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## Hound

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JEREMY THOMAS BURKE

## Hound

*Winner of the 2018 Vassar Miller Award*

*Desolate castle, the sky, the wide desert.*

So says Li Po (701-762)

according to Ezra Pound (1885-1972),

who called the Chinese poet a Japanese name,

*Rihaku*, and could not read Chinese in 1915,

the time of this translation. I read and write no

Chinese, nor Japanese, but I study

*Kanji* when I have spare time

(never happens). A Japanese system

of writing that utilizes characters

borrowed or adapted from Chinese writing:

*Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth Edition (1993), given

to me by my maternal grandparents when I graduated

from Northeast High School in Goose Lake, Iowa. I already owned a bible.

It was 1994 and bibles still had priority

over dictionaries, but Leo and Rosalie knew

I was college-bound. Rosalie still prays for me

every day. Leo rests in a Trappist

pine box six feet beneath the cold Iowa dirt

atop my favorite hill. It is a desolate castle—just the dead

and grass and stones. The sky there goes

as far as a sky can. A distance, wider than deserts,

grows between these words

and Leo's lifeless eyes, closed in perpetual care.

•

The tire's vulcanized rubber blathers

over a potholed road  
blocks away. Angry, old hounds  
lick themselves, chained  
to stakes in wholly ghost-  
filled backyards. The wheel's bay met  
like kin  
briefly before each tongue  
resumes its wont.

•

*The ant's a centaur in his dragon world.*

So says Ezra Pound (see above)  
according to *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*,  
Third Edition (2003), Canto LXXXI. Pound's a centaur  
in the anthologized world. While he's Rihaku in his  
Orientalized world. I'm the ant  
in his centaur world. Iowa is the home  
of my graveyard world. Leo is  
alive in those Iowa days. Rosalie resides in  
one of Westwing Place's seventy-seven intermediate beds  
for long-term nursing care in DeWitt. With convenient access  
to all hospital services (such as radiology, laboratory, therapy, and emergency), she is a  
dragon in her daughters' ant-days. The dictionary's  
a bible in my dragon world. Poetry's the centaur I ride  
through each page. I yell *Forward!*  
and she turns her human-looking head  
over her human-looking shoulder to say *Truly,*  
*Jeremy, I'm right here. No need to yell.*  
*Anyway, I canter where I want and carry*  
*you only as far as I desire. Don't forget it.*

But I always do. Close, my eyes. Ride  
that centaur into perpetuity.