for a way of truly expressing himself."<sup>2</sup>

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Exactly when did you say that?

**EZRA POUND**

It was a long time ago, perhaps even another lifetime you may say. If I can remember correctly, it would have been around 1910, maybe earlier. I was preparing a collection of poetry titled *Personae* which was to be released. It was then that I started thinking about the role of the poet and his place in history and the singular importance of respecting one's inner gaze.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Just how much of your youth do you remember Ezra?

**EZRA POUND**

Let just say "I have hidden my face where the oak spreads its leaves and cast aside the old ways of men."<sup>3</sup> For over "forty years I have schooled myself to write an epic poem that begins in the dark forest."<sup>4</sup> And yet, here I am playing tennis in the midst of perhaps the darkest forest, with a man forty years younger than I am. Light and darkness cast funny shadows across the wrinkles of time left on an old man's face. Perhaps that is the concept of the mask: the passage of time. One man's history summed up in the reflections and recollections on a written page.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

If I remember correctly did not Santayana write, “masks are arrested expressions and admirable echoes of feeling, at once faithful, discreet and superlative. Living things in contact with the air must acquire a cuticle, and it is not urged against cuticles that they are not hearts; yet some philosophers seem to be angry with images for not being things.”<sup>5</sup> And interestingly enough Robert Ezra Park said, “That it is no historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask... recognition that everyone everywhere more or less consciously is playing a role.”<sup>6</sup>

**EZRA POUND**

Well, for some reason I do like that Park fellow. He has a good solid name at his core.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

“If the mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be”<sup>7</sup> then what role do you see yourself playing at this time Ezra?

**EZRA POUND**

I am just a tired old man trying to ensure the correct education of those young people that seek me out and keep me company.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

So, you are maintaining your mind playing the role of insanity? We are in the middle of “reality as it is being performed”<sup>8</sup> on the grounds of the asylum. Now that really is crazy.

**EZRA POUND**

That is a nice play on words Erv.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I am sure you of all people Ezra realize the importance of words and how they can be used to console or as a weapon.

**EZRA POUND**

Oh yes, I am all too familiar with the power of language be it written or spoken.  
Why do you think I am here after all?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Well, it certainly wasn't to improve your tennis game and from how frequently you are looking over to the grassy hill over there, I would say it is more to look at those young nurses having their lunch.

**EZRA POUND**

Yes, it does seem that whenever the sun is out and the weather is warm, the nymphs come out of the forest to sit on the grass and have their lunch. However what I have realized also is that they never seem to age, yet I grow older by the minute.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

That doesn't seem to stop you from meeting the ladies though does it?

**EZRA POUND**

It's a gift, and being somewhat of a curio also helps. Oh, I wanted to tell you about something interesting that happened the other day.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I am listening.

**EZRA POUND**

An angel fell to the ground.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

What do you mean by an angel?

**EZRA POUND**

Well, I was carrying my aluminum folding chair from the ward to the oak tree where I always meet my little class of followers, and, as I rounded the corner of the path, I nearly bumped into her.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Her who?

**EZRA POUND**

Why the angel I was telling you about.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Oh, the person you bumped into was the angel. Okay, I am trying to follow you.

**EZRA POUND**

As I was saying, I nearly bumped into her. She startled me and in my surprise, which is never good for an old man, I jumped back and dropped some of my books.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Did she help you with your stuff?

**EZRA POUND**

Actually she did help me a great deal. Anyhow, I asked her if she happened to be looking for me.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Typical Ezra, always thinks that the young women are looking for you.

**EZRA POUND**

Well, it does happen more frequently than not that they do seem to seek me out. Have you met Sheri? She is a young artist who drops by often to sketch me and to chat?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Can we get back to your angel, if you don't mind Ezra?

**EZRA POUND**

Oh, of course, the angel. Why yes, where was I.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

You were starting to tell me about that angel you found on the grounds the other day.

**EZRA POUND**

Ah, well anyhow, it turns out that this rather tall, dark haired young lady wasn't really looking for me after all, but she was very pleased to have bumped into me and so decided to join the group that day.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Ezra, sometimes getting you to the point can be like pulling teeth. If this young lady wasn't looking for you then who was this young lady looking for?

**EZRA POUND**

Well, that is the interesting thing about my angel. She was actually looking for you!

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Looking for me! Did she happen to tell you her name?

**EZRA POUND**

Of course she told me her name. After I introduced myself, she introduced herself to me. What kind of gentleman would I be if I didn't introduce myself.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

And, what was her name?

**EZRA POUND**

I told you, her name. The angel who fell from the sky that day was Angelica.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Angelica! That is my wife. Did she happen to be alone?

**EZRA POUND**

Of course, all angels travel alone or at least I always suspected they did. Why, whom would she have been with?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Well, my son or perhaps with one of the doctors.

**EZRA POUND**

No, she was quite alone. She seemed rather lonely, troubled about something. I am not quite sure but I have seen that look in other young ladies before. Is she okay?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

What do you mean by that?

**EZRA POUND**

I don't know, okay. Is she all right? There must have been a reason she was here to see you.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Alright can mean a lot of things. How did she seem to you? How did she behave around the others? Did she talk too loudly or too often with the group? Did she promote some groundless idea that seemed to be seized upon from the papers, or did she just want to be the center of attention?

**EZRA POUND**

Well, that is a lot of questions to ask about the behaviour of one's wife. It almost sounds like you want me to re-create an image of her and her actions so you can diagnose her social interaction.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

One's image is a complex constellation generated from the individual's posture, place, expression and actions, after all.<sup>9</sup>

**EZRA POUND**

Interesting thought. All I can say from meeting her the last couple of times she has attended the group is that she is a refined, intelligent young lady who, although shy in the beginning, really can come out of her shell after a couple of drinks of wine.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

The last couple times she has attended the group? Wine! You were drinking wine, together?

**EZRA POUND**

ERVING, you know full well that some of my students bring me gifts. These little tokens of appreciation allow me to get through my stay here. I don't go around advertising these gifts because then the other inmates would expect me to share and I just won't do that.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

No, of course not. You certainly don't want to fraternize too much with other riff-raff, but you will entertain my wife.

**EZRA POUND**

I didn't realize. You didn't know that Aegle was attending my group.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Aegle? Who is that?

**EZRA POUND**

Aegle, why that is the name I have given my angle that fell from the sky; you really need to follow along better Erv. Aegle is Angelica. You are rather slow on the uptake today.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Aegle, you go about naming all your young female students, do you?

**EZRA POUND**

Why, yes if they happen to mean something to me, and your wife is someone rather special - troubled but all in all special.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

What makes you so certain?

**EZRA POUND**

Around here there is nothing but rabble, yet “her boredom is exquisite and excessive.”<sup>10</sup> “She is very much like the shifting changes to be found in a bundle of broken mirrors.”<sup>11</sup>

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

What did she want? Did she say?

**EZRA POUND**

She wanted someone to speak to her and I did.<sup>12</sup>

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

She is quite sick you know. It is not too her advantage.

**EZRA POUND**

Advantage.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

To be hanging out here with so many obviously ill people. This is not a game.

**EZRA POUND**

Game.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Angelica needs to be at home with our child. If she is bored she can watch the television set.

**EZRA POUND**

Set.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I am very worried about her and I do love her.

**EZRA POUND**

Love? I thought it was match?



**ERVING GOFFMAN**

EZRA, you really do need to listen more and talk less.

## **Act 3.**

### **Scene 1: The Cave — The World of the Dead**

**INT. ST. ELIZABETHS. CHESTNUT WARD. POUND'S ROOM.**

**DAY.**

Erving Goffman is standing in the middle of Ezra Pound's room found in the Chestnut Ward on the second floor of St. Elizabeths' Central Building. Goffman stands transfixed to his spot just inside the door as he scans the room. The room contains a bed strewn with books, papers and other miscellaneous materials. From under the bed we can see two legs sticking out and we can hear the distinct sound of jars and cans clinking together. We can only imagine that the scene underneath the bed is very similar to that on the bed. The walls of the room are lined with books, magazines and other papers of some sort. And, where no books can be seen, paintings and sketches of Ezra Pound himself stare back towards the viewer. From the ceiling of the room string has been strung like clotheslines which crisscross the room at various heights and distances. It is from these many strings that clippings and images hang down, blocking the path of any intruder into Pound's room and so those entering must duck and weave to avoid being tangled in them. Outside the door of his room, his wife Dorothy and Sheri Martinelli prepare the alcove for his special visitors. T.S. Eliot, and Williams Carlos Williams will be arriving shortly. Ezra is now almost fully under the bed. Only his slippered feet can be seen sticking out, and every now and then a hand thrust out from the darkness, pushing out a tin can or a jar of left-over food for his soon to arrive guests.

