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Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Guide to the Viola Baxter Jordan Papers

YCAL MSS 175



by Diane J. Ducharme

July 2003

P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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CALL NUMBER: YCAL MSS 175

CREATOR: Jordan, Viola Baxter, 1887-1973

TITLE: Viola Baxter Jordan papers

DATES: 1905-1951

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 1.04 linear feet (4 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The collection contains letters to Jordan from Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, H.D. and Bryher, as well as manuscripts of poems by Pound and Williams and a small quantity of personal papers. Subjects of the Pound letters include personal and family news; his writing and the literary world in general; his political and economic opinions; and his confinement at St. Elizabeth's Hospital. Letters from Williams discuss relationships between men and women; poetry; and arrangements for social occasions. Both H.D. and Bryher describe life in wartime Britain; H.D. also comments on her own work, her daughter Perdita, and her interests in the occult and in film. Writings include annotated and signed typescripts of early Pound poems, which he sent to Jordan for her to retype and submit to magazines; and several typescripts of early works by Williams. Other papers include dance cards, an advertising brochure for the Albergo Rapallo, and newspaper clippings.

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

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.jordan>.

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

Purchases from and gift of Viola Baxter Jordan, 1957-1968. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Box 4: Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

Conditions Governing Use

The Viola Baxter Jordan 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

Viola Baxter Jordan Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Processing Information

Former call number: ZA Pound Jordan

Associated Materials

Ezra Pound Papers, YCAL MSS 43 Susan Cordelia Jordan, Scrapbook Relating to Ezra Pound, YCAL MSS 107

VIOLA BAXTER JORDAN, 1887-1973

Viola Scott Baxter was born on March 15, 1887 in Utica, New York. In 1905 her mother urged her to attend a dance at Hamilton College, suggesting that she "might meet her Prince Charming." At that dance, the eighteen year old Viola was introduced to Ezra Pound and began a fifty-year friendship with him, mostly conducted via correspondence. Pound, in turn, introduced her to his former sweetheart Hilda Doolittle, and later to the poet William Carlos Williams, whom she dated for a time in 1907-08 and who also became a lifelong friend and correspondent.

Viola, who did not attend college, married the political economist Virgil Jordan in Utica in September 1914. The couple had three children, but were divorced in the mid-1920s. Viola received a small amount of alimony and child support and raised the children in Tenafly, New Jersey. She continued her correspondences with her old friends, reporting to H.D. and Pound about her occasional visits with the Williams family and sending them news of political events and popular culture, astrological speculations, and pointed comments on her daily life as a suburban housewife. Pound stayed at her home for two weeks during his visit to the U.S. in 1939, confiding in her about his domestic situation and showing her photographs of Mary, his daughter by the violinist Olga Rudge.

While Viola was completely cut off from contact with Pound after the American declaration of war on Italy in 1941, she remained in close touch with H.D. and her companion Bryher. In addition to sending them news about their friends in the U.S., she frequently sent cigarettes, stockings, and other small luxuries that were difficult to obtain during the war in Britain.

Although she disapproved of Pound's politics, she was dismayed to learn of his indictment for treason and his confinement at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, and wrote to him affectionately throughout his years there, sending him many packages of baked goods, jam, and candy. She and her children visited Pound and his wife Dorothy during the 1950s.

Severe arthritis and general ill-health curtailed her ability to correspond in her later years, and she lived quietly with her daughter Barbara in Harrington Park, New Jersey, where she died on November 26, 1973.

Scope and Contents

The Viola Baxter Jordan Papers document Jordan's friendships with the poets Ezra Pound, H.D., and William Carlos Williams. The papers span the dates 1905-1951 and have been organized into three series: I. Correspondence; II. Writings; and III. Other Papers.

[Series I, Correspondence](#), is housed in Boxes 1-3 and is organized into two alphabetically arranged subseries. The first, Viola Baxter Jordan Correspondence, primarily consists of letters received by Jordan from Ezra Pound; H.D. and her companion Bryher; and William Carlos Williams.

Jordan's letters from her earliest literary friend, Ezra Pound, are located in folders 48-90. Pound's first letter to Jordan, written shortly after their meeting in July 1905, notes that he recently read "Browning's 'Columbe's Birthday' and destroyed a bushel or two of my archives..." These early letters are filled with remarks on books read and classes taken; music and art; student life at the University of Pennsylvania; and comments on Pound's own poetry. In 1906 he boasts that "incautious editors are beginning to return it with encouraging remarks instead of kuss words." He also offers jocular advice on dating and marriage.

