

THE TROUBADOUR

TRAITOR

U. S. Poet Ezra Pound Backs
The Axis By DAVID BROWN*"Take thought:**I have weathered the storm**I have beaten out my exile."*

—Ezra Pound.

HEAR ye, hear ye," chants an announcer over the Rome radio, during an English-language program being short-waved to American listeners, "you are about to hear that distinguished American, Ezra Pound, who tells you the *truth* about your country." Although it is early evening in the United States, it is two the following morning in Italy. A burly, red-bearded man of 56, the picture of dignity but for the pajama bottoms which serve him as trousers, steps to the microphone.

"Friends," he thunders, with the reverberating tones of an Idaho evangelist, "I do not ask you to believe merely what *I* tell you. I am speaking of known facts, obtained in the only cities where the truth still reigns—Rome, Berlin and Tokio."

What follows is a curious mixture of eloquence and incoherent jargon. Always the talks pursue the same line. Roosevelt is a Jew and a money-changer. The British are partners of the devil. America is decadent and diseased. Fascist Europe alone is enlightened and civilized. All this Pound says with vigor and solemnity, punctuating his remarks with such violent jeers against U. S. education as "truly contemptible universities" and "pot-bellied, toadying presidents of fat beaneries." References to public officials are unprintably slanderous. "Horse-faced, sex-starved, American club women" come in for their share of contempt. Pound's talk drags on, the epithets pile up; the voice rambles, becomes drunken, irrational. As though a faucet had been closed, he signs off.

"Franklin Roosevelt," purrs a soft voice, "promised you peace and brought you war. This is Rome in our North American transmission."

Americans familiar with the fine, stirring, clean-cut verse of the poet Ezra Pound are puzzled by his evident mental deterioration. For Pound is the man of whom Archibald MacLeish wrote as late as 1939: "He is an exquisite poet, a deliverer of the nations, a father of light." And the *New York Times*, in an editorial on the occasion of Pound's accepting a doctorate at his alma mater, Hamilton College, remarked of him: "Few professors are as variously learned. He must keep one of the fattest books of quotations in the world. Chinese is baby talk to him. He thinks in Provençal. Nor is he a stranger to sterner sciences. He professes Social Credit, and Major Douglas has few more sincere partisans." Only *Poetry Reviews* glimpsed the inner man, commented: "Pound—an exacting teacher, a superior poet and a problem."

Those who know Pound intimately have long watched the cracks widen in his brittle intellect.

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They attribute his fascism to a persecution complex which Pound has suffered since college days. He was always a professional agin'-it-man. When he graduated from Hamilton he obtained a job teaching French at Wabash College. He had not been there long when he found himself loudly defending a woman of dubious virtue, for which he was ousted. It is typical of Pound to be against anything that is established or generally regarded to be *right*. At first this attitude was acclaimed in literary circles, where he was regarded as a healthy influence against stodgy, orthodox formalism. But as Pound's criticism transcended the bounds of decent taste, he soon became a nuisance.

It was then that he left the United States for a few months of teaching in Venice. He did not remain in Venice, however. London beckoned. There he enjoyed a whirl of popularity and was just as suddenly dropped when Londoners tired of being insulted. Pound moved to Paris, where he suffered a similar rise and fall. Finally he took his abuse to Italy, where for the first time in his life he got the treatment he wanted. Pound was a clown, a show-off, a funny man. The Italians loved a show. He could gather a small crowd of peasants who would laugh delightedly at his funny antics, his odd American drawl. He held forth like a privileged jester in an ancient court. He became an authority on music, although it is generally known here that Pound is tone deaf.

Pound's infatuation with Italy is attributed by many to his special audience with Mussolini. Pound was never content to be merely a great poet. He had been hailed in the United States and Britain for that and that alone. Pound had bigger ideas, ideas about the future of the world. Before he visited Mussolini he prepared a list of ten questions to ask the Duce about the economic future of Italy. When he presented them, Mussolini gazed thoughtfully at the sheet of paper, then said he could not answer them offhand, as each question required deep thought. When, four days later, Mussolini dismissed his entire cabinet, Pound gleefully concluded that his list of questions was responsible for the shake-up in Italy's government.

In 1939, after 31 years of expatriation, Pound, overcome with curiosity, returned to his native land. He told New York reporters to guard against "half-knowing, half-thinking critics of fascism," and advised Americans to "keep out of Europe." Brushing aside further questions, he declared he would hurry through the "undesirable atmosphere" of New York so that "I won't be smothered." After a brief sojourn in the hinterland, during which he expressed disgust with America's "pseudo-pink" literature, he hurried back to Europe to escape from a civilization which "is dull and anemic and preserves a rabble of priests, sterile instructors and repeaters of things secondhand."