**EZRA POUND**

Dorothy! Should I make tea?

**DOROTHY POUND**

*(from the hallway)*

I cannot hear you Ezra, wait a minute I will be right there...

*(rising from her chair and moving towards the doorway)*

I am coming. Just hold your horses.

**EZRA POUND**

What was that Dorothy? I can't hear you. I said do you want tea?

**DOROTHY POUND**

*(entering the room)*

Tea would be nice, yes.

Oh, Erving I didn't know you were in the room with Ezra. I must have missed you coming in when Sheri and I were down the hall collecting chairs.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

*(turning from the bookshelf)*

Good afternoon, ah yes, I was just coming by to speak with Ezra when he told me to wait a minute while he searched his stash of tins and jars for jasmine tea. At first, I thought maybe he had lost his marbles again or something important like that.

**DOROTHY POUND**

Marbles yes, cute Erving, but he would be a long time under the bed searching for those. Tea you said. Excellent. That must be the tea that Sheri brought by the other day. I am so glad you decided to join us today Erving. We have some very special guests coming by and I am sure you will be interested in meeting these gentlemen.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I am curious Dorothy. I hope you don't mind me asking, but why do you stay?

**DOROTHY POUND**

Stay? What do you mean?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I guess what I am asking is, why you show up every day here to visit Ezra, when you could be doing something else?

**DOROTHY POUND**

What else could I be doing? I am supporting my husband in his time of need. One could say that I am the modern day Penelope waiting for her husband's return.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Awaiting his return? That seems like an odd choice of words since he has never left.

**DOROTHY POUND**

Perhaps so, but then again maybe I come back day after day out of loyalty or maybe it is love?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Love perhaps, or maybe it is just love of the familiar as they say.

**DOROTHY POUND**

No, it is definitely out of love. Just look at the man, watch him, listen to him, his emotion, his passion. He really is something else.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

That is what I have been doing. I have been observing him very closely, trying to get a bead on him, and for the life of me I cannot seem to get a fix on him. He truly is a "multiple" and yet he seems to have lost his way.<sup>1</sup>

**DOROTHY POUND**

Then you need to listen more and think less about what it is you expect to see. For the "true" Ezra is right in front of you.

**EZRA POUND**

Ah ha, found the little bugger, must have rolled to the back when I got out of bed this morning. Oh, Erv, you have arrived. Great to see you again. Are you here to see me or just to stand there looking at my jewels?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Excuse me, I don't, know what you mean? I was looking at your bookshelves, the books you have gathered over the duration of your stay.

**EZRA POUND**

Of course you were. These jewels - rubies, sapphires, amethysts and whatnot I refer to - are the very books you were looking at.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

*(voice from the hallway)*

For god's sake Ez why the hell don't you just say what you mean?<sup>2</sup>

**EZRA POUND**

*(yells over shoulder in the direction of the open doorway)*

Good to hear you haven't changed much in your old age Bill. You are beginning to sound a lot like your father.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

*(talking over the interruption)*

Well Ezra, you realize that one can tell a great deal about a man from the way he keeps his books?

**EZRA POUND**

Okay, what exactly do my bookshelves say about me then, Erv.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Well, your taste leaves a little to be desired, though it is an interesting collection of classics, including the many versions of Homer's *Odyssey* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which is certainly a sign of pretentiousness and pompous elitism. Moreover, the lack of anything more recent suggests a person stuck in the past. You are definitely a classic, maybe even a relic.

**EZRA POUND**

You were saying something Erv? All I heard was a comment about my taste in the classics. Anyhow, what do you think of the sketches? They are mostly from Sheri, the young lady you saw on the grounds the other day.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Interesting; they seem almost to have a hauntingly obsessive fondness for you Ezra. Why do you insist on putting them all up?

**EZRA POUND**

Yes, she has captured my likeness well. As for keeping them on the wall, they expand my perspective. Don't you think?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Perhaps swells your ego more than your vision.

**EZRA POUND**

I guess you are right in that assessment. A very astute observation you have. However, one need understand and believe in that old codger Freud to think it may have something to do with my ego.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Again, I remind you, Ezra, that I am not a psychiatrist, nor am I seeking to find fault with your personality, which at this time seems to be getting too big for your room. Perhaps you need to better organize the nest you have built here. And these infernal strings strewn everywhere like a spiders web after a wind storm, that I keep walking into.

**EZRA POUND**

Organize my room? No, that will not do. This is the way I work. This is the way I think. Everything in this room is connected to a grander purpose of thought. It may not make sense to you but it certainly works for me. I can lie here in my bed and look up at these strings and clippings which from that angle can be read like a sheet of music.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

It seems that everything you do is organized around the idea of connections, real or not.

**EZRA POUND**

Yes, as if thoughts, ideas and theories are but bits and pieces pulled from the scrapheap of history. It is just the small matter of one seeing the connections that confront us.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

But, Ezra, what if those so called connections are flawed by the man who attempts to stitch them together.

**EZRA POUND**

Erving, you seem to worry too much for an assistant athletic director. After all, as the grand teacher, the job of the educator is only to arouse your curiosity.<sup>3</sup>

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I must admit that sometimes I really don't understand where you are coming from or even going to, for that matter.

**DOROTHY POUND**

Ezra was always forty years ahead of the game. Just look at him, he is simply sanity out of place, out of sync with time.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Yes, he does appear to be a little beyond our reality, which may explain why he is here, in this place in which one's sanity seems to be directly linked to what others think and then captured within an ever expanding dossier.

**EZRA POUND**

In this place, they don't want to just recreate reality. They expect normality and that is just not me. Normality is mediocrity and I am anything but. I am like the mystery of the hinges<sup>4</sup> in which one's genius and madness swing on society's conceptual pivot of normality. Yes, sanity truly is an architectural marvel.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Are you suggesting that your state of being swings both ways or are you suggesting that you are, a gentleman like those characters within *Tristram Shandy*?

**EZRA POUND**

A gentleman, me? Well, I very well could be, however I am sure that not many of my friends would support such a conclusion. Erving, what I am suggesting, and I think you need to make a point of this, especially during your time here at St. Elizabeths, is that it ain't what a man says but what he means that counts.<sup>5</sup>

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

First you need to be a gentleman, Ezra; however I will try to keep that in mind. From the sound of things out in the hall I do believe your visitors have arrived.



## **Act 3.**

### **Scene 2: The Alcove**

**INT. ST. ELIZABETHS. CHESTNUT WARD. HALLWAY.**

**DAY.**

Outside the doorway of Pound's room, in the alcove, voices can be heard in cheerful greetings and chairs can be heard scraping against the brown linoleum floor as they are moved and shuffled into place.

**EZRA POUND**

Good afternoon, hello, Possum, how are you doing? Oh, I see you managed to drag the old Sawbuck von Grumps out of New Jersey along for a visit.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

I had no idea that Thomas was going to be here and if I did, I wouldn't have wasted the cab fare to visit.

**EZRA POUND**

Please, take a seat. I was just making tea. I hope you will join us for tea, as it is Sheri's special jasmine tea. I can assure you that it is fantastic. However, I cannot guarantee that it will not contain a special pinch of St. Elizabeths', as her dust tends to get into everything, including the water.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Well, I can see from the state of your attire and your room that things haven't changed much.

**EZRA POUND**

While I have been locked away here toiling in the mines of the caged minds, I constantly worry about my place in literature.