Even in letters from his first years in Europe, Pound continued to discuss literature and the arts in general: folder 61 contains a lengthy attempt by Pound to explain the troubadours, "animal passion," his work in *Provença*, and his own strong opinions about artistic truth: "The rottenest morality that an artist can have is that sniveling *"idealism"* which tries to pretend that life is something more prudish than god made it." Gradually Pound began to describe the European scene to his American friend. His letters from London in 1914 and 1915 detail the authors and artists he is meeting; his impressions of London society; and his increasing irritation with Jordan's "provincial nonsense" about art and literature. The final letter in this portion of their correspondence, dated April 1915, compares her mind to "slightly hardened putty."

The correspondence lapsed for almost twenty years at this point, but in 1933 Jordan contacted Pound in Italy and their exchange resumed. Pound's letters from the 1930s and early 1940s are filled with news of his family and his political and economic opinions; disparaging commentary on the state of American politics and culture; and repeated thanks for presents of magazines, tea, coffee and a coffeemaker. Pound also defended his Rome Radio broadcasts, insisting in his last letter before America's declaration of war on the Axis powers: "IF you ever listened to my charming voice you wd realize that I dont despise America" (Box 2, folder 77).

In 1945, Pound wrote to Jordan four days after arriving at the Washington D.C. jail: "First chance I have had to write as was incommunicado at Pisa." He sent news of his families in Italy and concluded, "send me yr news. Eliot, Mencken, cummings all sendin' moral support."

Pound's letters from St. Elizabeth's Hospital fill folders 78-90. Mostly brief, these notes thank Jordan for presents of food, newspapers, cigarettes and flowers; send news of his daughter Mary and of Olga Rudge; and remark on the dullness of his daily routine at St. Elizabeth's. He repeatedly asked for news of mutual friends and other literary figures, and urged her to continue writing to him. Pound also gave Jordan advice about requests by scholars and universities for access to their correspondence: "Strongly object to yr *giving* anything to universities....they shd be made to pay thru nose..." (folder 84). There are no letters from Pound later than 1950 in the collection, although he and Jordan continued to correspond.

In contrast to Pound's early letters, those of William Carlos Williams were flirtatious and introspective. He addresses Jordan as "charming creature of transparent contradictions" and asserts that "you love me very desperately." Many of the early letters contain speculation on the nature of love, the emotional differences between men and women, and their own characters. In a letter of December 5, 1911, Williams informs her that "Virginity is a myth To be alive means you are committed against virginity."

Williams' first letter to Jordan after his 1912 marriage expresses concern at her recent silence: "I presume you are silent out of discretion, surely not out of desire?" But by 1914 the correspondence resumed on a friendly footing. In addition to invitations and plans for social occasions, the letters contain family news and display Williams' irritation at Jordan's taste for traditional poetry. "All the gush and sentiment in the world will not take the place of accurate observation," he wrote in an early 1920s letter. Williams was still remarking on this in 1937: "you'd like to ride a beautiful white horse through fields of lily of the valley till you swooned."

There are also occasional humorous comments on "Ezry." But a letter written in December 1945 describes Williams' anger at Pound's radio broadcasts from Rome. "He seems to be getting out of it the modern way--by pretending madness. Why doesn't he....acknowledge his guilt and take it in the neck?"

Williams often asked Jordan for news of their mutual friend H.D., whose own letters to Jordan fill folders 24-44. H.D.'s early letters describe travel in Europe and in the United States and repeatedly assure Jordan that her letters are welcome. She describes her film ventures and her work on *Close Up* with Kenneth MacPherson, and thanks Jordan for American "movie magazines" and reviews of current films. H.D. also comments on their experiences of motherhood and frequently touches on their shared interests in astrology, numerology and other occult topics, sending an elaborate Tarot reading for Jordan in February 1930 and encouraging her to record her own occult "experiences."

There are a few comments on H.D.'s own writing throughout the correspondence. A 1928 letter discusses her irritation with her own literary persona: "No one really much likes my own prose but I can't be held up by what the critics say H.D. ought to be like....I say WHO is H.D.? They all think they know more...than I." Jordan's dislike of modern poetry is noted: "My book of poems is announced...You will prob. not like it." (Box 1, folder 37)

H.D.'s wartime letters are filled with thanks for numerous packages from Jordan; descriptions of living conditions, the public mood in England, and her life with Bryher; news of her daughter Perdita's war work and social life; and her attempts to continue writing. There are also frequent allusions to Pound and to their lack of information about his activities. H.D. reports rumors that he has gone to Berlin to work directly for the Nazis, as well as her own belief that he has been "foolhardy."

