

J. Allyn Rosser

A Dream of Ezra Pound

I'd eaten dark chocolate, reading late at night.
They introduced me, and I still hadn't read
All the *Cantos*. Somehow he knew this on sight.

Still, his large old hand shook mine; I stayed
With him to kiss that wistful dented cheek;
He was shyly pleased, beard glowing, and said:

(I couldn't hear. His voice was oddly weak,
As if it came from behind him.) Police
Were there. He'd come back down, or up, to speak

On God. So he was not completely at ease
When my colleagues nattered on and on
About their flatly mispronounced *bêtises*;

But he was polite—extremely—to everyone!
Had he learned the hard way from his long bed
In Saint Elizabeths, lying there alone,

To nod when it was best to nod? He did.
It went over well with the academicians,
Beamish boys. At last he shook his head—

His voice resumed the vibrant, hallowing insistence
I'd expected, though much softer, bereaved,
In earnest response to some jargonous nonsense:

“Yes yes, we think in order to know, or perceive—
And in this we are sometimes, it seems, successful—
But we *believe* in order to *believe*.”

He said this in worn sorrow, in sorrow distressful.
He said this, E. P. No madness up his sleeve.
“No god,” he said. “Nothing but what we may leave.”

Suburban Report

In the suburbs of New Jersey, some 20 miles
from Forked River, not far from Oyster Creek
and several other sites for nuclear plants
whose outlandish open-mouthed shapes
already resemble ancient ruins,
we are still sweeping dirt from the sidewalks.
We are watering the perennials, raking gravel,
and stooping to pick up stray leaves.
We continue the tradition of yard sales.
On garbage night, when the youngest children
have gone to sleep, we gather on the curb
to fold our arms and speak in low tones.

Out here in the suburbs we're getting things
in order, we're learning to look calm;
when the final flash goes off
at least we can afford to be clean,
we can be on top of things: bills paid,
clothes pressed, hemlines straight.
Sometimes we think wanly of Pompeii
and the fame accorded charred relics;
or we think of the Guanajuato mummies,
their cold thin cheeks and lips still holding taut
to shape the ancient O, the skulls
outlined beneath them mouthing *cheese*.