**T.S. ELIOT**

You will always be read. Long after we have all left this world, you will be remembered among the greats.

**EZRA POUND**

I doubt that very much. Look at me, look at where I live.

**T.S. ELIOT**

You seem very comfortable here among your books.

**EZRA POUND**

Amongst my books yes, but consider what I am missing. You two are out gallivanting around the country receiving awards and recognition for your work. And, me; the only thing I have to look forward to is pork chop and apple sauce Tuesdays, if I am lucky.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

At least they seem to feed you well, living in exile, among what are now your peers.

**EZRA POUND**

I am a poet living in exile within the confines of my own country of birth.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Sort of like living in Vatican City. Yet you are definitely not the Pope.

**T.S. ELIOT**

No worse off than Ovid, I suspect.

**EZRA POUND**

No, I would have to disagree. I am better off than Ovid. At least I can see my friends and I have legions of the young that seek out my teachings.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Do mean those young people that flock here as if they are on a pilgrimage to visit the messiah? Hah, that is funny Ezra. Those kids are either cranks or just malcontents wanting to touch the flame of past greatness. Just idle curiosity seekers.

**T.S. ELIOT**

Bill, I thought you were going to try to be pleasant, if not civil.

**EZRA POUND**

Von Grump hasn't changed much and old age hasn't aided that personality much either.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Ezra, this place, this life is of your own doing. You and your ego, your penchant for supposed intellectual superiority, has landed you here. You are now living, just in case you haven't realized it yet, in hell. Look around you.

**EZRA POUND**

I am somewhat surprised by your reaction to this place Bill. You a doctor of medicine of all people should not put down such a grand institution as the great old lady St. Elizabeths.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Grand, I don't think so, but old I couldn't agree more. Look at her. She is falling apart. Why even the linoleum floor is worn almost away even though most people are wearing slippers. Just how does that happen?

**T.S. ELIOT**

Always an eye for detail you had, Bill, even if your eyes are failing you.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

It is not just my eyes that are failing me. Old age brings on most of our failings.

**EZRA POUND**

Women.

**T.S. ELIOT**

Women, what do you mean by that Ezra?

**EZRA POUND**

Women, they also bring out our failings.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Not my Flossie, she is my greatest inspiration.

**EZRA POUND**

And I thought it was the bottle that was your inspiration, Bill.

**T.S. ELIOT**

Oh, come on you two. Do I have to separate you like children? Oh, Ezra, I was going to ask you about that young fellow. You know the Canadian lad that was around here the last time I dropped by. What was his name?

**EZRA POUND**

Who? Kenner from the University of Toronto?

**T.S. ELIOT**

Yes, that is it, Hugh Kenner. I had the chance to read his book, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, which was extremely well done. Have you read it by chance, Bill?

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

No, I can't say I have. Toronto you said. Wyndham lives there does he not?

**EZRA POUND**

Yes, I do think Wyndham was in Toronto for a while, but I do believe he is in London now. I haven't heard from him in a while. The last thing I remember was that the Tate was displaying his work. His health is not good and his eyesight is even worse. In fact, I do think he is completely blind now but he does continue to write.

**T.S. ELIOT**

An interesting book that Kenner wrote. A little text, but I do think it will do your career wonders Ezra.

**EZRA POUND**

What, Wyndham's latest book?

**T.S. ELIOT**

No, Hugh Kenner's text, the one he wrote about your work.

**EZRA POUND**

Yes, it was flattering. Interesting though that it is Canada that seeks me out.

*(just then Erving Goffman emerges from Ezra's room)*

**EZRA POUND**

Speaking of Canadians, I would like to introduce you to Erving Goffman. He says he is working as the assistant Athletic Director but I think he really is just another Jew sent to spy on me.

**DOROTHY POUND**

Ezra! come now.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

I can see that you still have that Jewish obsession on your mind.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

As Ezra said, I am a Canadian Jew. However I am not a spy per se but have been sent here to correct Ezra's tennis game which needs a great deal of work, much like his introductions.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Does he still jump around like a Mexican jumping bean?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Not only that, he talks the whole time one is preparing to serve, down-right distracting I tell you.

**EZRA POUND**

Come on, Erv. You are just sore because I beat you the last time we played.

**T.S. ELIOT**

Ezra, is this one of your creative fictions? How could a seventy year old man beat this young fellow here?

**EZRA POUND**

Sometimes it is style more than grace that can allow one to win, not only on the tennis court, but in life as well.

**T.S. ELIOT**

Are we back on the topic of poetry again or something more ethereal?

**EZRA POUND**

Ether. Ill rumours abound, hey Possum.

**T.S. ELIOT**

Okay Ezra, I don't think we need to air our indiscretions here.

**EZRA POUND**

Well, why the hell not. My guests gathered here today are all fairly well acquainted with the prospect of spending time in the comfort of madness. Isn't that right Long Island Bill?

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Speak for yourself Ezra.

**EZRA POUND**

Come now. Both of you fellows know damn well what it means to live in sanity since you have both experienced insanity.

**T.S. ELIOT**

Ezra that was a long time ago and Bill was recovering from a stroke.

**EZRA POUND**

And I am here because I am charged with treason.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

I am here because Dorothy invited me down to see an old friend and to have a chance to catch on times past and to chat.

**EZRA POUND**

About what? The weather? I think not. We should talk about matters of greater importance such as work still to be done.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Writing for Christ's sake. Yes, I am still writing. It is what keeps me alive. And how is your Paradiso coming along Ra?

**EZRA POUND**

My writing is coming along fine. I am most likely more productive these past ten years than at any time in my life.

*(behind them the shouts of a patient are clearly heard,  
yelling "I am the King of Russia")*

But how am I to write a *paradiso terrestre* when every step I take forwards is yet another step back into hell.

*(another patient begins to bark  
inciting a couple of patients to start howling)*

**EZRA POUND**

But as my friend Erv tells me, it is but one of the joys of batch living. I have the opportunity to speak with a man who thinks he is god, another man who thinks he is the devil, and of course you have heard from the man who thinks he is the King of Russia.

**T.S. ELIOT**

I just don't know how you manage to continue writing in this madhouse, Ezra? I find it difficult enough to think straight with all the noise and distractions going on.

**SHERI MARTINELLI**

Like Circe's house is it not? Men being turned into animals and all, just listen to them barking, and scratching to get out.<sup>6</sup>

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Hmmm, and what magical herb from the gods has allowed you not to change Ezra?

**EZRA POUND**

The jasmine tea! Which reminds me, anyone in want of more tea?

**DOROTHY POUND**

I'll get it Ezra. Please don't get up.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

I will assist you Dorothy. It will give me a chance to see Ezra's room and stretch my legs a little. I am curious to see if he has managed to organize his space any since the last time we met.

**EZRA POUND**

Dorothy, tea all around. Bill, please be careful not to disturb anything with that variable foot of yours.<sup>7</sup>

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Okay, Ez I will be sure not to disrupt that rubbish heap of history<sup>8</sup> you are collecting within your cell.

**EZRA POUND**

You always were so sensitive, Bill. And to think that I thought life in your attic would have given rise to a closer sense of godliness.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Oh come on now, Ezra, you must have had time to come up with better jabs than that. Why don't you use your poetry as a stick and beat me like you do with others.<sup>9</sup>



**EZRA POUND**

Yes, perhaps you are right in that but the one about your foot fetish is pretty good.

**T.S. ELIOT**

Bill, you do have to admit that was fairly cunning as an offhand compliment, the way that Ezra managed to connect your poetry and your shuffle together. He really hasn't lost his keen sense of observation.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

No, he hasn't lost his sense of observation. I just wish he would stop trying to find connections in everything he sees or reads and would actually take some time to think a little before speaking.

**T.S. ELIOT**

That was never his strong suit, especially when he thought himself to be the expert of everything.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Funny, that is exactly what the cab driver said to me on the drive over. "Pound never learned when to shut up."<sup>10</sup>

**EZRA POUND**

True. But, how can we not be observant when that is what we all have made a career out of as poets? We are as a chosen few able to condense observations into images so that the everyday sentimentality becomes beauty to the reader, or at least that is what some of us have tried to do.<sup>11</sup>

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Are you suggesting that I only managed to condense the everyday and not see the object as beautiful?

