

Yale University Library
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Guide to the Olivia Rossetti Agresti Papers

YCAL MSS 173



by Diane J. Ducharme

June 2003

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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New Haven, CT 06520-8330
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CALL NUMBER: YCAL MSS 173

CREATOR: Agresti, Olivia Rossetti, 1875-1960

TITLE: Olivia Rossetti Agresti Papers

DATES: 1947-1963

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.63 linear feet (2 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The collection contains correspondence between Agresti and Pound documenting their political and economic views; their opinions of Mussolini and Fascism; and their disagreements on antisemitism and the Catholic Church. Other topics include news of family and mutual friends and Pound's confinement at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, as well as various efforts made on his behalf to free him. There are also letters from Dorothy Pound and several other friends of Pound, including T. S. Eliot; a few short pieces by Agresti, including one in defense of Pound; and a transcript of "Four Steps."

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.agresti>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.agresti>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Ezra Pound and purchase from Olivia Rossetti Agresti through Giovanni Giovannini on the George B. Alvord Fund and the Library Associates Fund, 1959; also purchase from Bertram Rota on the

Danford N. Barney Fund and the Frederick W. Hilles Fund, 1972. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research. *Restricted Fragile* in box 2 may only be consulted with permission of the appropriate curator. Preservation photocopies or photographic prints for reference use have been substituted in the main files.

Conditions Governing Use

The Olivia Rossetti Agresti Papers are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Olivia Rossetti Agresti Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Processing Information

Former call number: ZA Pound Agresti

Associated Materials

Ezra Pound Papers (YCAL MSS 43).

OLIVIA ROSSETTI AGRESTI, 1875-1960

Olivia Rossetti Agresti, the eldest daughter of William Michael Rossetti, was born in London on September 30, 1875. In 1892 she and her younger sister Helen began printing and distributing their own Anarchist journal, *The Torch*, an adventure described in their novel *A Girl Among the Anarchists*, published under the pseudonym Isabel Meredith in 1903.

Olivia married author and journalist Antonio Agresti in 1897, and the couple settled in Florence and later in Rome. In 1904 she was hired as a secretary and interpreter by David Lubin, founder of the International Institute of Agriculture, and worked closely with him until his death during the 1918 influenza epidemic. She joined the staff of the Italian delegation to the League of Nations in Geneva in the following year. Throughout her life, she continued to work as an interpreter at international conferences held in Italy and at the annual assemblies of the League of Nations.

In 1921 she joined the staff of the Italian Association of Joint Stock Companies as the editor of their monthly newsletter, a position she held until 1942. After Antonio's death in 1926, Agresti continued her work as editor and interpreter, and also lectured several times in the United States on such topics as "The Historical Development of the Italian Garden," "The Growth of Italian Industries," and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement. She also converted to Roman Catholicism and adopted two Italian girls.

Agresti's published works include *Giovanni Costa: His Life, Work and Times* (1904); *David Lubin: A Study in Practical Idealism* (1922); and *The Organization of the Arts and Professions in the Fascist Guild State* (1938), the last with Mario Missiroli. While she disapproved of Pound's antisemitism and his attacks on religion, she shared his approval of Fascist Italy and his belief that he had not committed treason, and in 1954 translated "Prometheus Bound," the text of a Radio Vatican broadcast on Pound's case, as a contribution to

efforts to free him from St. Elizabeth's. In her later years, Agresti began work on a memoir and frequently visited Schloss Brunnenberg, the home of Pound's daughter Mary de Rachewiltz. Olivia Rossetti Agresti died in Rome in 1960.

Scope and Contents

The Olivia Rossetti Agresti Papers document Agresti's relationship with the poet after World War II and her own political and economic beliefs during that period. The papers span the dates 1947-1963 and have been organized into two series: I. Correspondence and II. Writings.

[Series I, Correspondence](#) is housed in folders 1-33 and has been arranged alphabetically by correspondent. The major correspondent is Ezra Pound himself; the letters begin in 1947 while he was confined in St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C. Pound's letters usually deal with the political and economic themes that preoccupied him during this period. Attacks on Roosevelt, Churchill and the postwar Western democracies, approval for Fascism mingled with regret that Mussolini and Hitler were uninterested in Social Credit, dismissals of Christianity and denunciations of Jewish ideas and influence, are mixed with demands that Agresti read Brooks Adams and Del Mar, discuss recent events with Luigi Villari, or translate some work that Pound has recently discovered.

Pound's vivid condemnations of Christianity and of Jews were perhaps intensified by his knowledge that Agresti disagreed with him on these subjects. The carbons of her letters to him contain many approving references to the Catholic Church in Italy and to the necessity of faith in the postwar world, while a 1954 attack on Judaism and Jews brought her response: "I am profoundly convinced that it is wrong to foster generalizations that make a whole people or race responsible for the actions of some. Samuel Lloyd and Hamilton seem to me good Bt. names." Agresti and Pound also frequently clashed with her on the topic of David Lubin: while Agresti admired his thought, Pound was inclined to argue that Lubin's work was inferior.

Other topics include Pound's growing concern about drug addiction among the young in the United States, particularly heroin addiction, and his belief that the drug trade was a racial conspiracy; various projects for obtaining Pound's release from St. Elizabeth's; the profound social changes in postwar Italy and America; contemporary literature and the arts; and Pound's daughter Mary and Agresti's family.

The letters of Pound's wife Dorothy, located in folders 11-12, contain news of Pound's health and daily activities and messages dictated by Pound.

