

Thomas URBAN

EZRA POUND AND KATYN:  
RUSSIAN TRACE IN *THE CANTOS*

**Abstract:** The article dwells on the Russian/Soviet trace in Canto LXXVII by Ezra Pound where he mentioned Katyn (written as “Katin”, line 42). After the discovery of mass graves in the Katyn Forest in 1943, the Nazi government decided to organize propaganda campaigns in order to blame the Soviets and to break the Grand Alliance. German embassies in Italy, Finland, Czechoslovak Republic, Belgium and some other countries were inviting writers to Katyn and encouraging them to publish essays and feuilletons on their impressions. Ezra Pound, who lived in Italy at that time, was invited by Gotthardt Maucksch, an employee of the cultural department of the German Embassy in Rome. The poet was interested in traveling there but was refused a visa. The paper comments reports written by the international delegation representatives who visited Katyn, most of which were anti-Soviet. During his stay at St Elizabeths Hospital, Pound followed the news on the Madden Committee investigation of the Katyn massacre (1951–1952) and referred to Katyn in his letters to Olivia Rossetti Agresti. Back to Italy, Pound reestablished contact with Gotthardt Maucksch (his name, written as *Maukch*, also appeared in the Katyn context in Canto LXXVII). However, Maucksch did not leave any memories that could shed light on his post-war literary contacts with Pound. Documents on the Foreign Ministry plan to invite Pound to join the intended trip to Katyn in 1943 were destroyed during the bombings of Berlin in World War II.

**Keywords:** Ezra Pound, *The Cantos*, Katyn, World War II.

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## ЭЗРА ПАУНД И КАТЫНЬ: РУССКИЙ СЛЕД В «КАНТОС»

**Аннотация:** В статье исследуется отражение в творчестве Э. Паунда сюжета о Катынском расстреле, отсылка к которому появляется в канто LXXVII. После обнаружения массовых захоронений в Катынском лесу в 1943 г. власти нацистской Германии планировали организовать пропагандистскую кампанию, целью которой стал бы подрыв авторитета советского правительства в глазах союзников и ослабление военных позиций Большой тройки. Посольства Германии в Италии, Финляндии, Чехии, Бельгии и др. призывали писателей посетить Катынь и опубликовать свои впечатления от поездки. Эзра Паунд, живший тогда в Италии, получил приглашение от Готтхарда Маукша, сотрудника отдела культуры Посольства Германии в Риме. Паунд очень заинтересовался этим предложением, но ему было отказано в визе. В статье перечисляются репортажи, опубликованные членами международной делегации по итогам поездки в Катынь; большинство из них носили антисоветский характер. Когда Паунд находился в госпитале Святой Елизаветы, он следил за расследованием, проходившим под руководством Р.Д. Мэддена (1951–1952), упоминал Катынь в своих письмах к Оливии Россетти Агрести. По возвращении в Италию Паунд возобновил контакт с Готтхардом Маукшем (его имя фигурировало в канто LXXVII, но было неверно транслитерировано). Однако воспоминаний или каких-либо указаний на сотрудничество с Паундом после войны Маукш не оставил. Документы, подтверждающие намерения Германии пригласить Паунда участвовать в поездке в Катынь, были утрачены во время бомбардировок Берлина в ходе Второй мировой войны.

**Ключевые слова:** Эзра Паунд, «Кантос», Катынь, Вторая мировая война.

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Maukch thought he would do me a favour  
by getting me onto the commission  
to inspect the mass graves of Katin.<sup>1</sup>

This sentence can be found in the 77th Canto written in Pisa after the World War II. In the manuscript there are four lines referring to the international delegation of writers that Germans brought to the Katyn Forest in spring, 1943. However, Pound misspelled the name of this Russian village. As is typical for his late work, this sentence is unrelated and left without further explanation in *The Cantos*. Also the person named “Maukch“ is not introduced and appears only once.

because of their charm - - But on the 135  
other hand Maukch thought he would do me  
a favour to get me onto a commission  
to inspect the mass graves @ Katin. -  
(le beau monde gouverne, ...  
if not tomorrow & any rate it  
is a level of some sort which  
they tend to return, changing  $\square$   
in the middle whether it is  
horizontal. . . ~~you need show~~  
~~who chose you & what with a story~~  
"I having got in (advantage, privilege)  
then is nothing states nothing  
— retain they will not do  
to maintain  
"ew"

Canto LXXII. Facsimile of Ezra Pound text. Ezra Pound Collection in the Beinecke Library. YCAL MSS 183. Used by permission of the Ezra Pound heirs