**EZRA POUND**

Not suggesting. I think that may be true. You see objects of beauty everywhere. Possum, on the other hand, sees beauty rarely but when he does, it is found in the past made present within the experience of life. And myself, I see.

**T.S. ELIOT**

You see beauty as difficult <sup>12</sup> or have you changed your theme to beauty is in the history of economics and money.

**EZRA POUND**

As we age, I should say as I age, beauty now becomes represented in the shifting images of women. What was it again that Flaubert supposedly once said? Do you remember Possum? I believe it was in reference to Madame Bovary.

**T.S. ELIOT**

Not another one of your word games is it.<sup>13</sup>

**EZRA POUND**

Yes, of course.

*(hands a small piece of paper to Erving Goffman)*

Please, read it out loud if you can Erving.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

*(scans the page and reads out loud)*

“Tout ce que je voulais, était un maxteau de fourrure; mais a`la place, je me suis fait fourré.”<sup>14</sup>

**EZRA POUND**

*(laughing)*

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Yes, nicely done, using the similar sound of fur and fuck in French.

**EZRA POUND**

Not only that, but would it not be what Madame Bovary would have wanted from Charles?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Maybe so, but your humour is lost on those that don't know the language.

**EZRA POUND**

And, once again you surprise me Erving by your knowledge, which seems to expand every time we chat.

**DOROTHY POUND**

Tea is served. What was that you were saying about women Ezra? I missed the point of how it pertained to women.

**EZRA POUND**

Oh, it was an attempt to prod old Bill a little and get him down from his attic perch and into the gutter a little. You know, great men being influenced by beautiful women.

**DOROTHY POUND**

Well, then, I shall take that as a compliment directed both at myself and at Flossie as she always was William's greatest inspiration. Is that not right William?

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Yes, that is very true Dorothy. We have been married now for almost fifty years and she still is the love of my life.

**EZRA POUND**

I guess you haven't told her everything then Bill.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Pardon me, Ezra. I missed that last comment.

**EZRA POUND**

Oh, I was just saying that beauty is everything that is all.

**T.S. ELIOT**

I don't know if it is everything, but it certainly can be pleasing to the eye and to the ear when one experiences it.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Hmm, yes, the experience of the everyday is beauty. As I sit here watching the interaction between the minds of poets, I cannot help but observe that each of you, in your own unique way reflect the moral aspects of your career within a framework of imagery waiting to be judged by the self and others.<sup>15</sup>

*(All three men turn towards Erving Goffman in surprise since they forgot that he was the fourth man in the room.)*

**EZRA POUND**

You know Erving, I am always just a little surprised by how you can manage to sum up social interaction and experience with a quick turn of a phrase. Are you sure you are merely just an assistant to the athletic director?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Well, you must realize that working within the system does require me to work with the whole person and not just the athletic side of the individual patient. But I must say I am very surprised at just how relaxed Mr. Eliot and Mr. Williams are within this environment.

**EZRA POUND**

Well, Erv, you have now opened the door to a little secret which I am now excited to let you in on. I am not sure if you know that both of these men have spent time within similar mental institutions. Bill more recently than Possum, but nonetheless both are intimately familiar with the coming and going of those referred to as mad.

**T.S. ELIOT**

Ezra why must you continue to air our dirty laundry?

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Thomas, I told you he would bring this kind of stuff up, always trying to present himself as better than us. Yet here he sits in this hell hole, for ten years and yet he doesn't seem to be in a hurry to get out.

**EZRA POUND**

Why should I try to set myself free? I have a place to work in relative peace from outside annoyances. I receive three meals a day. Oh, by the way, have you all had the opportunity to try Sheri's cookies? They are homemade you know, and very good too. I think you will find some in that tin on the floor in front of us. Oh yes, and I have a steady stream of young people coming to me so that they can hear me, and so I have the chance to teach a whole new generation of writers.

**T.S. ELIOT**

I thought you were using most of these young people as research minions in your quest to complete the Cantos.

**EZRA POUND**

Well, that too. As you know some of my visitors are as dumb as ham, but now and again I do run into one that does have a special talent. Sheri, can you show us what you are working on?

**SHERI MARTINELLI**

*(turns the sketch pad towards the group)*

Well, once again you can see that I am working on my favourite subject: you Grampa.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

It certainly looks like she has captured the true you Ezra - rather black and white and sort of flat.

**T.S. ELIOT**

Yes, a quaint little sketch, and being that it is black and white, it does capture your essence.

**EZRA POUND**

Come now, you two, be nice to Sheri. Although she is very talented, she can be fragile.

**SHERI MARTINELLI**

*(turns the page back towards her and rips it out in disgust)*

No, they are right; I haven't captured you in your fullness of self. I can do better.<sup>16</sup>

*(At that moment the shuffle of slippered feet are heard coming along the hallway and a ghostly face with a large grotesque scar running from ear to ear and up and over the forehead appears around the corner of the alcove. An extremely old and frail man approaches the chair of T.S. Eliot and grabs the arms of the chair. The man leans in towards T.S. Eliot and stares blankly at the old poet, blindly oblivious to whom he is looking at and perhaps unaware of what he is doing.)*

**EZRA POUND**

Possum, it seems that you have a new friend. Perhaps one of your fabled hollow men have come to pay their respects.

**T.S. ELIOT**

Ezra that is not very nice.

**EZRA POUND**

Excuse me, old man, perhaps you would care for a cookie?

**T.S. ELIOT**

Who is that old man? And what is with that horrible scar?

**EZRA POUND**

Oh, that is the badge of Freeman<sup>17</sup> and by the way he is the eldest statesman. He tends to babble on about visions or something. There are several of them here on the Chestnut Ward.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Freeman? Ezra, that scar was the result of a lobotomy.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Success, and yet another lost soul in the name of psychiatry.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Lost, yes. I am not so sure I would say that was a "soul" that was cut out of him.

**EZRA POUND**

Well now gentleman, I would hazard to suggest, from the way he was looking at Thomas there, that perhaps a bug house romance may be around the corner.

**T.S. ELIOT**

Ezra, I thought you of all people would know that man is not my type. I tend to find those more broken more to my liking - hence my friendship with you.

**EZRA POUND**

Oh, I know all too well your type, Possum, and I have seen the fallout. I have heard the desperate cries and have seen the tormented shades, knowing all too well what second death arrives from their screams.<sup>18</sup>

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

Ah, and once again back into the inferno we charge headlong.

**EZRA POUND**

I think that at last you will see that everything is connected, be it literature, poetry or personal experience. Dante saw it on the staircase with Virgil. And Odysseus saw it in the eyes of Tiresias during the practice of the "Nekuia". And, I have found it in the screams and cries of those living here in hell.<sup>19</sup>

**T.S. ELIOT**

Yes, I can see where you are going with that thought.

**EZRA POUND**

Erv, you have been very quiet. What is on your mind?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I was thinking about what a fine line it truly is between genius and madness.

**W.C. WILLIAMS**

And what do see when you look up from your lap Mr. Goffman?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Truthfully?

**EZRA POUND**

Yes, Erving, when you look around the room here what do you see madmen or geniuses?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

All I see are stars.<sup>20</sup>



## The Chorus

INT. ST. ELIZABETHS. CHESTNUT WARD. HALLWAY.

DAY.

Nine men all dressed in various shades of white file down the marble hallway. Some shuffle, some seem to glide across the floor. Their flowing white pajamas create a sense of the phantasmal, which is only augmented by the blackness of their expressionless eyes. As they gather together the wails and moans come to form the words that echo down the hallway and across the grounds towards the centre of the nation.