Folders 40-42 contain letters written from Switzerland after H.D.'s breakdown and hospitalization in 1946. These contain nostalgic descriptions of old friends and college life; reports on Perdita's work and marriage; comments on psychoanalysis and literature; her growing friendship with Norman Holmes Pearson; and remarks on the refugee situation in Switzerland and Bryher's political opinions.

Bryher's own letters to "Dear Mrs. Jordan" (Box 1, folders 3-19) began with a thank-you note for a parcel of cigarettes written in H.D.'s absence and an explanation of her name, apparently at Jordan's request: "it is not unusual over here as a name but it is actually a surname." Her letters contain descriptions of wartime privations, rationing, blackouts, air raids and censorship: "We have V2 quite a bit but we must not write anything about it" (Box 1, folder 12). Her references to Pound and his arrest for treason are more negative than H.D.'s; in 1946 she remarks that "maybe he was crazy, I hope he was" but observes that "he should think himself very lucky to be an American....the two British were hung" (folder 14). Bryher's letters from Switzerland after the war contain detailed discussion of H.D.'s condition and extensive comments on recent European politics.

Third Party Correspondence consists of brief letters from Ezra Pound to Jordan's sister Gwendolyn Baxter and is located in Box 3, folder 108.

[Series II, Writings](#), is located in Box 3, folders 110-141 and is organized into two subseries, Writings by Ezra Pound and Writings by William Carlos Williams. Each subseries is arranged alphabetically by title of work.

The majority of the Ezra Pound writings are early poems that Pound sent to Viola Jordan, some annotated with requests that she retype them and submit them to various magazines for him. "Christopher Columbi Tumulus," "Joachim du Bellay Loquitur," and "Purveyor's General" are accompanied by Jordan's typed copies and by rejection letters from *Harper's* and *Scribner's*. Many of these early typescripts are signed and dated by Pound. Folder 126 contains a typescript carbon of "More Jazz," a 1935 satire on Roosevelt's banking policy.

Folders 137-41 hold typescript copies of poems and two short prose pieces by William Carlos Williams. One of the prose pieces, "About Movie Tempo," is signed and dated by Williams.

[Series III, Other Papers](#), is housed in folders 142-48 and includes two dance cards, a brochure for the Albergo Rapallo annotated by Pound, a calling card, and newspaper clippings.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence, 1905-1951

1.05 linear feet (2.5 boxes)

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

Series I is available in digital form.

VIOLA BAXTER JORDAN CORRESPONDENCE

b. 1, f. 1	The American Magazine Rejection letter signed "The Editors"	n.d.
b. 1, f. 2	Bradley, Sculley	1948 Apr 22
b. 1, f. 3-5	Bryher	1941-42
b. 1, f. 6-8	Bryher	1943
b. 1, f. 9-11	Bryher	1944
b. 1, f. 12-13	Bryher	1945
b. 1, f. 14-15	Bryher	1946
b. 1, f. 16-17	Bryher	1947-48
b. 1, f. 18	Bryher	1949
b. 1, f. 19	Bryher	1950-51
b. 1, f. 20	Century Magazine Rejection letter signed "The Editor"	n.d.
b. 1, f. 21	Clark, Barbara, Life and Letters	1946 Jul 19
b. 1, f. 22	Cornell, Julien	1945-46
b. 1, f. 23	Doolittle, H. [brother of H.D.]	1929 Jul 13
b. 1, f. 24-28	H.D.	1918-30
b. 1, f. 29-33	H.D. Includes printed advertisement for "The Hedgehog", 1936	1930-42
b. 1, f. 34-35	H.D.	1943
b. 1, f. 36-38	H.D.	1944
b. 1, f. 39	H.D.	1945
b. 1, f. 40	H.D.	1946-47
b. 1, f. 41	H.D.	1948

