

TUMBRILS

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Number 1

March, 1945

E. P. ODE POUR L'ELECTION DE SON SEPULCHRE

The mass execution of Knut Hamsun, Ezra Pound, Richard Strauss, Louis Ferdinand Celine, Walter Giesecking, Joseph Gregor, and André Gide attracted considerable attention, and was attended by thousands of workers, journalists, high-school students and expectant mothers, in the best Guillotine traditions. The intelligent interest the public took in the occasion was very gratifying to the United Nations Court of War Guilt, which had done its best to make it memorable. The Russian judge even volunteered to supply a few babies with their hands cut off - not Belgian, unfortunately, but there were plenty of Poles available - to render the object lesson even more pointed, but it turned out to be unnecessary. The comments of the public, on viewing the seven bodies hanging side by side, were enlightened in the extreme, and showed a thorough understanding of the issues concerned. One teamster voiced the opinion of the crowd: "Serves 'em all right," he said, "for bein' so damn' smart."\*

Lately, however, the Court's decision to prosecute men such as George Santayana and Alfred Jay Nock, who did not care how the recent Crusade came out, as well as the active Fascist sympathizers such as those recently hung, has been called into question by a number of unpatriotic people. Your columnist can think of no better way to answer these questions, most of which we hope are merely misguided, than to refer to the previous trial itself. Some of the records of the preliminary investigation have been put at our disposal for this purpose, and from them we have selected portions of the

\*The statement of a certain subversive newspaper, that the phrase was "So much smarter than we are," is of course too foolish to even require refutation.

testimony relating to Ezra Pound.

A word as to the nature of the testimony itself. As the public is now aware much of the evidence against the twenty-odd minor figures whose indictments followed the conviction of the Seven was most cleverly gathered by the Investigating Commission during the examination of Jurors. It is from these records that we select the following material germane to the Nock-Santayana controversy; hence the democratic tone and lack of the legal phraseology and procedure necessary in a public trial. The questioner in the selections is a member of the Commission who has asked that his name be withheld; the witness, "Dr." Arthur Lloyd Merlyn, who was at that time being held as a material witness by the Commission for pro-collaborationist writings. (Also detained in this classification were Dunoyer de Segonzac, Othon Friesz, Sascha Guitry, Serge Lifart, Derain, Vlaminck and Despiou. Aristide Maillol, Willam Mengleberg, and Jean Cocteau were also on the original list but by the time the investigation had begun had been otherwise disposed of.)

II.

- Just a moment ago, Dr. Merlyn, you referred to the "Moloch" concept. What does that mean?

- By that I meant the way whereby all forms of a nation's endeavor are made to serve political ends, so that every activity must be measured and stamped as official. In a totalitarian state, nothing is exempt from this concept, least of all the arts.

- And in a democracy?

- Ideally, art there is judged upon artistic grounds alone.

- Even though it comes from a totali-

itarian enemy?

- Yes; or, like the music of Shostakovich, from a totalitarian friend. His music, after all, is "official," too.

- But hardly anti-democratic.

- How can you tell? Music cannot be a polemic art by its very nature. In any case, I would have no objection if it were anti-democratic, since I do not judge a work of art on those grounds.

- Well, neither have we.

- Your memory needs refreshing. We began to think that way with Erica Mann's attack on Richard Strauss - an unofficial attack, but one which set the pattern for subsequent official attitudes. Her demand was that we boycott Strauss' music because he was a Nazi. At the time musicians generally ridiculed the notion, and even Kurt List was moved to conduct a rather left-handed defense of Strauss. The view was that Strauss' present politics did not form a useful standard of judgement for his music, and many people drew comparisons with the ten-year ban imposed upon Wagner's music during the last war.

- Dr. Strauss' portion of this trial has not yet come under examination, but we'll admit your remarks as pertinent. They seem to bear out our case rather than yours.

- True; Miss Mann's attack did not receive public support. At the time the atrocity stories were not arriving with such frequency, the German counter-attack on the Western Front had not yet occurred, and a people confident of early victory were not psychologically prepared for the suggestion. Later the polemic critics struck more shrewdly, at Ezra Pound this time. His membership in the National Academy of Arts and Letters had been brought under fire, and when the directors of that institution refused to cancel it - on the grounds that as a great American poet, he belonged there, regardless of his politics - the newspaper PM, which regards itself as a spokesman of the liberal movement, castigated the Academy furiously. The Academy's director answered with a lengthy letter explaining the reasons for his stand clearly and fully; but reader response this time had been adequately conditioned and was most violent. Mr. Pound had already been indicted for treason, although the Court which issued the indictment refused to release any specific

charges to the public; and the general attitude seemed to be that the quality of his literary work was of no importance to anyone in the face of the unproven and unsubstantiated accusation.

