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The Odyssey of Ezra Pound

Lead: At the end of World War II, the U.S. Government accused one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century of treason.

Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Born in Hailey, Idaho, Ezra Loomis Pound as a young boy was brought East, grew up in Philadelphia and studied at the University of Pennsylvania. By 1908 he was in the process of shedding his conventional Presbyterian, upper-middle class upbringing and was

travelling Europe with a view to settling there. Over the years, first, London, then Paris and Italy were home to his restless spirit. Essayist Robert Wernick recalls that from the pre-war years his was a commanding presence in literary circles. By his encouragement and example, poetry in the twentieth century was changed in both content and style. He promoted or had influence over most of the leading poets and novelists of the early part of the century: William Butler Yeats, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, Robert Frost, D.H. Lawrence and T.S. Eliot.

During the Great Depression, in the 1930s he became fascinated with the study of history, particularly economic

history, writing several books highlighting his admiration for Benito Mussolini and his idea that a Jewish international banking conspiracy had led the world into a long series of wars. After the United States declared war on Italy in 1941, Pound made hundreds of propaganda broadcasts on Rome Radio where he pronounced his hatred for a wide range of subjects including: Jews, the Bank of England, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, publishers, nightclubs, Rembrandt, and Puccini. In 1945 the U.S. Justice Department came looking for him and jailed him on charges of treason.

His lawyers claimed he was insane, which he most certainly was not, but

the court accepted the idea and he spent a dozen years in St. Elizabeth's, the federal insane asylum in Washington, D.C. Ernest Hemingway summed up the feelings of those admirers of his literary genius embarrassed by his bigotry and vulgar political peculiarities. "He deserves punishment and disgrace, but what he really deserves most is ridicule." An unrepentant Pound was released and returned to Italy. He died there in November, 1972.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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