VIOLA BAXTER JORDAN CORRESPONDENCE (continued)

b. 1, f. 42	H.D.	[1949]
b. 1, f. 43	H.D.	[1950]
b. 1, f. 44	H.D.	[1951]
b. 1, f. 45	Jordan, Viola	Jul 19, n.y.
b. 1, f. 46	Moore, Frank L.	1947 Nov 20
b. 1, f. 47	Pound, Dorothy	1945-49
b. 2, f. 48-49	Pound, Ezra	1905
b. 2, f. 50-52	Pound, Ezra	1906
b. 2, f. 53-55	Pound, Ezra	1907
b. 2, f. 56-59	Pound, Ezra Includes typescript carbon on "Unproductive America" and cover letter, both pseudonymously signed as "John Vore" Includes printed advertisement for <i>Personae</i>	1908-10
b. 2, f. 60	Pound, Ezra	1910 Mar
b. 2, f. 61-63	Pound, Ezra	1910-11
b. 2, f. 64	Pound, Ezra	1912 Apr
b. 2, f. 65-67	Pound, Ezra	1914-15
b. 2, f. 68-69	Pound, Ezra With "All the Unemployed will have <i>work</i> for 25 Years," typescript carbon	1933-35
b. 2, f. 70	Pound, Ezra	1936
b. 2, f. 71	Pound, Ezra	1937
b. 2, f. 72-74	Pound, Ezra	1939
b. 2, f. 75-76	Pound, Ezra	1940
b. 2, f. 77	Pound, Ezra	1941
b. 2, f. 78	Pound, Ezra	1945
b. 2, f. 79-80	Pound, Ezra	1946 Jan-Jul
b. 2, f. 81-82	Pound, Ezra	1946 Aug-Dec
b. 2, f. 83-84	Pound, Ezra	[1947]
b. 2, f. 85	Pound, Ezra	[1948]
b. 3, f. 86-89	Pound, Ezra	1949
b. 3, f. 90	Pound, Ezra	1950

VIOLA BAXTER JORDAN CORRESPONDENCE (continued)

b. 3, f. 91	Pound, Homer L.	n.y. Dec 25
b. 3, f. 92	Rachewiltz, Mary de	1945-49
b. 3, f. 93	Rudge, Olga	1948-49
b. 3, f. 94	Schaffner, Perdita	1920 Jan 1
b. 3, f. 95	Shakespear, Hope Wedding invitation for Dorothy and Ezra Pound	n.y. Apr 18
b. 3, f. 96	St. Elizabeth's Hospital	1947
b. 3, f. 97-98	Williams, William Carlos	1909-11
b. 3, f. 99-100	Williams, William Carlos	1912
b. 3, f. 101-103	Williams, William Carlos With: typescript collection of poems, "Pastorals and Self-Portraits"	1913-14
b. 3, f. 104	Williams, William Carlos	1915-19
b. 3, f. 105	Williams, William Carlos	1920-27
b. 3, f. 106	Williams, William Carlos	1936
b. 3, f. 107	Williams, William Carlos	1937-46
b. 3, f. 108	Williams, Florence	1913-18, n.d.
THIRD PARTY CORRESPONDENCE		
b. 3, f. 109	Pound, Ezra, to [Gwendolyn Baxter]	1933-41

Series II: Writings, 1905-1935*0.3 linear feet (.4 box)*

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

WRITINGS BY EZRA POUND

b. 3, f. 110	"Art nascent," typescript	n.d.
b. 3, f. 111	"Aube in the Dust," AM	1908 June
b. 3, f. 112	"Autumnus," AMS With: "In tempore Senectus," typescript, page one	1908 June
b. 3, f. 113	"Capilopus Sends Greeting to Grotus Mantua 1500," typescript Signed "Ezra Pound, Wyncote"	[1908]
b. 3, f. 114	"Christopher Columbi Tumulus, from the Latin of Hippolytus Capilopus," typescript signed, corrected and annotated With: TS carbon of poem With: TLS rejection from Harper & Brothers, 1908 Jul 30	[1908]
b. 3, f. 115	"The Cry of the Eyes," typescript Signed "Ezra Pound Wyncote"	n.d.
b. 3, f. 116	"Earths winter cometh," typescript Signed "Ezra Pound Wyncote"	n.d.
b. 3, f. 117	"For man is a skin full of wine," typescript	n.y. May 16
b. 3, f. 118	"Fratello mio, Zephyrus," AMS With: "In Tempore Senectus," typescript, page 2 With: autograph note to VBJ With: three typescript carbons of "Fratello mio, Zephyrus"	[1908]
b. 3, f. 119	"How Prometheus bore the flame in a hollow seed," typescript	n.d.
b. 3, f. 120	"Hymn to the Dope," typescript	n.d.
b. 3, f. 121	"In Tenebris Cantorum Est," typescript	n.d.
b. 3, f. 122	"Joachim du Bellay loquitur," AM With: two typescript copies With: rejection letter from Harper & Brothers	
b. 3, f. 123	"La Regine Avrillouse," typescript	n.d.
b. 3, f. 124	"The Lord of Shallot," typescript Last four stanzas crossed out in pencil	n.d.
b. 3, f. 125	"Malrin," typescript Signed "Ezra Pound, Milligan Place, Crawfordsville, Ind."	n.d.

