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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."

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Remember Ezra?



Ezra Pound: Home on treason charges

Inside the massive, steel-barred doors of the District of Columbia jail last week a new inmate adjusted himself amiably to prison life. Seldom had any jail housed a more singular catch. After nearly 40 years of expatriation in Europe, Ezra Pound, 60-year-old poet and stormy petrel among twentieth-century litterateurs, was home to face trial for treason. He was charged with broadcasting the Axis line over Radio Rome to his countrymen at war. He was America's Lord Haw Haw.

The Washington cell was a far cry from the purlieus in which Pound flourished most of his adult life. The Idaho-born son of a mining assayer early found the United States a "mind swamp," unattuned to his cultured tastes, unappreciative of his highly special talents. After a try at teaching at a Midwestern college—which soon dismissed him as what he himself called "the Latin Quarter type"—Pound left in 1908 for London, later for Paris, and finally, on the Italian Riviera, for a plazzo in Rapallo.

The Continent's salons and bistros soon learned to know the handsome, Barrymoreish figure as the founder of the revolutionary Imagist movement in poetry and champion of the new surrealism in the arts. If, in his ballads and cantos—unhampered by conventional meters, laden with obscure allusions—some critics found nothing but the banal and trivial, others saw "brilliant experiments." Neither denied his tremendous influence on other more lucid modern poets.

His Kind of Freedom: The beginnings of Pound's eventual lock with the law stemmed from his discovery of Mussolini. In 1936 he sang Il Duce's praises in a pamphlet hailing him as the inheritor of Thomas Jefferson's mantle. In 1939, on one of his rare trips back to America, he described Fascist Italy as "freer than anywhere else in the Occident."

With the outbreak of war Pound, whose royalties from Britain and the United States were cut off, rode the Axis air waves. After Pearl Harbor he told America that it was "illegally at war through what I consider to be the criminal acts of a President whose mental condition was not, so far as I could see, all that could or should be desired." Of Hitler and Mussolini he later broadcast to America: "They are your leaders however much you think you are conducted by Roosevelt or told by Churchill." He warned: "You are at war for the duration of the Germans' pleasure. You are at war for the duration of Japan's pleasure."

Indicted in absentia in mid-1943, Pound was seized by Italian Partisans

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last May. He was brought home in an Army C-54 on Nov. 18. Another plane had brought seven Italians, ex-employees of the Rome and Milan radios, ready to give vital information on Pound's alleged links with Fascist propaganda. Behind him in Italy, Pound left a wife, a mistress, two sons, and an 86-year-old mother.

In his prison cell the returned expatriate ate and slept well and eagerly told his story to all comers. His clothes threadbare, his shaggy beard now graying, he last week sarcastically assailed the "damned-fool idea" that he had betrayed his country. As fully aware as the government of the ticklishness of his case—it is the first American arraignment for treason based on opinions aired via radio—Pound disgustedly threw up his hands and muttered: "If freedom of speech doesn't apply on the radio—in an age of radio . . ." Then he blustered: "I'm a respectable character. I'd die for an idea, all right, but to die for an idea I've forgotten is too much . . . Does anyone have the faintest idea what I said?"

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