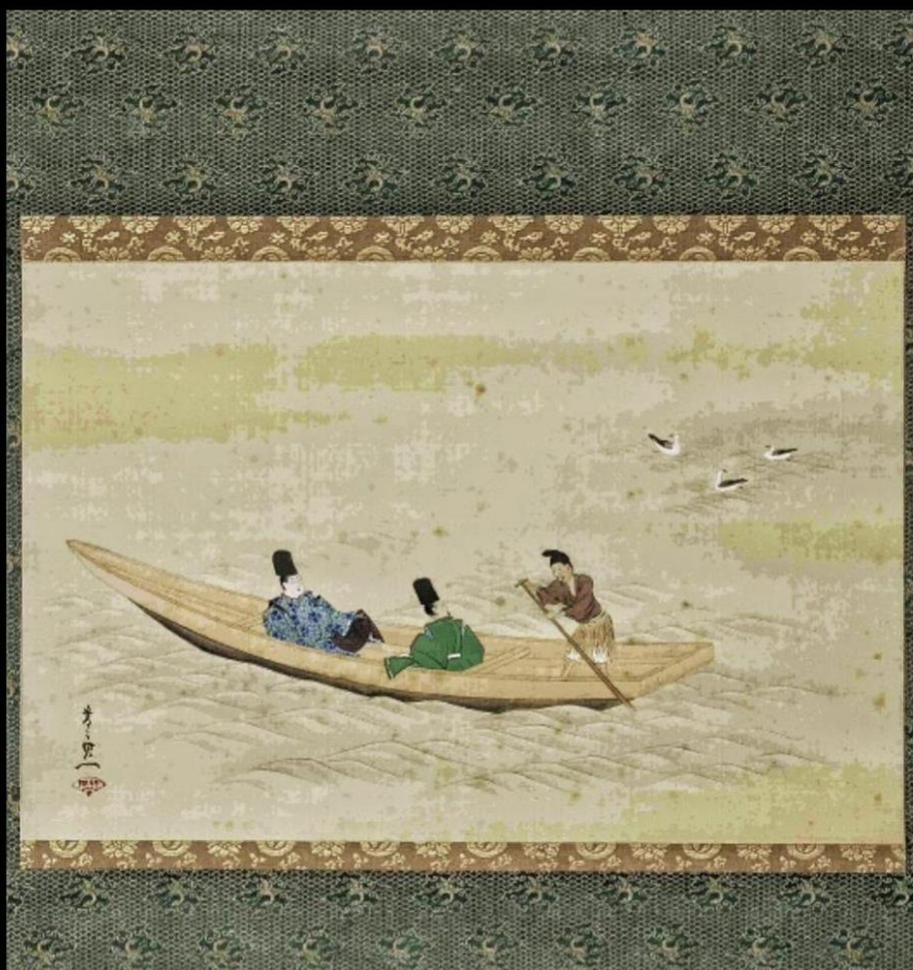


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DOCUMENTARY

Italian Writers Petition for Pound, 1956-1957

by Carlo Pulsoni

[Carlo Pulsoni published the short essay "Liberate il poeta Pound" in the 20 March issue of *Atlante*, for which Massimo Bacigalupo has very graciously provided a translation into English. The original essay can be read at http://www.treccani.it/magazine/atlante/cultura/Liberate_il_poeta_Pound.html.

Many thanks to the author for permission to reproduce the piece here.]

Twenty years have passed since the death of Vanni Scheiwiller, a "useless publisher of books and micro-books," as he loved to define himself. If his editorial merits are well known, perhaps less known is his role as promoter of the Italian petition to free Ezra Pound from the St. Elizabeths criminal asylum, where Pound had been imprisoned since the end of 1945. Thanks to the archival papers of the Fondo Scheiwiller stored in the APICE Center of the University of Milan, the salient stages of the story can be reconstructed. The appeal should have come out on Pound's seventieth birthday (October 30, 1955), but various circumstances prevented this. The failure was mitigated by the publication in the *Corriere della Sera* of an article by Giovanni Papini with an eloquent title: "We ask for the pardon of a poet." In the following months Vanni goes back to work on the petition, hoping to deliver it to the American embassy, as he writes to Giuseppe Ungaretti in the first days of April 1956. In reality the delivery was to take place only in the month of August and was to have, in addition to Diego Valeri and Sergio Solmi as promoters, the following signatories: G. B. Angioletti, Riccardo Bacchelli, Luigi Bartolini, Attilio Bertolucci, Carlo Betocchi, Piero Bigongiari, Giorgio Caproni, Raffaele Carrieri, Emilio Cecchi, Nicola Chiaramonte, Libero de Libero, Alfonso Gatto, Virgilio Giotti, Piero Jahier, Carlo Levi, Mario Luzi, Eugenio Montale, Alberto Moravia, Marino Moretti, Aldo Palazzeschi, Giovanni Papini, Alessandro Parronchi, Enrico Pea, Sandro Penna, Vasco Pratolini, Mario Praz, Salvatore Quasimodo, Clemente Rebora, Umberto Saba, Camillo Sbarbaro, Vittorio Sereni, Ignazio Silone, Leonardo Sinisgalli, Gianni Stuparich, Leone Traverso, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Elio Vittorini, Cesare Zavattini. Within a few weeks the Embassy made it known that the issue was not within its competence, but rather of the Washington authorities. Washington did not respond, which is why Vanni tried to

organize a new international appeal, as evidenced by a draft letter to Jean Cocteau of February 1957: "Dear M. Cocteau, last year a petition for the release of Ezra Pound was delivered to the American Embassy in Rome . . . But now it's been six months and they haven't done anything. We must therefore start all over again and try this time with an international appeal, always in the name of the most elementary human and civil values and without going into the legal and political question. Could I count on your support for France? I write simultaneously to Eliot for England (he can ask Auden, Spender, Edith Sitwell, etc.), and to MacLeish for America (who could ask Hemingway and some other American Nobel Prize winners, Williams, Marianne Moore, Aiken, Cummings, etc.). For Italy those mentioned. I would try for Spain, but only with exiled poets like Guillén, Alberti, Jiménez, etc. For the poets in German, the Swiss publisher Schifferli will take care of it and of Northern Europe (he has already spoken to Lagerkvist and the UN secretary Hammarskjöld is favorable to Pound). Some other poet could be Neruda, Seferis, Elytis and the ones you will suggest. It seems to me that writers from beyond the Iron Curtain and fascists do not have the right to sign. Can I count on your help for France? (I am told that you have already done something.) I would think of Cendrars, Mauriac, Aragon, Paulhan, Supervielle, Jouve, Saint John Perse, Reverdy, Tzara, Soupault, Prévert, Frenau, and perhaps Sartre, Camus and Malraux."

Scheiwiller's concerted efforts were repaid the following year with the return of Pound to Italy. Vanni was finally able to meet in person the "Garibaldi" of his editions, as he called him in a dedication to Enrico Falqui, while Pound was to encounter "il miglior editore" – to cite Dante and *The Waste Land*, as Pound's daughter Mary de Rachewiltz did in a letter to Vanni of 12 January 1956.