Agresti's brief correspondence with T. S. Eliot is found in folder 6; while he responded politely to her announcement of the founding of the Committee for the Defense of Classical Culture, he declined to take an active role in freeing Pound from confinement, pointing out "that Mr. Pound has never been tried, and therefore cannot be pardoned." Other correspondents include Buddhadeva Bose, Louis Dudek, Hugh Kenner, and Olga Rudge, who writes seeking Agresti's support for defenses of Pound. Giovanni Giovannini's letters document the sale of a group of Pound's letters to Yale University.

[Series II, Writings](#), contains two short biographical pieces by Agresti; a statement, apparently by Rossetti, that Pound "has never mixed up in the internal affairs of Italy;" and a transcript of Pound's "Four Steps."

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence, 1947-1963

0.36' (0.85 box)

Series I, *Correspondence*, is organized into two subseries and is alphabetically arranged within each subseries by name of correspondent.

OLIVIA ROSSETTI AGRESTI CORRESPONDENCE

b. 1, f. 1	Bose, Buddhadeva	1954 Aug 18
b. 1, f. 2	Cookson, Rachel Typescript carbon of letter from ORA	[1958]
b. 1, f. 3	Coselschi, E.	1955 Mar 2
b. 1, f. 4	Dudek, Louis	1954 Feb 19
b. 1, f. 5	Edwards, John	1955 Aug 26
b. 1, f. 6	Eliot, T. S.	1954
b. 1, f. 7	Giovannini, G[iovanni]	1958-59
b. 1, f. 8	Kasper, John	1951 Dec 31
b. 1, f. 9	Kenner, Hugh	1953 Jul 13
b. 1, f. 10	Luce, Clare Boothe	[1954] Oct 7
b. 1, f. 11	Pound, Dorothy	1947 Jun-Sep
b. 1, f. 12	Pound, Dorothy	1948-58
b. 1, f. 13-15	Pound, Ezra	1947-50
b. 1, f. 16-17	Pound, Ezra	1951-52
b. 1, f. 18	Pound, Ezra	1953 Jan-Sep
b. 1, f. 19	Pound, Ezra With: ANS from Dachine Rainer to Ezra Pound, n.d.	1953 Oct-1954 Feb
b. 1, f. 20	Pound, Ezra	1954 May-Aug
b. 1, f. 21	Pound, Ezra	1954 Sep-1955 Mar
b. 1, f. 22	Pound, Ezra	1955 Apr-Dec
b. 1, f. 23	Pound, Ezra	1956
b. 1, f. 24	Pound, Ezra	1957
b. 1, f. 25	Pound, Ezra	1958
b. 1, f. 26	Rachewiltz, Boris de	1958

OLIVIA ROSSETTI AGRESTI CORRESPONDENCE (continued)

b. 1, f. 27	Rachewiltz, Mary de	1953
b. 1, f. 28	Rudge, Olga	1948-54
THIRD-PARTY CORRESPONDENCE		
b. 1, f. 29	Catholic University of America to Ezra Pound	1956 May 18
b. 1, f. 30	Cookson, Rachel to Ezra Pound	1958 Feb 28
b. 1, f. 31	Giovannini, G[iovanni], to Dorothy Pound	1963 Aug 16
b. 1, f. 32	Pound, Ezra, to Helen Angeli Rossetti	1963 Jul 6
b. 1, f. 33	de Rachewiltz, Mary, to Helen Angeli Rossetti	1963 Jul 1

Series II: Writings, 1958

0.06' (0.15 box)

Series II, *Writings*, is organized into two subseries and each subseries is alphabetically arranged by title of work.

WRITINGS BY OLIVIA ROSSETTI AGRESTI

b. 1, f. 34	"The Anecdote of an Interpreter:" Table of contents and list of illustrations	n.d.
b. 1, f. 35	Biographical sketch	1958
b. 1, f. 36	Biographical sketch concerning her friendship with Ezra Pound In French	1958 Jun 12
b. 1, f. 37	"Ezra Pound:" Statement in defense of Pound against accusations of treason	n.d.

WRITINGS BY EZRA POUND

b. 1, f. 38	"Four Steps" [a personal statement by Ezra Pound] Transcript of radio program produced for the BBC by D. G. Bridson	1958 May 7
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Restricted Fragile*0.21' (1 box)*

Restricted Fragile, Box 2, contains fragile originals. The material is arranged in folder order and may only be seen with the permission of the appropriate curator. Preservation photocopies or photographic prints have been substituted in the main files for reference use.

b. 2, f. 39	Box 1, folder 14
b. 2, f. 40	Box 1, folder 16
b. 2, f. 41	Box 1, folder 18
b. 2, f. 42	Box 1, folder 19
b. 2, f. 43	Box 1, folder 20
b. 2, f. 44	Box 1, folder 21

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

American literature -- 20th Century
Antisemitism
European literature -- 20th Century
Fascism -- Italy
Radio in propaganda -- Italy
Social credit
World War, 1939-1945 -- Italy -- Propaganda

Geographic Names

Italy -- Civilization -- 20th Century
Italy -- History -- 1922-1945

Names

Agresti, Olivia Rossetti, 1875-1960
Eliot, T. S. (Thomas Stearns), 1888-1965
Giovannini, Giovanni
Mussolini, Benito, 1883-1945
Pound, Dorothy
Pound, Ezra, 1885-1972
Pound, Ezra, 1885-1972 -- Friends and associates
Pound, Ezra, 1885-1972 -- Political and social views
Pound, Ezra, 1885-1972 -- Views on money