The historical background, on the other hand, is well-documented. According to locals, Wehrmacht soldiers discovered mass graves not far

<sup>1</sup> Pound, Ezra. *The Cantos*. New York: New Directions, 1981. (Canto LXXVII: 42)

from the village of Katyn, about 20 kilometres west of the Russian city of Smolensk, in February 1943. When the frost period was over, the mass graves were exhumed. In the graves lay several thousand Polish officers in uniform, who had been executed by a shot in the back of the neck. NS Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels learned of the discovery in the beginning of April 1943. He immediately informed Hitler who instructed him to exploit the case in the German war propaganda.<sup>2</sup>

Since the German defeat at Stalingrad three months ago, Goebbels has been looking for an occasion to get back on the offensive with propaganda campaigns. He had received reports of the increasingly defeatist mood because the German population no longer saw “a clear picture of war“. His speech in Berlin Sports Palace on February, 18 calling for a total war had not changed the pessimistic mood of the population.<sup>3</sup>

Hitler immediately saw Katyn as an opportunity to drive a wedge between the Allies. After all, the Polish government in exile in London was under the protection of the British, who in turn were allied with the Soviet Union. German and Polish experts who evaluated the documents found on the corpses came to the conclusion that the Soviet secret service NKVD was responsible for the mass executions.<sup>4</sup>

Goebbels planned a propagandistic campaign aimed primarily at the Anglo-American press.<sup>5</sup> In this way, the leaders in London and Washington were supposed to come under pressure and to break the alliance with Stalin.

The Propaganda Ministry in Berlin invited a group of foreign correspondents to Katyn. Most of them came from the countries occupied by the Wehrmacht or allied with Berlin. But there were also two journalists from neutral countries: Christer Jäderlund (*Stockholms Tidningen*, Sweden) and Paul Schnetzer (*Der Bund*, Switzerland). Jäderlund later reported that he was convinced of the perpetrators of the NKVD, but his newspaper had not printed his report.<sup>6</sup> Schnetzer, on the other hand, was not sure which

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<sup>2</sup> *The Katyn Forest Massacre: Hearings Before the Select Committee to Conduct an Investigation of the Facts, Evidence, and Circumstances of the Katyn Forest Massacre*: in 7 vols. Vol. 5. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952: 1247–1249.

<sup>3</sup> Fox, J.P. “Der Fall Katyn und die NS-Propaganda.” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 3 (1982): 469.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*: 463–465.

<sup>5</sup> 11h-Konferenz vom 8. April 1943. Bundesarchiv, R055/00015: 77.

<sup>6</sup> *The Katyn Forest Massacre*: 1564.

side to blame, and did not write about the mass graves of Katyn. Instead, he published a report about Smolensk largely destroyed in the fighting.<sup>7</sup>

Goebbels' plan was to reinforce the press offensive with writers who could publish essays and feuilletons about their impressions of Katyn. For instance, the Ministry of Propaganda considered inviting the Norwegian Nobel Prize winner Knut Hamsun, who had repeatedly praised Hitler and encouraged his compatriots to collaborate with German occupiers<sup>8</sup>, but finally -the idea of bringing 84 year old Hamsun to Katyn was rejected.<sup>9</sup>

Cultural attachés of German Embassies in several countries were given the task of inviting writers to Katyn. In Rome German diplomats could not find a prominent Italian author who agreed to travel to Katyn. Ezra Pound lived in Rome at the time and was acquainted with Gotthardt Maucksch, an employee of the cultural department of the German Embassy. Pound mentioned him in *The Cantos*, but misspelled his name. Before the war Maucksch owned a German bookshop in Rome. In the German embassy he was responsible for translating German writers into Italian. In addition to fiction, he was obliged to share with Italian publishers the documentation of the Reich Government, which justified the German attack on Poland in 1939.<sup>10</sup>

Germans knew that Pound worked in Rome for the English-language propaganda program of Italian radio, which was under the control of Mussolini's government. In the USA Pound had therefore been indicted in absentia for treason. However, it is not known whether German diplomats knew what he thought of Hitler. Sometimes Pound praised him, sometimes he called the NS-regime "a sickly and unpleasant parody of fascism."<sup>11</sup> His attitude towards the Soviet Union, on the other hand, was clear: "Stalin's regime considers humanity NOTHING save raw material." He also had a clear opinion of the US President Franklin D. Roosevelt: "A weak man."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> "Smolensk heute." *Der Bund* (15 April 1943).

<sup>8</sup> 11h-Konferenz vom 8. April 1943. Bundesarchiv, R055/00015: 77.