WRITINGS BY EZRA POUND (continued)

b. 3, f. 126	"More Jazz," typescript	1935
b. 3, f. 127	"Night September 20 or 30 . 1904," typescript With: "Ex Exilio," typescript	[1905?]
b. 3, f. 128	"Psalma," typescript	n.d.
b. 3, f. 129	"Purveyor's General," AMS With: two typescript copies With: rejection letter from Scribner's Magazine	1908 Jun
b. 3, f. 130	"A Rouse," typescript With: notes in Pound's hand on verso, mostly crossed out	n.d.
b. 3, f. 131	"Sonnet of the August Calm," AMS With: two typed copies	1908 Jun
b. 3, f. 132	"Song," typescript	n.d.
b. 3, f. 133	"Surgo," typescript With: explanatory note	n.d.
b. 3, f. 134	"To R. B.," typescript With: note in Pound's hand "See Browning's 'Balantine apology'"	n.d.
b. 3, f. 135	"To the dawn DEFIANCE," typescript Signed "Ezra Pound Wyncote Pa"	n.d.
b. 3, f. 136	"Webs," typescript	n.d.
WRITINGS BY WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS		
b. 3, f. 137	"About Movie Tempo," typescript signed	1927 Jul 8
b. 3, f. 138	"Pastoral," typescript carbon Two stanzas crossed out in pencil	n.d.
b. 3, f. 139	"Slow movement," typescript	n.d.
b. 3, f. 140	"Speech Rhythm," typescript signed	n.d.
b. 3, f. 141	"Touché," "In Harbor," "Woman Walking," typescript carbons	n.d.

Series III: Other Papers, 1905-1945*0.11 linear feet (.1 box)*Series III, *Other Papers*, is alphabetically arranged by type of material.

b. 3, f. 142	"Albergo Rapallo" Brochure with pictures of Rapallo showing Pound's residence, with ms notes in Pound's hand	n.d.
b. 3, f. 143	Calling card, "Ezra L. Pound" On verso: "To V.S.B. Goode Yule"	n.d.
b. 3, f. 144	Concert programs featuring Olga Rudge	1933
b. 3, f. 145	Dance cards with signatures	1905 Feb-Jun
b. 3, f. 146	List of publishers and addresses With drawing of the back of a man's head	n.d.
b. 3, f. 147	Newspaper articles and reviews concerning Pound	1911-45
b. 3, f. 148	"Town Talk" Newspaper fragments concerning whiskey	n.d.

Restricted Fragile*0.21 linear feet (1 box)*

Box 4: Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

b. 4, f. 149	Box 1, folder 24
b. 4, f. 150	Box 1, folder 29
b. 4, f. 151	Box 1, folder 33
b. 4, f. 152	Box 1, folder 35
b. 4, f. 153	Box 2, folder 57
b. 4, f. 154	Box 2, folder 58
b. 4, f. 155	Box 3, folder 92
b. 4, f. 156	Box 3, folder 112
b. 4, f. 157	Box 3, folder 141
b. 4, f. 158	Box 3, folder 147
b. 4, f. 159	Box 3, folder 148

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
American poetry -- 20th Century
Imagist poetry
Modernism (Literature)
Poets, American -- 20th Century
Women authors
World War, 1939-1945 -- Great Britain
World War, 1939-1945 -- Social aspects -- Great Britain

Names

Bryher, 1894-1983
H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), 1886-1961
Jordan, Viola Baxter, 1887-1973
Pound, Ezra, 1885-1972
Pound, Ezra, 1885-1972 -- Friends and associates
Pound, Ezra, 1885-1972 -- Political and social views
Williams, William Carlos, 1883-1963