See, the lost, oh see us the unfortunate  
Shuffling, and with slippered feet  
The misguided in place and in time  
Wandering!  
See us, the lost, out of tune with society  
The freemen, half-awakened  
Medicated and in trance  
We mutter down the halls  
Hesitate and meander back  
Societal misfits  
Vulnerable  
Men of slippered feet  
Cuckoo, cuckoo  
We out of step with time  
We souls lost in place  
Trapped in mind  
Slow to take society's leash  
Of polite society's expectations <sup>1</sup>  
Castaways on the sea of normality  
The lost souls of civil society  
Do you hear... our voices?  
Do you see... our visions?  
You can drug us, you can cut us, you can electro-shock us  
We be the Freeman<sup>2</sup> of St. Elizabeths  
Our flesh was willing  
Our mind un-sprung  
We are the unconscious objectors of your civilization  
You can stifle our bark and remove the bite  
Yet we never grow old here  
In this place - where the walls contain and isolate us

The stain on mankind's humanity  
If mental illness didn't exist you would create it  
We are the trees; we bend under the weight of the sky  
The men of slippered feet  
We glide across the sea of grass  
Filter in and amongst the trees  
Our eyes emit no brilliant lights  
Shadowed by the hand of medicine  
Freemen of thought no more are we  
We call out in hunger, for feeling,  
Sensation, of any kind  
We are the forgotten, backwards  
Screams of silence, please hear our pain  
Touch... our only sensation  
The light is dulled by the shadows cast by the edifice  
We gather under the leaves  
That fill file after file  
Dappled in the sunlight of the leaves  
Our voice is brought back to life by the wind  
The shuffle of our feet  
We are "nobody" yet we are everybody  
Start with two lies  
And argue over what is the truth<sup>3</sup>  
Life contained within a dossier  
Notes of medical abstraction  
Goodbye the sun, autumn is dying<sup>4</sup>  
The sun goes into shadow<sup>5</sup>  
And they want to know what we talked about<sup>6</sup>  
MADNESS I say.  
The mind mirrors the image but is not itself  
We are men not destroyers<sup>7</sup>  
Wait, what is that you are writing in my file?  
The interpretation of your experiences  
After all, appearance and intent must be scrutinized  
Medicalized, institutionalized, and routinized  
Recording of the individual's history  
The act of being  
Normalized.

## **Act 4.**

### **The End: The Magic Moment**

**EXT. ST. ELIZABETHS. CHESTNUT WARD. STAIRCASE.**

**DAY.**

Late afternoon. On the path leading towards the Chestnut Ward, we see Ezra Pound walking slowly towards a spiral staircase. He is carrying a folding lawn chair and has a pillow case stuffed with various undisclosed items flung over his shoulder.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

*(coming from behind running)*

Mr. Pound. Ezra. Wait a minute.

**EZRA POUND**

*(stops, turns around)*

Yes, who is calling me? Oh, Erv, I wasn't expecting to see you today.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

*(huffing and puffing, obviously a little out of breath)*

Ezra, I was hoping to speak with you before you went into the ward. Do you still have some time?

**EZRA POUND**

I have nothing but time. Where do you want to chat?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

How about we sit on the stairs over there.

**EZRA POUND**

All right, seems like a fine place for a little talk. Let's go.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Ezra, let me help you with that lawn chair. Do you need me to carry any of those books?

**EZRA POUND**

No, I am okay with these. One gets used to lugging around these texts day after day, which is why I now use a pillow case. Makes things much easier.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Please, Ezra, take a seat. I really need to speak with you.

**EZRA POUND**

What is it you need to talk to me about? Do you want to talk about books, great men of genius, arms or women?<sup>1</sup>

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Actually, I need to let you know that I am finished here and that I am leaving. I really wanted to say goodbye.

**EZRA POUND**

I am use to goodbyes, but I am not used to losing tennis partners. What I am to do now?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Ezra, I think it is not the tennis you are going to miss as much as it is your excuse to fraternize with the young student nurses who sit on the grass eating their lunches.

**EZRA POUND**

Well, one does need a motive to maintain one's exercise routine.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

This is true and you took your exercise very serious. You were hitting the ball over the fence just enough to induce the need to leave the court and retrieve the ball that landed at their feet.

**EZRA POUND**

I'm not that crazy after all.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I am not sure how to tell you this or even how much I should tell you, but I have come to realize that you are a more than just a tennis partner. You have become a friend and even at times a confidant. I thought it may be necessary to explain why I am leaving.

**EZRA POUND**

Go ahead and tell me what is on your mind.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Well, I am actually not an Assistant to the Athletic Director. I am a...

**EZRA POUND**

You are a Jewish spy just as I always suspected!

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

No, much worse than that. I am a sociologist conducting fieldwork here at St. Elizabeths in an attempt to understand the role of the institution in the construction of mental illness and how the inmates may develop a social world of their own.<sup>2</sup>

**EZRA POUND**

Hmmm, are you sure you're not a spy?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I am sure.

**EZRA POUND**

I must confess that from the first time I set eyes on you I didn't see you as the athletic type.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Why is that?

**EZRA POUND**

You are far too slight of stature and you really didn't fit in with the rest of the staff. But I just couldn't figure out why that was.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

So, my lack of height gave me away, and I thought it would be my being too normal.

**EZRA POUND**

Normal? Ha, if that's all it took for someone to be out of place here then the asylum would be nearly empty.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

That is one of the things I wanted to talk with you about. Just how do you manage to maintain a semblance of sanity within the walls of bedlam?

**EZRA POUND**

Well, now that is fine question. I guess one must ask oneself if sanity exists at all before one can look to the insane for answers. Look at how that shadow falls on the grass in front of us.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Yes, the shadows are getting longer as the days get shorter.

**EZRA POUND**

Well, we could be saying goodbye to the sun as autumn is dying, but that really is not my point.<sup>3</sup> There is a very faint line between the light and where one see the darkness begin.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

What is it that you are getting at? Are you only noting the shadow cast by the walls of St. Elizabeths that cuts into the light of the sun?

**EZRA POUND**

*(smirking at the thought)*

No, look at the shadow play on the grass. Can you see the point where the light and the darkness become one?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Yes, I can see it. It is almost imperceptible, but it is certainly there. It is rather faint as you suggested, but there does seem to be a line drawn between the two, even if it is rather blurred.

**EZRA POUND**

Yes, yes, blurred. Yet this line though faint is narrow like the silk cord that bridges the gap between heaven and hell.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I wouldn't say bridge, as it seems to more or less separate the light from the darkness.

**EZRA POUND**

However the light does not dis-unify the shadow. The distinction is really a blurring of the presence of light and darkness, like twilight.<sup>4</sup>

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Yes, but is not twilight to be found at the end of the day, the end of the daylight and the coming on of darkness.

**EZRA POUND**

Well, I guess that depends on your perspective, since twilight can represent the time between both dawn and dusk.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

It depends upon the perspective of the observer, I guess. And you are saying this because...?

**EZRA POUND**

It is the very same line one must walk between sanity and insanity, between what one may refer to as “normal” behaviour and actions and those actions and behaviours that only a madman would conduct.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I see what you are saying, or at least what you may be suggesting. The patient must walk the thin line of tension created through the expectations crafted between the home-world and the institutional world.<sup>5</sup> And yet, within the walls of this institution those behaviours and even those actions that one may view as “normal” are treated as symptoms of one’s mental disorder.<sup>6</sup>

**EZRA POUND**

Behold me shriveled like the trunk of that old oak which I lecture under day after day.<sup>7</sup> What do the young people want, that gather around my limbs as I sit in my folding aluminum throne? What is their reason they come to me? Do they seek guidance? Is it out of intellectual curiosity or is it simply to see, for themselves, if I am as insane and dangerous as what the government says I am?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I witnessed your lectures often and believe that many of those so-called students originally come out of idle curiosity or simply for the need to say to their friends, “I visited Ezra Pound in the mental hospital and he is just as crazy as they say he is.” But those that stick around come to see you as more than just a crazy old coot. Like me, I have come to the realization that you are just a little different.

**EZRA POUND**

By different, you mean crazy.



**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Why, yes, crazy if you like, but more than that. You are like a father to some, a grandfather to others, a kindly friend to many and, to all those willing to listen, a teacher - perhaps, America's greatest living poet. Living amongst those that society has sorted and cast off .<sup>8</sup>

**EZRA POUND**

And the living are cardboard.<sup>9</sup>

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Yes, I like that. But Ezra you are more than that.

