

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

[After a pause, Ezra Pound enters from stage left engrossed in a copy of tonight's program. Ezra is twenty, full of energy, and self-confident to the point of arrogance.]

POUND

What the ensanguined llllllll is the matter with this bloody goddamndamnblastedbastardbitchbornsonofaputridseahorse of a foetid and stinkerous printer????? Is his serbo-croatian optic utterly impervious to the twelfth letter of the alphabet???? JHEEZUSMARIAJOSE!!! Madre de dios y de dios del perro. Sacrobosco di Satanas. Of course if if if bloodywell if this blasted program appears with anything like one twohundredandfiftieth part of these errors we are done, and I shall never be able to look another poet in the face. *[Looks up from the program and notices the audience for the first time.]*

Oh...Uhhhh...Just a minute... *[Exits]*

[offstage] There's people out there! What the hell are they doing out there already? What do you mean it's after 8:00? Fer Christ's sake what do I care if it's after 8:00 or not? What? What!? Oh bloodywell, that's just perfect! Don't push me, you go out there! What do I care? Make something up! Oh great, like crying's going to fix the problem. *[Pause]* Look, it's going to be OK. I don't have a handkerchief. Here, use this. *[We see the curtain pulled from behind, then here the sound of a nose being blown.]* Just sit down here, I'll take care of it.

[Enter Pound]

Uhhhh, Welcome to the *[Fill in name]* theatre's production of Pound. Please turn off all cell phones, paging equipment, and...and... well, all of that stuff.

[Sticks his head through the curtain to backstage] There, everything's back on track and OK. No one even noticed that anything was wrong.

[Looks at the program again] It's really not all that terrible, just a little typo on the second page. *[Turns to the page with his photo, holds it up next to his face.]* The photo's not bad, but I am not so beautiful in a picture as in real life. The real drama about my face is its play of expression. *[Makes several expressions to illustrate his point.]*

Well, it's not the same when I demonstrate. You've got to picture me at a party in London, wearing custom made trousers made of green billiard cloth, a pink velvet coat with blue glass buttons, a glorious tie that Wyndham Lewis hand painted for me, my beard cut to a point and the crowning touch, a single turquoise earring. Oh yes, you gay guys think you invented that but I was way ahead of you.

OK, so here I am at a party, I'm talking to this gorgeous lady, looking deep into here eyes with my deep green eyes, and maybe I tell her [*During this he gets on his knees, then his side*]:

You came in out of the night
And there were flowers in your hand,
Now you will come out of a confusion of people,
Out of a turmoil of speech about you.

I who have seen you amid the primal things
Was angry when they spoke your name
In ordinary places.
I would that the cool waves might flow over my mind,
And that the world should dry as a dead leaf,
Or as a dandelion see-pod and be swept away,
So that I might find you again,
Alone.

[*Looks up*] Yep, I get lucky on a regular basis. [*Sits on the edge of the stage*] It's really the secret to my success as a poet.

Think about it a minute. Women are the conservators of tradition, practical and clever, but not suited to abstract projection or invention. Man is the spermatozoide charging the female chaos head-on. We're naturally inventors and originators because our brains are bathed in residual sperm, the real source of original thought. It is more than likely that the brain itself is, in origin and development, only a sort of great clot of genital fluid held in suspense or reserve. This hypothesis explains the enormous content of the brain as a maker or presenter of images. If we consider that the power of the spermatozoide as precisely the power of exteriorizing a form; and if we consider the lack of any other known substance in nature capable of growing into a brain, we are left with one conclusion—that the spermatozoic substance must have greatly atrophied in its change from lactic to coagulated condition.

The one true sexual perversion is abstinence. The release of spermatozoic pressure within the brain, and then the subsequent replenishment, is the source of true creativity.

HEMINGWAY

[Ernest Hemingway is slim and athletic, with the back and shoulders of a football player. He is every bit a "man's man," involved in hunting, sports, warfare, and the conquest of women.]

Ezra Pound was one of the first people to really encourage me to write, not just the newspaper articles but literature. Here he was a major poet but he devoted one-fifth of his time to his poetry and spent the rest of his time trying to advance the fortunes of his friends. "The Sun Also Rises," "For Whom the Bell Tolls," "A Farewell to Arms," I don't know if I would have written any of it if it wasn't for that early encouragement and support by Ezra.

Any poet born in the twentieth Century who can honestly say that he has not been influenced by or learned greatly from the work of Ezra Pound deserves to be pitied rather than rebuked. It was from Pound that I learned more about how to write and how not to write than from any other son of a bitch alive, and I've always said so. Pound was the man who taught me to distrust adjectives as I would later learn to distrust certain people in certain situations. Politicians for example. All the contact I've had with politics has left me feeling as though I'd been drinking out of a spittoon.

And Ezra didn't try to change you into something you weren't. I remember one evening I met up with Ezra after I'd been out boxing and swimming in the ice-cold Seine. "You go on and learn everything you can about myth and history", I said, "I can't, I'm limited. But I'm going to know everything about fucking and fighting and eating and drinking and begging and stealing and living and dying."

He just took what he liked about his friends and ignored what he didn't like. Sometimes I didn't see how he managed to do that. Take his painter buddy Wyndham Lewis. That guy was a weasel with the eyes of an unsuccessful rapist.

WYNDHAM LEWIS

[Wyndham Lewis is an English-American painter who was raised in England.]

