

## POUND

### Characters:

This play is written to be performed as a one-man play, with a single actor playing all of the indicated roles.

As the play progresses the character Ezra Pound ages from that of a young man to that of an old man. The other characters do not noticeably change with respect to age.

The play takes place in one act with no intermission.

Ezra Pound, the poet

Ernest Hemingway, the writer

Camillo, an official at the Italian Ministry of Propaganda

Mr. Frankson, the head of the US Department of Justice

Clark Thompson, an attorney working for Mr. Frankson

Ed Johnson, a reporter for the Chicago Sun

Dr. Wendell Muncie, a Doctor of Psychiatry

Judge, the Judge hearing the Pound case

Lt. Colonel PV Holder, a witness during the trial

William Carlos Williams, the poet and a pediatrician

Mr. Risso, the Mayor of Rapallo, Italy

Allen Ginsberg, the San Francisco Beat Poet

Italian Announcer, a 1940's Italian radio announcer

American Announcer, a 1940's American radio announcer

### Setting:

The play largely takes place on an almost empty stage—there is a vintage 1940 radio microphone to one side.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

*[During this next bit Ezra Pound enters 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 goddamndamnbastedbastardbitch born putrid seahorse of a 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 get a fair trial out of this damn... *[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! *[Pause]* 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.

*[To Audience again]* I'm really quite a lovable guy. Just a fuzzy, wuzzy, woozy, sloozy, lovable little bear. *[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 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 into her eyes with my deep green eyes, and maybe I tell her [*He hams it up during this*]:

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 seed-pod and be swept away,  
So that I might find you again,  
Alone.

[*Looks up*] Yep, I got 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 brings us to the one true sexual perversion—abstinence. The release of spermatozoic pressure within the brain, and then the subsequent replenishment, is the true source of creativity, so abstinence is really turning our back on great art.

FRANKSON

*[Mr. Frankson is the head of the Department of Justice, a slow talking Texan whom one instinctively dislikes.]*

Don't let that weasel Pound fool you, folks. You all seem like decent people. God fearing people. My names Mr. James Frankson, and I head up the U.S. Department of Justice. And I emphasize the word justice, because that's what this little shindig is all about. Ezra Pound calls himself a poet, but you're going to discover that he was really nothing but a traitor to everything decent about America. Don't be fooled by his clowning around. Don't be taken in by his "ol' Ezra your buddy" routine. If you're taken in, you won't be able to do your duty as American Citizens at the end of this performance. Ezra Pound needs to hang as a traitor to everything that's decent about the United States of America.

And don't let Hemingway fool you either. He may know how to write, but he don't know dick about right and wrong.

#### 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.]*

I took an instinctive dislike to that Frankson character the first time I met him. It's the eyes that give a person away. He had the eyes of an unsuccessful rapist.

I'm the last person to claim that Ezra was perfect. Ezra Pound was right half the time, but when he was wrong you were never in doubt about it. He was also one of the first people to really encourage me to write, not just the newspaper articles but literature. There 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 them without 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.

FRANKSON

You watch it, boy. You're on a few anti-American lists yourself. You get messed up with this Ezra character and it's not going to look good for you. If I remember correctly, it was you who first got him interested in living in Italy. Very interesting, if you ask me.

*[Camillo is an official at the Italian Ministry of Propaganda, Minculpop.]*

CAMILLO

There is no doubt that Ezra considered himself a friend of Italy, but there is also no doubt that he always considered himself to be a loyal citizen of the United States. In my role with the Italian Ministry of Propaganda, or Minculpop, I tried many times to convince Ezra to read the statements that we wrote, but he insisted on only reading his own speeches. He was a friend to everyone, the poets, the citizens, the fascists, even Mussolini.

HEMINGWAY

Ezra just took people the way they were. I remember one evening I met up with Ezra after I'd been out boxing and then 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 looked at me and winked. He took what he liked about his friends and ignored what he didn't like.