<sup>9</sup> Weber, C. *Krieg der Täter. Die Massenerschießungen von Katyn*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2015: 144.

<sup>10</sup> *Inventario dell'archivio storico 1934-1970*, eds. M. Benzoni, A. Ostinelli, S. Pizzettis. Roma: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Direzione generale per gli archivi, 2007: 127.

<sup>11</sup> Kimpel, B. D., Eaves, T.C.D. "Ezra Pound on Hitler's Economic Policies." *American Literature* 55:1 (1983): 48.

<sup>12</sup> Sicari, S. *Pound's Epic Ambition: Dante and the Modern World*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991: 106.

Gotthardt Maucksch was commissioned to invite Ezra Pound to join the international delegation of writers flying to Katyn. According to contemporary witnesses, the poet was extremely interested in going there. However in the end the German Embassy in Rome did not grant him a visa: he was obviously considered uncontrollable.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, in the last week of April 1943, eight men of letters flew to Smolensk and were brought to the Katyn forest. Instead of Pound, Enrico Massa, a translator of German literature into Italian and Gotthardt Maucksch's friend, joined the delegation. There were also two Finnish writers – Jaakko Leppo, the head of the foreign department of the VTL secret service, and Örnulf Tigerstedt, an outstanding Scandinavian modernist, who saw in Hitler and Mussolini strong leaders of the working class<sup>14</sup>, three Belgians – Pierre Hubermont, a Walloon, Flemish nationalist Ferdinand Vercnocke, who had written an "Ode to Hitler", and Filip De Pillecyn, who, far from worshipping Hitler, hoped that the German Reich would contain Bolshevism.<sup>15</sup> Hubermont, who initially set his hopes on the Soviet Union as a workers' paradise, came back completely disillusioned from the 1930 Kharkov Congress of Proletarian Writers. In 1935 he took part in the International Writers' Congress for the Defense of Culture in Paris, but soon he became enthusiastic about Hitler as a leader of a workers' party whilst denouncing German racism.<sup>16</sup> Also František Kožík, a Czech playwright, poet, novelist and advocate of Esperanto was assigned to the delegation – against his will, as he later reported.<sup>17</sup> German authorities of the Reich Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia appointed him a director of the Czech radio.

Goebbels had high hopes for Ernesto Giménez Caballero, as he was the only representative of an officially neutral country. Giménez Caballero was a part of Surrealist and Futurist movement, called himself a socialist, as an editor of the avantgarde magazine *La Gaceta Literaria* worked with Luis Buñuel, Salvador Dalí and Federico García Lorca, published essays

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<sup>13</sup> Wilhelm, J. J. *Ezra Pound: The Tragic Years, 1925–1972*. University Park, PA : Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994: 231.

<sup>14</sup> Waltå, G.O. *Poet under Black Banners: The Case of Örnulf Tigerstedt and Extreme Right-Wing Swedish Literature in Finland 1918–1944*. Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell, 1993: 121–123.

<sup>15</sup> Waegemans, E. “‘Een geweldige, ja kolossale vrees voor het bolsjewisme.’ Filip De Pillecyn naar het dodenwoud van Katyn (1943).” *Filip De Pillecyn Studies III* (2007): 157.

<sup>16</sup> “Sommaires – Le Mois.” *Le Journal de Genève* (2 octobre 1938).

<sup>17</sup> Kožík, F. *Vzpomínky*. Praha: Orbis, 1995: 211–213.

by Ilya Erenburg.<sup>18</sup> But after a long stay in Mussolini's Italy and probably under the influence of his Italian wife, he became an enthusiastic supporter of fascism who believed that his homeland had to defend itself against both Bolshevism and big business.<sup>19</sup> During the Spanish Civil War, he had been part of a propaganda unit of Franco's troops and was appointed Secretary of State in the Ministry of Education in Madrid. Goebbels hoped that Giménez Caballero would persuade the leadership in Madrid to enter the war alongside the Germans and Italians.<sup>20</sup>

Giménez Caballero published a long report about his journey to Katyn.<sup>21</sup> It appeared on April 30, 1943, the 50th birthday of the Reich Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop – the issue placed his portrait on the title page. Giménez Caballero wrote that he would have preferred to meet Russian writers or visit the Lenin Mausoleum on Red Square rather than see the victims of red terror. A few weeks later he published a 51 page brochure *The Massacre of Katyn – A Vision of Russia*. Three Belgian writers had a joined press conference in occupied Brussels that provoked a strong response in the newspapers under German control, and published their reports blaming the Soviet regime.<sup>22</sup> Örnulf Tigerstedt did the same in his report for a Stockholm newspaper.<sup>23</sup> František Kožík was far more reserved than the Belgians: in his report on Katyn he did not name any perpetrators.<sup>24</sup> Jaakko Leppo and Enrico Massa did not report on their trip.