- It has since been substantiated.

- Not publically, and hence not believably. And even if it were, it does not and cannot affect the merits of his literary work, which has been greatly praised in every country but his own, and of immeasurable influence even here. I think it has some meaning that the two greatest English-language poets since Yeats should both have been Americans, and should both have left their country very early in their careers, to be followed shortly afterward by Henry Miller, who occupies a similar position in the realm of prose. Miller came back, and Eliot of course was lucky enough to become a citizen of one of our recent allies, but Pound chose Italy as his adopted country, and so - by some peculiarly suspect process of law, but with general public consent - is branded a traitor. That he should also be one of America's principle glories in the field of creative scholarship is simple irony.

- Not at all; it is antecedent.

- Well, there is something in that, all right. It is true that whatever influence he has had as a Fascist is consequent to his poetic influence; which I presume is what you mean.

- Exactly.

- I don't find the point very crushing because I had assumed it to be self-evident to us both. However, if you insist on bringing it up, let me point out that it is antecedent in a much more important sense than that; Pound's studies not only gave him influence as a Fascist, but lead him to Fascism in the first place. Or, in other words: his Fascism has meaning because he is one of the world's great scholars; and Tweedle-dee-wise...

- Ahem; that's quite enough of that. In any case you have made the crucial admission: that the man is an avowed Fascist.

- True; but -

- No buts about it. You can't get around it. You admit he's a Fascist?

- Certainly; but -

- And we were at war with Fascism?

- Yes; but -

- Well then! I don't see how any ar-

gument of yours can do away with those two facts, that you agree are facts.

- Quite true. I've misunderstood you, it seems; your statement is valid; none of my arguments, which were about EP's literary reputation, affect your two facts in any way. But it was my notion that we were talking about what good, if any, Pound has done his country, in order to decide whether or not he should be executed. Most of this good revolves around EP as poet; do you prefer that we talk about LP as Fascist?

- I don't see how you can separate the two.

- The crux of our argument lies in "why," not "how." I might ask you to resolve some parallel dilemma; for instance, if Shakespeare had spent his leisure time corrupting children and cutting throats, would you have had him hung before, or after, he had written his plays? Unfortunately, I am not sure whether you give a damn whether or not he wrote any plays -

- Of course I do; do you take me for a truck-driver?

- Well, then, answer the question.

- The cases are not the same. Pound, by supporting Fascism, has corrupted many thousands more people than any individual criminal could have done.

- Oh; then if EP had merely gone about buncing little boys, you would be willing to let him go unpunished.

- No. One must think of the general welfare of society.

- Aren't Shakespeare's plays good for the general welfare?

- Yes; but -

- Never mind. Eventually you will have to say that you would execute Shakespeare today for committed crimes regardless of the plays, and I don't care to back you into that corner. I think it's as obvious to you as it is to me that the whole argument rests on whether or not EP's contributions outweigh the damage you say he has done. That is what we must judge. Correct?

- Yes, it seems so.

- All right. Then, let's get back to Fascism, and to the nature of EP's treason, and see if we can't get some accurate measure of the damage. Many people claim to have heard him on the radio but memory is untrustworthy and the writ-

ten word is an unsilencable witness. Here is a copy of one of EP's poems, or rather, one volume of a very long poem of his. It has no title but it is a good witness to call because this section of it deals with government, and should tell us a little of his ideas on that subject.

- It's a poor beginning. The first thing I see is a nasty reference to the Jews. Here's another - by God: he says that the man who admits the Jews to his country will be damned by his grandchildren. Is that what you call a contribution to culture?

- Slowly, slowly. You'd be surprised to learn that the line you quote is not Pound's, but has been attributed to Ben Franklin. The attribution is doubtful, however, and in any case it is a nasty damned line and I shall hold EP as responsible for it as you would. But I'd like to point out to you that when EP says "the Jews" he doesn't necessarily mean you. He uses the race throughout as a symbol of usury, or, more specifically, of the capitalistic practice of loaning money at interest, which he refers to by the Jewish word, "neshek." (His choice of a Jewish word at this point, incidentally, was predicated by the word's resemblance to the Latin nescio, meaning "ignorance;" the combination is a shorthand way of referring to an earlier quotation from John Quincy Adams - "sheer ignorance of the nature of money.")

- Your parenthesis is interesting and I admit the device is ingenious; but on the whole I find the explanation no improvement. The calumny that the Jews are a grasping, money-mad race is neither an accurate nor an endearing idea for Pound to use.