I'm going to be looking for you to do him the same courtesy. Sure, he had his faults, and they were as wide as the Grand Canyon. But his good points were as deep as that same canyon.

CAMILLO

It was never about the money with Ezra. Did you know he once received a \$2,000 Dial Award, and promptly gave the money to the writer John Cournos to help him pay for an

operation? Before the war his wife asked him to return to England and take care of disposing of her mother's things after she died, and Ezra just opened up the house and gave everything away to anyone who wanted anything. He couldn't have really meant those awful things he said on the radio.

#### FRANKSON

Let's get back to the reason we're all here. We're here because Ezra's been moaning and groaning that he never got his jury verdict on the charge of treason. Instead of being grateful that the government locked him in an insane asylum instead of hanging him, which he deserved, he's been telling the big guy upstairs that a jury of his peer would have found him innocent. Well, he gets his chance and you [*indicates the audience*] are the jury. At the end of this complete waste of time you'll all be able to reach in your program, pull out that red card, and indicate your vote of guilty by holding it up. Simple as that. Just remember, red card as in red, white, and blue.

#### HEMINGWAY

Not so fast Frankenson, or Frankenston, or Frankenstein, or whatever the hell your name is. No one's going to vote on Ezra's guilt or innocence without understanding who he was. The big picture. I couldn't even begin to name all of the writers and poets who owe 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

Dear Harriet:

[*To Audience*] Harriet Monroe was the editor of Poetry Magazine. Quite a woman. I used to feed her work from the writers I knew in Europe.

[*Reading again*]

Dear Harriet: I was jolly well right about Eliot. He has sent in the best poem for your magazine 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. 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. I wish he had as much talent in the selection of a wife.

CAMILLO

Ezra and Mr. Eliot corresponded regularly as long as I knew him. Mr. Eliot referred to Ezra as Brer Rabbit and Ezra referred to Mr. Eliot as "The Possum." He never explained why.

POUND

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

CAMILLO

He once got a letter from Eliot's wife Vivien. The letter said:

"Dearest Ezra, I would have great faith in anything you might suggest. I am suffering from colitis and a high temperature. I very often have a temperature of 99.4 for two or three weeks at a time for no obvious reason. I have 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."

Can you imagine what it must have been like for Mr. Eliot, living with that woman?

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, 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 quackiatrists

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. I remember telling Hemingway about Eliot's problems.

#### 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, everything would be fine.

#### POUND

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 grace. 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 here in London. 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 magazine, and besides he is young enough to wait for an award. 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.

#### HEMINGWAY



We all saw Ezra as a sort of teacher. 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.]

SCENE TWO

[Lights up.]

POUND

Dear Harriet: If this louse will specify exactly what dialogue changes he wants made I will approach James Joyce in the matter. But I most emphatically will not forward the insults of an imbecile to one of the very few men for whom I have the faintest respect. If you have to spend your life in contact with such minds, God help you.

Dear Harriet: No, most emphatically I will not ask Eliot to write down to any audience whatsoever. Neither will I send you Eliot's address in order that he may be insulted.

My Dear James:

[*To audience*] James Laughlin was a friend and the man who published most of my work. His publishing company, New Directions, or as I liked to call it, New Erections, was mostly started specifically to publish my work.

[*Reading again*]

My Dear James:

WOT, my dea Odon, I NEVER seem able to get into YOUR damn block is that I have NO bloody means of knowing WHAT the hell you or other readers consider Obscure...It all looks simple to me and if some blighter don't know that C-A-T spells cat, or D-O-G dog, how am I to tell WHICH words of three letters are incomprehensible. You appear to understand PARTS of my writing, but how the kesl can I tell WHICH parts, if no one ever picks out a particular part and asks: what thehelldoyou mean?