**EZRA POUND**

Perhaps, I am all of those things, but yet I believe that I am doomed to be lost within the walls of this confounded place. Only Ovid may have had it worse off than I. Yet, it is this shadowy path I must tread between sanity and insanity<sup>10</sup> for we are all quite alone amongst these ash trees.<sup>11</sup> Yet with pen in hand, I tempt still to write the acceptable word;<sup>12</sup> however these walls of St. Elizabeths veil the truth behind my dreams, my goals, my art.<sup>13</sup>

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

You do realize that some of us actually know where you pull your thoughts and ideas from even when they seem to be random.

**EZRA POUND**

Yes, I guess one can only hope that someone remembers. But I must confess that this is how I knew you didn't belong here as a staff person when you recognized my reference to George Santayana that first day we met.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

And I thought you just said it was my being so short that gave me away.

**EZRA POUND**

Well that and your continuous note taking. Even my best pupils don't take as many notes as you.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

When did you notice me taking notes?

**EZRA POUND**

I am also an observer of others. After all, I am in the midst of conducting the longest surviving written observation of history.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Yes, a poem containing history. Ezra, you seem a bit distracted.

**EZRA POUND**

Distracted? I was just remembering another friend that I once had to say goodbye to, and that one may say I am this, that or the other and within the words scarcely uttered one ceases to be that thing or that person.<sup>14</sup> It is funny how thoughts and memories can invade one's mind at the strangest moments.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

And who was the friend you were remembering?

**EZRA POUND**

I was just thinking about Henri, the artist friend I had many years ago. We are always among the dead in this living history of life and those experiences we live. Crazy, I know. Words, just mere words. Yet, everything is language.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

*(thinking deeply)*

Hmmm. Well, EZRA, I do believe you must be deeply committed to be locked away for all these years here at St Elizabeths.

**EZRA POUND**

*(slight chuckle)*

Yes, Erv, I am certainly a committed patient. And yet, I still search for the real masks of the self.<sup>15</sup> For as you may know, man is just a skin-full of wine with a heart of a little child crouched low beneath the wind,<sup>16</sup> and yet against all gloom and woe and every bitterness I have the blue-jays and squirrels<sup>17</sup> with me to greet the oncoming russet clad sunset.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Again, you pull thoughts from poems past. It is no wonder the psychiatrists here are confused by your persona of madness. You seem to be forever playing at being mad yet you are just being Ezra, the poet.

**EZRA POUND**

Yes, at times my mask does show the hinges where it may be fastened to my face. But I can only be what I have created myself to be out of the air. For to understand me, one must come to terms with one's self, for it is under the masks we wear that the observer must look.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Once again you throw poetry into our conversation like a game. I hope you don't mind but I must ask: just how much of "you" is contained within your Cantos?

**EZRA POUND**

I am surprised by your question.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Why is that? I hope it is not asking too much.

**EZRA POUND**

No, not at all. It is just that Yo-Yo asked me the same thing just the other day.<sup>18</sup>

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Yo-Yo, the inmate on the Chestnut Ward, asked you the same thing?

**EZRA POUND**

Yes. However I shall attempt to answer your question since our conversation has suddenly taken on a topic of interest which we can discuss: me.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

And here it was that I thought the whole time we were discussing you.

**EZRA POUND**

Oh no, no, we were actually talking about you.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

We were?

**EZRA POUND**

Yes we were. Anyhow, back to me: The entire Cantos must be about me since I am the historical observer. How could they not, since it is not a work of fiction or just about one man and since the tale of the tribe is to be recalled from one man's mind?<sup>19</sup>

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

And you wonder why they call you mad.

**EZRA POUND**

Mad. Let me continue since you asked the question. The Cantos are the next great epic, an historical epic pulled together from the reference point of one man's interpretation of those connections found in the writings of other great men.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Connections and importance found within the literature of our past, interesting.

**EZRA POUND**

Connections are found everywhere. One just needs to be able to see them and also one must read the right books so that one begins to know his own history and thus make him think.<sup>20</sup> That is the work of the poet, the poem and the writer within the poem.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

That is interesting, Ezra, for within these very walls of St. Elizabeths we have our own multitude of lovely little recurring histories, where the individual attempts to create his own concept of self. Yet it is the psychiatrist, the nurses and the staff who construct the individual's identity from the connections drawn from past actions found in the dossiers past and present.<sup>21</sup> Is that not unlike your own reconstruction of history: the mapping of humanity from the textures and tonalities of the recorded history of past actions be they of great men or of great victories?

**EZRA POUND**

Yes, and no. I do see your point; however the Cantos re-create a sense of historical truth, what one may refer to poetic truth.<sup>22</sup> And your construction of selfhood as described is the process of fictional truth derived from the case files of individuals whose lives have been recorded by the hands of those working within a process.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Yes, of course. The status of the individual may be "backed by the solid buildings of the world, grounded in their very foundations; however our sense of personal identity often resides in the cracks."<sup>23</sup> The sense of self is not found only within the written word but often between the lines of what is and what is not said.

**EZRA POUND**

I am starting to see where you are going with your fieldwork. I must be getting back to my room or the attendant will start to wonder what has happened to me.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Not to worry, Ezra. I have spoken with Dr. Overholser and he is aware of your delay since I informed him that I was going to be taking sometime to chat with you.

**EZRA POUND**

I guess Dr. Overholser has known about your research from the very beginning.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Yes. He has been of great assistance, even going so far to explain to me why you haven't been exposed to the various treatments and pharmaceuticals of the psychiatric profession.

**EZRA POUND**

And why is that? You do realize that I have watched the transformation of the men and the women in the wards as different techniques of compliance have been administered. I have seen the metamorphosis of men into docile animals and even the surgical transformations of men into sheep. Have you met the man that barks nonstop?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Yes, I have managed to make his acquaintance. He even tried to bite me when I tried to shake his paw. It is a real shame that such a thing is allowed to go on.

**EZRA POUND**

And so, what did Dr. Overholser say?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

He said, "The mind of the poet was not to be touched."<sup>24</sup>

**EZRA POUND**

Well, that was very thoughtful of him. Perhaps the food could be better and to aid the digestion; the wine could be a little more free-flowing.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

You know, Ezra, I am going to miss your company.

**EZRA POUND**

It is surprising to me too that I am going to miss yours as well. It is interesting though, Erving, that in one's lifetime, one's experiences seem to come full circle. Do you not agree?

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Depends on what you are getting at.

**EZRA POUND**

Well, take my life for example. Here I stand today on the stairs leading to the Chestnut Ward. As a child, my parents and I lived in a house on Chestnut Street, and that house had a door made of Chestnut or was it Walnut? No matter the difference. What I am saying is that perhaps I was destined to be a nut.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Perhaps not a nut, but you were certainly destined to be around nuts.

**EZRA POUND**

Yes, I like your idea better. Nonetheless, I have been around trees my whole life. Even now, I look across the grounds of St. Elizabeths and find myself looking at the dark forest from which I have come.<sup>25</sup> And yet I look towards the sky I see to this very day that it is supported by trees.<sup>26</sup> The sky's glass leaded with elm boughs<sup>27</sup> whose darkness is shattered and fragmented in thy mind's beauty,<sup>28</sup> and yet I must return to where the dead walk in slippered feet, where the land of the dead smells like a mixture of saliva and piss and the only sound that can drown out the screams and wails of the lost is my type writer as it tick-tacks across the page.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Ezra, it is your work that must have kept you sane.

**EZRA POUND**

Not just my work but also my many friends and visitors that allow me to be connected to the outside world. Which reminds me? I saw Aegle again yesterday while speaking with my young visitors. She was sitting cross-legged on the grass. Her long dark hair looked matted and her eyes seemed to be dull not as alive as usual.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Aegle! Here at St. Elizabeths? Again.

**EZRA POUND**

Aegle is Angelica. You know, Sky, your wife. I have named her after one of the Naiads mentioned in Greek Mythology.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

I remember fully. What was she doing here?

**EZRA POUND**

Anyhow, as I was saying, she was on the grounds the other day listening to me read from Ovid's Metamorphoses. She is very bright, yet is a very troubled young lady.