- That I grant. Nevertheless, the calumny is widespread, the reference is easily recognizable - it is, in short, exactly the sort of symbol poets are constantly using; and in assessing literature symbols are as secondary as laboratory equipment would be in assessing a scientific theory. Right now we are trying to decide what ideas the symbols stand for, and what good the ideas might be, not how pretty the symbols are per se. If you will examine Pound's text,

you'll speedily discover that the references to Jews do not make up a race-hatred idea at all, but have purely economic connotations. This entire poem, in short, is an exposition of a very definite scheme of ethics and government, a reasoned argument based on illustrations from vast slices of world history; and besides the illustrations drawn from the dynasties of China (of which Pound is a paramount student,) our own American colonial thought is examined and the world-perspective of J. Quincy Adams endorsed practically line for line. (At the expense, incidentally, of Alexander Hamilton, whom some people might have expected EP to support.)

- Is this supposed to prove that Pound is not a Fascist after all?

- Certainly not. I should do the man a vast injustice to imply any such thing; his faith in Fascism is consistent with his thinking from the very beginning. As a convert to Carlisle's Heroic theory of history, and a student of James Joyce who himself was a student of Vico, Carlisle's teacher, EP naturally is more interested in the good done by good governors, than he is in the flats of popular rule; no man could be today less than a Fascist under such conditions, unless he was a jellyfish. But he was anxious that his own country should profit from what was good in Fascism, and particularly that the statal economic system adopted with spectacular success by Hitler be attempted here. His studies and observations had convinced him that the Corporate State was the only just state, and from Italy where he found something approaching it he wrote and broadcast his arguments for it to America and other countries. This was the sum total of his effort in behalf of Fascism, unless the government has secret information of other activities; if so such information will have to be made public before Pound can be accused of any crime, let alone that of treason.

- That seems quite criminal enough; that a man of his influence should exert it in behalf of international thugs and murderers; it makes him an accessory to every act of brutality committed by the Nazis and Mussolini's gang.

- It does nothing of the sort. If I advocate democracy, and because of that someone calls me an accessory to every lynching in the South, would you take

that accusation with equal solemnity? It would make no difference if I went even farther than that, and endorsed the lynchings in public, there is still nothing in the act to bring me to jail. Many people in the South do exactly that, and in entire good faith, too, out of the conviction that it is good for their country; and of the two cases Pound's is the stronger, because his reasons are stronger. If one of the things we are trying to determine is the measure of the damage EP has done, then we have a partial answer already; he has done nothing more than to use his influence for what he considered to be good, and his crime is that of holding a different opinion than yours as to the nature of good. To get the complete answer it remains only to apply a pragmatic test - that is, just how great was the influence itself? The answer is, not very. I do not know how many people ever bothered to listen to him in this country but the number is not large and of that number few were likely to find his radio manner very ingratiating; he spoke generally in terms of studied insult, in a style so like his later poetry that it required a very agile mind to follow the abrupt leaps of his reasoning. His writings in the polemic field were ignored almost entirely by this country - the evidence is quite clear there, he himself often complained of the fact; and as for his literary work - well, although he excelled as a teacher, spoke fourteen languages, knew the history and practice of nearly all the arts backwards and forwards, and was one of the principle poets and critics of this generation, he was still able to say that he had never been invited to lecture at any college or university in the United States. His membership in the Academt was awarded to him very tardily, and it was the only honor of that kind ever awarded to him by his own country, although minor talents from Europe, during the first days of the refugee influx, were fought over by university faculties while they gave feeble performances in the Library of Congress. Thus it would seem that the influence of which you spoke in terms of antecedents could hardly have acted here in any effective way....Of course he was often insufferable on the radio, It is not surprising that the continued stupid silence which greeted his efforts to

clarify what was going on in totalitarian capitals, should later produce in him his broadest conclusion that the liberal movement in America was ignorant and impotent; nor that the treatment accorded him and many another native-born scholar or artist should give birth to his famous remark, "The damned country is a cultural backhouse." Apparently it is remarks of this sort that goaded the government into making its charges. The fact of the matter is that this country, like every other country in the world today, is a cultural backhouse, an economic mess, and a spiritual cesspool, and the greatest and only treachery of any importance is to accept that with equanimity, or to ignore it, or to vilify the rare men who attempt to correct it.

III.

- I see; then you suggest that we try the Court for treason, instead.

- Oh no, I expect history to take care of that quite competently. I refer you to some words that Lord Dunsany penned in 1916: "When the poet comes to an age that will not heed his words, let him strike off that dust that is flesh and pass hence....and not in the day of judgement only shall it be better for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that age, but in its own time its own people shall kick out their own demerit." And that, Mr. \*\*\*\*, is what we are doing now, although we do not know our own sins; we have found it convenient to forget why it is that we are being punished, and so murder each other in infantile fury.

- Oh, come now, that is surely a very facile way of accounting for our difficulties, which have amounted to a world revolution which still continues.