[*To audience again*] I never worried about pleasing the public. Art that sells on production is bad art, essentially. It is art made to demand. It suits the public. The taste of the public is bad. The taste of the public is always bad. It is bad because it is not an

individual expression, but merely a mania for assent, a mania to be in on it. Even the botches of a good artist have some quality, some distinction, which prevents their pleasing mass palates. This idea about art for the many, for the majority, is nonsense.

Just look at the public's idea of what makes good poetry. Here are a list of facts on which I and nine million other poets have spieled endlessly:

1. Spring is a pleasant season. The flowers, etc., etc. Sprout, bloom etc. etc.
2. Young man's fancy. Lightly, heavily, gaily, etc. etc.
3. Love, a delightsome tickling. Indefinable, etc.
4. Trees, hills etc. are by a provident nature arranged diversely, in diverse places.
5. Winds, clouds, rains, etc. flop through and over 'em.
6. Men love women. (More poetic in singular, but the verb retains the same form).

(In Greece and Pagan countries men loved men, but the fact is no longer mentioned in polite society except in an expurgated sense.) I am not attracted by the Pagan custom but my own prejudices are not material poetica. However, in the above 6 groups I think you find the bulk of the poetic matter of the ages. Wait-

7. Men fight battles, etc. etc.
8. Men go on voyages.

It's all entirely predictable. When the artist goes beyond the expected, his genius is never recognized by the masses, and I include the critics in this category.

In 1910 Roger Fry brought from France eight paintings by Manet, twenty-one by Cezanne, twenty-two by van Gogh, and thirty-six by Gauguin. The critics denounced the show as a scandalous disgrace. *The Times* called it a childish rejection of civilization. Ross of the *Morning Post* argued that the artists were all mad and that their emotions were of no interest except to the student of pathology and the specialist in the abnormal.

Of course, the artists who make the money are the artists who create art that is not art. But I know, not

from theory but from practice, that you can live infinitely better with very little money and a lot of spare time, than with more money and less time. I struggled for years to own nothing that I can't pack in a suitcase.

O generation of the thoroughly smug  
and thoroughly uncomfortable,  
I have seen fishermen picnicking in the sun,  
I have seen them with untidy families,  
I have seen their smiles full of teeth  
and heard ungainly laughter.  
And I am happier than you are,  
And they were happier than I am;  
And the fish swim in the lake  
and do not even own clothing.

This brings us to the immorality of bad art. Bad art is inaccurate art. If an artist falsifies his report as to the nature of man, as to his own nature, as to the nature of his idea of the perfect, as to the nature of his ideal of this, that, or the other, of god, if god exist, of the degree in which he suffers or is made glad; if the artist falsifies his reports on these matters or on any other matter in order that he may conform to the taste of his time, to the proprieties of a sovereign, to the conveniences of a preconceived code of ethics—then that artist lies. If he lies out of deliberate will to lie, if he lies out of carelessness, out of laziness, out of cowardice, out of any sort of negligence whatsoever, he nevertheless lies and he should be punished or despised in proportion to the seriousness of his offence.

Bad art is immoral. Good art can not be immoral. By good art I mean art that bears true witness, I mean the art that is most precise. Good art bears witness and defines for us the inner nature and conditions of man.

Of course, this is difficult. But if a man writes six good lines he is immortal—isn't that worth trying for?

[*Lights down.*]

### SCENE THREE

[*Lights up*]

POUND

Don't imagine that I think economics interesting—not as a Botticelli or Picasso is interesting. But at present economics is as interesting as a gun muzzle aimed at one's own head is interesting.

Last count, every baby that's born in the United States is born owing \$30,881, and that doesn't even count long term obligations the government has taken on. About 10% of all of the money the government receives goes to pay interest on the national debt. That's about \$240 billion dollars that doesn't do anybody any good.

#### CAMILLO

Ezra's was so passionate about his economics, more even than his poetry. I never understood his theories, but I loved his passion in trying to describe them.