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

Ezra, do you mean you were talking to my wife yesterday? She was supposed to be at home.

*(The steel door begins to open. The hinges creek as the door is pulled back, revealing the attendant standing in the doorway, his blond hair a glow in the light cast by the incandescent bulb hanging behind his head.)*

**ATTENDANT**

Oh, Mr. Pound, I was wondering what has become of you. You do realize that you are late coming back from the grounds?

**EZRA POUND**

Yes, I do realize that, however it was okayed by Dr. Overholser. You can check with him to ensure that I am telling you the truth.

**ATTENDANT**

Oh, you can be assured that I will check with him as soon as I see him.

**EZRA POUND**

Oh, Erving, as I was saying before being interrupted; you must remember: we are men not destroyers and that although dreams may clash and are shattered, even the Gods forgive.<sup>29</sup> Please forgive those that you love and the Sky is falling, Erving, the Sky is falling. Don't lose your centre fighting the world.<sup>30</sup>



*(door slams shut and the lock is turned)*

**ERVING GOFFMAN**

*(muttering to himself)*

What does he mean by that little rant I wonder? And just why was Sky back on the grounds of St. Elizabeths again? The sky is falling? What is that all about?

**INT. ST. ELIZABETHS. CHESTNUT WARD.**

**DAY.**

**EZRA POUND**

*(Shuffling down the hallway towards his room – mumbling to himself)*

What is it about that spiral staircase? It reminds me of Dante's Inferno every time I climb them: What was that line in the Inferno? Oh yes, there is no other way. Only by these stairs can we leave behind the evil we have seen, yet those simple-minded folk still don't see the point.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps, Bill was right; I really should learn to just shut up.)

## Notes

### Act 1. Scene 1: The Beginning — And from the Dark Forest

#### **Textual Layering**

Alighieri Dante. *The Divine Comedy Volume 1: Inferno*. Trans. Mark Musa. (London: Penguin, 2003) Print.: hereafter referred to as *Inferno*

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald. (London: Vintage, 2007) Print.: hereafter referred to as *Odyssey*

Ezra Pound. *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. New York: New Directions, 1996. Print. hereafter referred to as *The Cantos*. All references will be cited by Canto number/page number (e.g. *The Cantos* CIX/794).

#### **References**

1. *The Cantos* CIX/794. I have attempted to mine the section of the work completed by Pound during his stay at St. Elizabeths and include it in the dialogue where and when it fits.
2. *Odyssey* 169
3. *The Cantos* XCV/666
4. *Inferno* I/70
5. *The Cantos* XIC/794
6. Noel Stock. *The Life of Ezra Pound*. (New York: Pantheon, 1970) Print. 42: hereafter referred to as *Life of EP*.
7. *Life of EP* 429
8. *Inferno* I/71

### Act 1. Scene 2: Welcome to Hell

Conceptually the merger of St. Elizabeths with the house of Circe as described in Book X of the *Odyssey* (*Odyssey* 171, 173). It is at this junction in the screenplay that the reader should begin to see repeating images. I have attempted to integrate the use of the chair as the subject rhyme for a Throne.

### **Textual Layering**

Alighieri Dante. *The Divine Comedy Volume 1: Inferno*. Trans. Mark Musa. (London: Penguin, 2003) Print.: hereafter referred to as *Inferno*

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald. (London: Vintage, 2007) Print.: hereafter referred to as *Odyssey*.

### **References**

9. *Odyssey* 171

10. *Odyssey* 173

11. *Inferno* 70. Once again, Dante's *Inferno* comes into play and Pound takes on the role of the poet/guide. The role that Virgil takes on for the pilgrim. In this case Goffman is the pilgrim.

12. *Odyssey* 180. Introducing the vision of the house of Circe; we begin to witness the hell that Goffman has walked into. As reader, we are now privileged with the sounds, the sights and the smells of St. Elizabeths. We are also beginning to realize that what were once men are now being forever changed within the walls of this institution.

13. *Odyssey* 182

## **Act 2. Tennis Courts — Purgatory Let the Games Begin**

### **Textual Layering**

Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Double Day Anchor, 1959. Print.; hereafter referred to as *Presentation*

Ezra Pound. *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. New York: New Directions, 1996. Print.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Ezra Pound: a Critical Anthology*. Harmondsworth: Ed. J. P Sullivan. Penguin, 1970. Print.: hereafter referred to as *Anthology*

### **References**

1. *The Cantos*, CVI/775. One of many times Pound repeats this line throughout *The Cantos*. I personally quite enjoy the imagery created by the words, especially when one takes into consideration that St. Elizabeths was once an arboretum.

2. *Anthology* 24

3. *Anthology* 24

4. *Anthology* 199

5. *Presentation* VII

6. *Presentation* 19

7. *Presentation* 19

8. *Presentation* 36

9. Erving Goffman. "The Insanity of Place." *Psychiatry* XXXII.4 (1969): 357-88. Print. 375.: hereafter referred to as *Insanity of Place*. This is an excellent resource which seems to be almost autobiographical in nature. It happened to be published five years after the death of Goffman's first wife, Angelica, who committed suicide by jumping off the San Raphael Bridge over an arm of San Francisco Bay.
10. Ezra Pound. *Selected Poems of Ezra Pound: the New Classics Series*. New York: New Directions, 1949. Print.; hereafter referred to as the *Selected Poems* "The Garden," 26.
11. *Selected Poems*, "Near Perigord," 49.
12. *Selected Poems* "The Garden," 26. The exact quote is "She would like someone to speak to her, / And is almost afraid that I / will commit that indiscretion."

### **Act 3. Scene 1: The Cave — The World of the Dead**

This section contains references to many sources; however, I have tried to maintain the conceptual layering consistent with that found in *The Odyssey* and the *Inferno*. It should also be noted that descriptions of Ezra Pound's room at St. Elizabeths can be found in Stock's *the Life of EP* 441) and other sources such as Marcella's account, (Torrey 220) and even in *Asylums*. Similar scenes are remembered from Pound's room in Rapallo (Robert Fitzgerald, *A Note on Ezra Pound* 509)

#### ***Textual Layering***

Alighieri Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. Mark Musa. London: Penguin, 2003. Print.

Erving Goffman. *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York: Anchor, 1961. Print.; hereafter referred to as *Asylums*.

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald. London: Vintage, 2007. Print.

#### ***References***

1. Robert Fitzgerald "A Note on Ezra Pound, 1928-56." *The Kenyon Review*. Vol. 18, No. 4 (Autumn, 1956) 505.
2. "Caviar and Bread," Geoffrey H. Movius 393.
3. Much of this dialogue stems from a carefully crafted play on words and out right innuendo. Pound is at this point being rather prickly with W.C. Williams which was a common occurrence throughout their lengthy friendship.
4. Maurice Hungville, "Ezra Pound, Educator" 469.
5. Robert Browning. *Browning: Poetical Works: Complete from 1833 to 1868 and the Shorter Poems Thereafter*. Oxford Usw.: OUP, 1967. Print. The mention of "the mystery of the hinges" stems from Browning's, *Sordello* Book V 143.
6. Ezra Pound. "Letters of Ezra Pound", Ed. D.D. Paige. *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring, 1950), 53-65. Print. The exact quote can be found in Letter 3,

addressed to W.H.D. Rouse in which Pound wrote, "Tain't what a man sez, but wot he means that the traducer has got to bring over. The implication of the word" (60).

### **Act 3. Scene 2: The Alcove**

In this section of the screenplay we are witness to the interactions between Pound, W.C. Williams and T.S. Eliot. It is highly unlikely that Williams and Eliot would visit Pound on the same day because they really did not enjoy each other's company. It is also interesting to note that typically T.S. Eliot and W.C. Williams would schedule their visits around other engagements such as when being recognized for their literary achievements or when being given achievement awards. It must have made for some strained conversations, as Pound would have been well aware of his two friends receiving these accolades while he remained removed from the world even though it could be viewed from the window of his cell.