I never knew what Ezra saw in Hemmingway. The man was such a brute. One day I rang the bell at Pound's flat but got no answer, so I opened the door and there was Hemingway, half naked, tall, covered in muscles, and standing serene as, without any undue exertion, he used his boxing gloves to repel a hectic assault of Ezra's. After a final swing at the solar plexus, which Hemingway parried effortlessly, Pound fell back upon his settee exhausted.

Actually, I'm not sure I ever understood most of what Ezra did. Pound was a pedagogic volcano whose molten matter was language that seared through a tragic fracture in his personality, a broken seam of the sensibility, releasing an uncontainable energy or an anger that could persist for thirty years. I saw him play tennis once and it was like watching an inebriated kangaroo hopping around the court, the flaps of his polychrome shirt flying out like the petals of some flower and his red head like a flaming pistil in the middle of it.

Did you know he once received a \$2,000 Dial Award, and promptly gave the money to John Cournos to help pay for an operation? I couldn't even begin to name all of the writers and poets who owed at least a good part of their success to Ezra. I mean, just to name two of the most obvious examples neither James Joyce nor T.S. Eliot would have ever made it without the support of Ezra. Eliot in particular owed a huge debt to Ezra.

POUND

I prefer obstetrics to funerals. It is more exhilarating to fight for a new fine writer against prejudice than to bury him when his reputation is made. It is tremendously important that great poetry be written, it makes no jot of difference who writes it. The experimental demonstrations of one many may save the time of many.

[In the following paragraphs Pound is reading a letter he has written to Harriet, the editor of Poetry Magazine.]

Dear Harriet, have just discovered another Amur'kn for your magazine, this one named Robert Frost. VURRY Amur'k'n, with, I think the seeds of greace. Have reviewed an advance copy of his book, but have run it out too long. Will send it as soon as I've tried to condense it—also some of his stuff if it isn't all in the book. I'll try to get

you a copy of his latest book. I'm using mine at present to boom him and get his name stuck about. I admit he's as dull as ditch water, as dull as Wordsworth. But he is trying almost the hardest job of all and he is set to be literchure some day. Sincere, very dull, without tragedy, without emotion, without metrical interest, a faithful record of life without intellectual interest or any desire for anything not in it. A great deal of New England life is presumably as Frost records it. It is difficult to see how such life differs greatly from that of horses and sheep.

Dear Harriet: Bodenheim shows promise in some manuscripts. Sent me, but he has nothing in this year's Poetry, and besides he is young enough to wait. Bodenheim has been on the grump ever since I was forced to tell him that I could not perceive much originality in his work. The things to be avoided are, naturally, an award to Amy Lowell.

[*To Audience*] Stupidity bores me and I have never yet found the intellectual pace too swift or the mental dynamite too high for my still unsatisfied appetite.

[*To Harriet again*] Now, let's see. Where was I. Oh yes, Eliot. I was jolly well right about Eliot. He has sent in the best poem I have yet had or seen from an American. Pray God it be not a single and unique success. He has taken it back to get it ready for the press and you shall have it in a few days. He is the only American I know who has made what I can call adequate preparation for writing. He has actually trained himself and modernized himself on his own. The rest of the promising young have done one or the other but never both (most of the swine have done neither). It is such a comfort to meet a man and not have to tell him to wash his face, wipe his feet, and remember the date on the calendar.

[*Vivien Eliot is a high-strung, flighty English woman.*]

VIVIEN

Ezra often presents the appearance of a man trying to convey to a very deaf person the fact that the house is on fire.

My husband Tom always said that "There is no question that I own my poetry success to his early support, and what is perhaps my greatest work, "The Wasteland," was really a collaboration between the two of us, although he would never take any of the credit."

When they corresponded Ezra used to call Tom "Possum" and he would call Ezra Brer Rabbit. I'm not sure how they got into that game.

POUND

Why did I call him The Possum? The possum has the ability to appear dead while it is still alive.

VIVIEN

He was a true friend to Tom and me. I remember once I was at my wits end and the only person I could trust was Ezra. I wrote him:

Dearest Ezra, I would have great faith in anything he might suggest. I am suffering from colitis, a high temperature (I very often have a temperature of 99.4 for two or three weeks at a time for no obvious reason), migraines, insomnia, and increasing mental incapacity. I have a horror of using my mind and spend most of my time trying to avoid contact with people or anything that will force me to use my mind.

POUND

Waaal, Possum, my fine ole Marse Supial: Thinking but passing over several pejorative but Possumble—oh auite possumble—interpretations of selected passages in your ultimate communication, wot I sez appealin to you for the firm's interst, on your return from your Pasqual meddertashuns iz a need to focus your attention more on your poetry.

[*To Audience*] Eliot was perhaps the greatest poet writing in English today, but his life was nothing but distractions. His wife was a constant drag on him, he hated his job as a clerk at the bank but he was afraid to quit, he insisted on continuing to see the quackiatrist even after it was obviously doing no good. My wife Dorothy and I always felt he was wrestling with a devil or an angel, working in a kind of prison from which his works of poetry were his only escape.

HEMINGWAY

Ezra told me about Eliot's problems. I told him that if Eliot would strangle his wife, rob the bank, and bugger his brain specialist, he might write even better poetry.

POUND

Maybe Wyndham was right. Maybe you were a brute.

HEMINGWAY

We all saw Ezra as a sort of teacher. He was right half the time. When he was right, he was brilliant; and when he was wrong you were never in doubt about it. Of course, not everyone wanted to be taught. Gertrude Stein used to say, "Ezra Pound was a village explainer, excellent if you were a village, but if you were not, not."

[Lights down.]