#### POUND

Productivity in the United States is going up every year. It always has gone up, probably always will. And the population is going up every year. Always has, probably always will. Combine these two facts together and you'll understand why the amount of money in circulation needs to go up every year. More people, more productivity, and we need more money in circulation to avoid a depression.

So what happens now to get that money into circulation? Comes from two places. First, the national deficit. The government gives treasury notes to the federal reserve bank and they give the government money in exchange. The government spends that money, and the amount of money in circulation goes up. Now most people don't know this, but the federal reserve bank is a privately owned network of banks that is not a part of the government at all. So who benefits? The bankers.

Second, the banks loan out more money than they have on deposit. The difference is called bank credit. So banks basically charge interest on money that's not even theirs, but the process increases the amount of money in circulation. And who benefits? The bankers.

Workers are more productive, banks profit. There are more workers working, banks profit. So who should benefit from that growth? The people who made it possible. The American workers. That's the whole idea behind social credit. When new money needs to be put into circulation, the government should create that new money. No debt. No

interest. They just do what the banks do now, what the constitution says they should be doing, and create the money. Then what do we do with it? If we consider the United States of America as a giant corporation with every U.S. Citizen a shareholder, then it becomes obvious. As the corporation grows and prospers, what the corporation needs to operate, it uses internally for the benefit of everyone. What's left over is distributed to the shareholders as a dividend. This social dividend isn't a hand-out. It's our fair share of compensation for the hard work of everyone in the country.

Dearly beloved brevem, this is ole Ezry speaking. You probably do not doubt it. You probably have derived that belief from the intrinsic nature of the discourse even if you came in and took your seat late.

*[Lights out.]*

#### SCENE FOUR

*[We hear music from the 1930s or early 1940s interspersed with burst of static. Lights up with Ezra speaking to Camillo.]*

#### POUND

Camillo, even if America declares war on the Axis, I see no reason why I should not continue to speak on the radio, so long as I say nothing that can in any way prejudice the results of American military or naval action, the armed forces of the USA or the welfare of my native country.

*[Lights down on Ezra, lights up on the radio microphone as we hear a flat formal voice with an Italian accent read a station identification.]*

#### ITALIAN ANNOUNCER

Good evening. This is the Italian Broadcasting System, transmitting a special program for the Western United States and Canada, the Pacific area, New Zealand and Australia. We open our program this evening with a talk by Ezra Pound.

#### POUND

*[Ezra approaches the microphone lovingly.]*

Europe calling! Ezra Pound speaking!

[*He drops into a folksy drawl*] Ah hear one of mah ex-editors has bin saying, oh yeah, Pound talks are all right but they arrrrrrre—what was it? 'belated?' No, he said, uh, they're "retarded" was it? Out of date, um out of date, that was it.

My politics seem to me simple. My idea of a state or an empire is like a hedge hog or porcupine, chunky and well-defended. I don't cotton to the idea of my country being an octopus weak in the tentacles and sufferin' from stomach ulcers and chronic gastritis. You should not be involved in a war on the other side of the world.

Oh sure, you were sold a bill of goods when this whole thing got started. Our President was a verbal masturbator and you let him diddle you. I think he ought to be jailed, if a committee of doctors thinks him responsible for his actions, and I think he ought to be in a high walled gook house, or insane asylum if he is not.

And I do not belong to that romantic school of writers who think lunatics are interestin' or that their characters are necessarily more admirable than those of plain low down crooks.

Don't shoot him. Don't shoot him. Don't shoot the President. I dare say he deserves worse, but don't shoot him. Assassination only makes more mess.

What you can do is to understand just how the President is an imbecile. I mean that, learn just how, in what way he is a dumb cluck, a goof, a two fisted double-time liar (oh well, you know that already, and lyin is not a sign of intelligence) but don't shoot him. Di-ag-nose him. Diagnose him.

When I carefully consider the curious habits of dogs  
I am compelled to conclude  
That man is the superior animal.

When I consider the curious habits of man  
I confess, my friend, I am puzzled.