Hound

Jeremy T. Burke
University of New Orleans

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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.

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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.