The propaganda campaign of the Germans did not have the desired effect – the Western Allies maintained their alliance with Stalin. The Office of War Information (OWI) in Washington, which provided the American press with reports on the theaters of war, called the German reports on Katyn

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<sup>18</sup> “Ayer murió Ernesto Giménez Caballero, escritor entre la vanguardia y la polémica.” *ABC* (15 de mayo 1988).

<sup>19</sup> Giménez Caballero, E. *La matanza de Katyn: visión sobre Rusia*. Madrid: Imp. E. Gimenez, 1943: 39.

<sup>20</sup> *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, hrsg. E. Fröhlich. T. II, bd. 7. München: Saur, 1993: 217.

<sup>21</sup> Giménez Caballero, E. “Acabo de ver Katyn.” *Informaciones* (30 de abril 1943).

<sup>22</sup> “Belgijscy literaci nad grobami polskich oficerów pod Katyniem.” *Goniec Krakowski* (30 kwietnia 1943); Hubermont, P. *J'étais à Katyn. Témoignage oculaire*. [Bruxelles, 1943]; Vercnocke, F. *Ik was in Katyn. Ooggetuigenverslag*. [Bruxelles, 1943].

<sup>23</sup> Tigerstedt, Ö. “I Dödsskogen vid Katyn. Massgravarna i Smolensk skildrade av ett ögonvittnen.” *Svenska Dagbladet* (29 April 1943).

<sup>24</sup> Kožík, F. “Co jsem viděl v Katynu.” *Svět* 18 (1943): 3.

a "big lie".<sup>25</sup> The British press authority (Political Warfare Executive Directive) sent an instruction to all editors that the reports from Katyn should be presented as a "futile attempt by Germany to postpone defeat by political methods".<sup>26</sup>

Since Pound could not take part in the trip to Katyn, he limited himself to accusing the British Prime Minister of his silence about Katyn in a radio commentary: "Mr. Churchill knows quite as much about Bolshevik METHODS of administration as anyone else. Mr. Churchill has in the past expressed himself quite clearly on that subject. Nothing equivocal about Winston's words when referring to Russia under Bolshevik rule. The mass graves at Katyn surprised NO one."<sup>27</sup>

In May 1945 Pound was arrested by American troops in Italy. He was held in solitary confinement in Pisa, including three weeks in an open-air iron cage. Psychiatrists found that he was mentally disturbed, partly because he equated Hitler with Joan of Arc.<sup>28</sup> In prison he continued to write *The Cantos* – one of them including the four lines about Katyn.

After the war some members of the Katyn writers' delegation had to face the consequences of their collaboration with the Germans. František Kožík was expelled from the Writers' Union in Czechoslovakia; however, he managed to escape the threat of imprisonment.<sup>29</sup> He submitted to the Soviet embassy his publications on Katyn, arguing that both the trip and the articles were the result of German coercion. The Moscow diplomats accepted his explanations.<sup>30</sup> Three Belgian writers were sent to prison. The Flemish admirer of Hitler, Ferdinand Veruccke, was first sentenced to life imprisonment, then the jail term was reduced to 16 years; he was released after a total of six years. Filip De Pillecyn was to spend ten years in jail but was released after 5 years and regretted his collaboration with the German occupiers.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *The Katyn Forest Massacre*. Vol. 7: 1988.

<sup>26</sup> Bell, Philip M.H. *British Public Opinion, Foreign Policy and the Soviet Union 1941–1945*. London; New York; Melbourne; Auckland: E. Arnold, 1990: 109.

<sup>27</sup> Pound, E. "Soberly." *Ezra Pound Speaking: Radio Speeches of World War II*, ed. L.W. Doob. London; Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978. No 90.

<sup>28</sup> Stock, N. *The Life of Ezra Pound*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1970: 408.

<sup>29</sup> Kožík, F. *Vzpomínky*: 223.

<sup>30</sup> Borák, M. "Zlocin v Katyni a jeho české a slovenské souvislosti." *Evropa mezi Německem a Ruskem. Sborník prací k sedmdesátinám Jaroslava Valenty*, eds. M. Šesták a E. Voráček. Praha: HÚ AV ČR, 2000: 516.