- Is it? I think not. Compared to the magnitude of this attitude toward men of letters, your revolution is only a meaningless rotation. "We should refine our sense of character and conduct, of justice and sympathy, greatly heightening our self-knowledge, self-control, precision of action, and considerations, and making us intolerant of baseness, cruelty, injustice, and intellectual superficiality or vulgarity." This, says G.B. Shaw, is what art should do, and to-

ward this end many artists have labored with an assiduity few can even pretend to understand; and for that labor can we show any record that art has ever done anything of the sort? The marvel to me is that men of Pound's calibre, in the face of the curses and spittle of men who refuse to allow thought to act upon them, still continue to make the effort, to point out ways of making things better, to expose themselves to the hatred which is the general reward of those who do something for someone else's good. I know a poet of considerable genius who did that eminently reasonable thing; he declared that men of insight had spent the last four centuries preparing guides for the use of the men of action, and that any were the men of action got into in the face of that vast body of reference material were not of any further interest to the men of insight. He spent the whole war in a conscientious objectors' camp, acting as a guinea-pig for pneumonia research, as utterly indifferent to the newspapers as ever were Neck or Santayana, and I can see no flaw in the reasoning that placed him there. How much more amazing it is, then, that people of EP's nature, with what degree of bitterness it is no matter, to try to help, to make articulate the products of their minds, which they would be justified in husbanding for the tiny audience that they know would heed them.

- This is all very pretty, but there is really little evidence that Pound himself has ever done anything of the sort; certainly the greatest part of his work is anything but articulate. Look at the book you handed me. It's full of Chinese - and here's a line in German - and three in Greek - a line in Latin - even the English is all mixed up. If his attempt to present significant ideas were as sincere as you claim, why isn't our own medi-ocrat, self-T-tas-T, vite-hi American language good enough for him?

- That answers itself; it is not good enough. I can't go now into the details of EP's painstakingly developed method of putting down his ideas, but I can tell you that he uses it because it seems to him to be the best way of doing it; and that his method is significant enough to have affected the work of ev-

ery other major poet in the world. Of course Mr. Walter Winchell claims he cannot understand Pound, which might be considered damning in some circles; I presume that EP understands Winchell well enough....And if it comes to that, it is rather interesting to note that Pound has always been most assiduous, in his prose (of which there is a great deal,) in his use of the very American language to which you refer. His translation of Confucius, for instance, and his several books on reading and the acquisition of culture in general, are colloquial to the point of downright misspelling. Oh, you will find Pound clear enough if you actually attempt to follow him; and knowledge is worth a little effort. Of course, against a set

determination not to learn, no writer in the world can prevail. "A substitute is yet to be found for water, as there has been for beer and salt; it is yet to be widely advertised, sold and drunk like many another wickedness, but people must some day turn from all these things and go one by one to the camp where the good men dwell." Thus, Dunsany; but if that day ever does arrive, it will be only through the self-abnegation - angry and bitter, perhaps, but continuing forever, in the shadows of the gibbets of patriots and Philistines - of men like Ezra Pound. Doubtless there are laws that will provide good reasons for his execution; but it will take a truly blindfold Law that can hang him, while so many of the acquiescent just remain unhung.

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TWO BURLESQUES  
from Marcus Lyens' Trompe l'Oeil

VI. Prayer for Joyce

Peolybacky, soofleshing dimily o'er  
whaleopath, keaning our nightside to  
asheraitics, grant this him day  
our mournful newmere;

Typotte us not in darkling kittyfishies;  
and laye us lightly ni ogs annirate,  
nor lent ere curite this  
cromohning crepusquus;

Gull his trevails swiftly to wrist;  
he connicht alpemore. Miss  
brunt effliktion.. Yrs navely.  
Apselorse.

Uhmh.

XIV. My God, the Gracks

Scraphic folinds, everbold  
withhold

the lap  
i(dary surge  
of music, as

the strings  
ferc?told.

the com  
ing mes'oparen  
ic urge

Preh!

lenin's revolution

shall /c

rupt! first at a  
musicale

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Bibliography for the Pound essay available upon request. The next TUMBRILS will contain three short essays: "An Open Letter to Olin Downes," "FAPA and the Pamphlet-ers," and "The Calligraphy of Magic;" this last the first section of Curious Stories, a prospectus of techniques involved in publishing fantasy. Completing the issue will be "Third in a Crowd," a poem by John Hillary. TUMBRILS invites contributions of a serious nature; copyright will be released to all FAPA contributors upon publication. Thanks are extended to Jean de Maris, of Miraudo et Cie, Brussels, for permission to reprint the selections from Marcus Lyens' Trompe l'Oeil.

- James Blish