#### ***Textual Layering***

Alighieri Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. Mark Musa. London: Penguin, 2003. Print.

Erving Goffman. *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York: Anchor, 1961. Print.; hereafter referred to as *Asylums*.

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald. London: Vintage, 2007. Print.

#### ***References***

1. *Odyssey* 172
2. Pound here is poking fun at Williams' expense connecting his friend's slow recovery from a stroke in 1952, to Williams' use of the "variable foot" as a means of measure in his poetry. For more background see Weatherhead's "William Carlos Williams: Prose, Form, and Measure" *ELH* Vol. 33, No. 1 (March 1966): 118-131 and William Carlos Williams. *The William Carlos Williams Reader*. Ed.M. L. Rosenthal. New York: Published for J. Laughlin by New Directions Pub., 1966. Print.
3. Williams' is referring to the general disorder of Pound's room at St. Elizabeths. E. Fuller Torrey provides an excellent description of Pound's room:
4. His room in phenomenal disarray, the floor was littered with papers, boxes and assorted bric-a-brac, almost all the wall space was covered with paintings and pictures and schematic drawings and memos... envelopes and pieces of paper containing lines and excerpts from books he was sing dangled from strings.(200)
5. The conversation also alludes to Pound's own words which can be found in Ezra Pound, "*Practical Suggestions*" (372).
6. "A Study of Ezra Pound's Present Position," William Carlos Williams and Paul L. Mariani *The Massachusetts Review* , Vol. 14, No. 1 (Winter, 1973), (118-123) We find W.C. Williams providing an interesting account of Pound's use of the word as a

tool to attack others in this article. Williams writes: "In better words, perhaps, he has lost faith in the efficacy of the poem and has gone over to ideas, using poetry as his stick, his shillelagh, one might perhaps better say. It is not a poet's recourse. It is the recourse of a man who has been defeated in his primary effort. It is unfortunate but was predictable" (118). I have pulled this into the conversation as a means to highlight how Pound even in his seventies fences with words. A back and forth exchange among friends.

7. William Carlos Williams. *The William Carlos Williams Reader*. Ed.M. L. Rosenthal. New York: Published for J. Laughlin by New Directions Pub., 1966. Print. 314.
8. Hugh Kenner. *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*. Berkeley: University of Nebraska Press, 1985. Print. 143; hereafter referred to as the *Poetry of EP*.
9. Poetry of EP 231
10. William C Pratt. "The Greatest Poet in Captivity Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeths." *The Sewanee Review* Fall 94.4 (1986): 619-29. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 March 2012. Pound seemed to enjoy playing such word games with many of his visitors to St. Elizabeths. For instance, "Pound joked with him (Craig LaDriere, a professor at Catholic University) about attending the Modern Language Association convention, or MLA, which Pound referred to in one of his characteristic puns as 'the melee'. And, he wrote out on a scrap of paper 'Pas de leur on que nous' and asked her to read it aloud so that it came out as 'Paddle your own canoe' to everyone's amusement" (621).
11. "Tout ce que je voulais, etait un maxteau de fourrure; mais a la place, je me suis fait fourre." Translated into English the phrase reads. All I wanted was a fur coat and instead I got fucked. Pound was found of playing such word games with his many visitors and seemed to quite enjoy the indelicacies of language, especially at the expense of others.
12. *Asylums* 127-128
13. Ezra Pound. *Collected Early Poems*. Ed. Michael John King. New York: New Directions, 1976. Print.; hereafter referred to as *Collected Early Poems*, "Ballad Rosalind," 31.
14. *Odyssey* Book X
15. The appearance of the "Freemen" symbolizes those patients treated by Dr. Walter Freeman, who in his zealous pursuit of treating the mentally ill, conducted several hundred lobotomies during his time at St. Elizabeths. Interestingly enough, Dr. Freeman also photographed every single lobotomy performed. Further information on Dr. Freeman can be found at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/lobotomist/program/>.
16. *Inferno* Canto I/71
17. *Odyssey* Book XI
18. *Inferno* XXXIV/383 when the Pilgrim emerges from hell and describes what he saw.

*I saw the lovely things the heavens hold,  
And we came out to see once more the stars.*

## The Chorus

### **Textual Layering**

Erving Goffman. *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York: Anchor, 1961. Print

Ezra Pound. *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. New York: New Directions, 1996. Print.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Collected Early Poems*. Ed. Michael John King. New York: New Directions, 1976. Print.; hereafter referred to as *Collected Early Poems*

### **References**

1. The “making new” of Pound’s “The Return” (*Early Poems* 198) in which I have intentionally replaced the image of the returning soldiers or hunters, with the subject rhyme of the inmates on the Chestnut Ward. The inmates represent those lost to societal pressures through their inability to conform to the expectations of normality.
2. Freeman, once again a reference to Dr. Walter Freeman.
3. *The Cantos* C/737, a reference to Pound’s use of the red-herring technique or technique of infamy in which Pound confronts the reader with two statements neither of which may be true. However, the search for truth is muddled because those involved in the conversation lose sight of the fact that both statements are lies and the truth of the matter is meaningless. See Terrell’s *Companion to the Cantos*, 649 for more information.
4. *The Cantos* XCVI/683
5. *The Cantos* XCVIII/706
6. *The Cantos* XI/51
7. *The Cantos* CXVII/823

## Act 4. The End — The Magic Moment

### **Textual Layering**

Alighieri Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. Mark Musa London: Penguin, 2003. Print.

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald London: Vintage, 2007. Print.

Ezra Pound. *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. New York: New Directions, 1996. Print.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Collected Early Poems*. Ed. Michael John King. New York: New Directions, 1976. Print.

### **References**

1. *The Cantos* XI/51
2. *Asylums* IX
3. *The Cantos* XCVI/683
4. *The Cantos* XCVIII/713

5. *Asylums* 13
6. *Asylums* 206
7. *Collected Early Poems*, "Piere Vidal Old," 111.
8. Goffman, Erving. "On Cooling the Mark Out." *Psychiatry: Journal of Interpersonal Relations* 15.4 (1952): 451-63. *Bios Sociologicus: The Erving Goffman Archives*. Dmitri N. Shalin, ed. UNLV: CDC Publications. Web.
9. *The Cantos* CXV/814
10. *Collected Early Poems*, "Donzella Beata," 27.
11. *Collected Early Poems*, "La Fraisne," 10.
12. *Collected Early Poems*, "Aegupton," 38.
13. *Collected Early Poems*, "Nicotine," 49.
14. Ezra Pound. *Gaudier Brzeska: A Memoir*. London: John Lane, the Bodley Head, 1916: 85. Print.
15. Thomas F Grieve. *Ezra Pound's Early Poetry and Poetics*. Columbia: University of Missouri, 1997: 185. Print.
16. *Collected Early Poems*, "Oltre La Torre: Rolando," 52.
17. *Collected Early Poems*, "Prelude: Over the Ognisanti," 59.
18. *The Cantos* CIV/761 It is suggested by Marcella Spann Booth in the *Companion to the Cantos* that perhaps Yo-Yo was an inmate at St. Elizabeths. Pound wrote, "What part oby u iz deh poEM?" (Terrell 678)
19. *The Cantos* XCIX/728
20. *The Cantos* LXXXIX/610-623
21. *Asylums* 305
22. Grieve 159
23. *Asylums* 320
24. Torrey, E. Fuller. *The Roots of Treason: Ezra Pound and the Secret of St. Elizabeths*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984: 252. Print.
25. Heymann, C. David. *Ezra Pound, the Last Rower: A Political Profile*. New York: Carol Pub., 1992: 214. Print.
26. *The Cantos* LXXXV/569
27. *The Cantos* CVII/781
28. *The Cantos* CVII/809
29. Booth, Marcella. "Ezrology: The Class of '57." *Paideuma*. Winter ed. Vol. 13. Orono: University of Maine, (1984): 375-87. Print. Ser. 3. (380) Booth provides a fantastic firsthand account of her meetings with Ezra Pound during his incarceration at St. Elizabeths.
30. *The Cantos* CXVII/823



31. *The Cantos* CXVII/822

32. *Inferno* XXXIV/382

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