<sup>31</sup> Waegemans, E. "'Een geweldige, ja kolossale vrees voor het bolsjewisme.' Filip De Pillecyn naar het dodenwoud van Katyn (1943)." *Filip De Pillecyn Studies III* (2007): 178–180.



Pierre Hubermont was sentenced for 16 years, and spent in jail only six. Later he wrote articles against Walloon chauvinism<sup>32</sup> and a 110 page analysis of Katyn's mass murder for which he failed to find a publisher.<sup>33</sup>

Örnulf Tigerstedt fled to Stockholm in autumn 1944, but was taken into custody there. Part of the Swedish press demanded that he be extradited to the Soviet Union as a "fascist and war criminal". However, Swedish conservative circles supported him, including the Royal house. He was released but never returned to his homeland, where his works were removed from public libraries.<sup>34</sup>

Ernesto Giménez Caballero succesfully continued his career as a diplomat and a filmmaker of documentaries on Latin America and Spanish cultural heritage.

Pound was brought from Italy to the USA in November 1945. Before his departure, he was reading to his guards the bestseller *Mission to Moscow* by Joseph E. Davies, the US ambassador to the Soviet Union during the Great Terror (1936–1938).<sup>35</sup> There is no record of how Pound commented on the book. Davies, who did not speak Russian, justified in it the Moscow show trials; being a great admirer of Stalin, he wrote about him: "His brown eye is exceedingly wise and gentle. A child would like to sit on his lap and a dog would sidle up to him."<sup>36</sup> Davies, a close friend of Roosevelt's, also defended the Krelim version of Katyn on behalf of the White House, and insisted that the crime was committed by the Germans.<sup>37</sup>

In the USA, during his stay at St Elizabeths Pound was allowed to read periodicals. He followed attentively the reports about the special committee of the American Congress, which in 1951/52 under the chairmanship of the deputy Ray J. Madden accomplished an investigation about the Katyn massacre and came to the conclusion that the perpetrators were to be looked for in the NKVD. Pound sent a letter with newspaper clippings to an acquaintance. He also wrote verses in which he dealt with Katyn. He regarded the mass murder within the context of the press reports on the cruelties com-

<sup>32</sup> *Encyclopédie du Mouvement wallon*, ed. P. Delforge: in 4 vols. Vol. II. Namur: Charleroi Institut Jules Destrée, 2000: 820.

<sup>33</sup> Hubermont, P. *Khatyn ce n'est pas Katyn*. 1976. [unpublished manuscript; Soma-Ceges, Bruxelles.]

<sup>34</sup> Waltå, G.O. *Poet under Black Banners*. 150–154.

<sup>35</sup> Stock, N. *The Life of Ezra Pound*: 221.

<sup>36</sup> Davies, J.E. *Mission to Moscow*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1941: 269.

<sup>37</sup> Dunn, D. *Caught between Roosevelt and Stalin. America's Ambassadors to Moscow*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1998: 184.

mitted against American prisoners of war during the Korean War: “Greasy hypocrisy today re/ atrocities in Korea, ‘surprise’ AFTER Katyn. And no wops/ making esprit re/ Churchill //”<sup>38</sup>

Back to Italy, Pound renewed his contacts with the German literary agent Gotthardt Maucksch, who was running a large bookshop in Florence.<sup>39</sup> Maucksch, later honoured for his contribution to German-Italian cultural relations, did not leave any records of his contacts with Pound. Foreign Ministry files on the plan to invite Pound to Katyn got burned in a bombing raid on Berlin during the war.

**Maucksch, Gotthardt**

★ 21.10.1902 Heidenau/Sachsen

ev.

Eltern: Max M.; Milda geb. Roscher

∞ 2.3.1943 Ilse geb. Redlefsen

Buchhändler in Rom. – 1.8.1936 NSDAP.

1. 4.1941	DA B Rom (Quirinal), Kulturref., bis 9.9.1943
8.10.1941	Dienstvertrag als Wissenschaftlicher Hilfsarbeiter
4.10.1943	DA beim Bevollmächtigten des Großdeutschen Reichs bei der ital. faschistischen Nationalregierung, Fasano, Leitung der Außenstelle Verona des Kulturref.

*The only archived surviving document on Gotthardt Maucksch.  
Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin.*

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<sup>38</sup> “I Cease Not to Yowl” *Ezra Pound’s Letters to Olivia Rossetti Agresti*, ed. D.P. Tryphonopoulos. London: Surrette; Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998: 82.

<sup>39</sup> Terrell, C.F. *A Companion to The Cantos of Ezra Pound*: in 2 vols. Vol. II. Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 1984: 403.

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