

THE TREASON DEBATE:
EZRA POUND AND HIS ROME RADIO BROADCASTS

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On July 26, 1943, the well-known American poet Ezra Pound was indicted for treason by a United States grand jury for his World War II radio broadcasts over Italian airwaves.¹ Pound was never brought to trial; instead, he was found insane and was institutionalized at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington D.C. After his release from St. Elizabeth's in 1958,² Pound immediately returned to Italy, where he lived for the remainder of his life.

Because Pound was never formally tried for treason, there has been much debate over his guilt or innocence. Scholarly works have usually taken one side or the other. Some authors, like William M. Chace in his article, "Ezra Pound: 'Insanity,' 'Treason,' and 'Care,'" have failed to draw a conclusion about Pound's guilt, citing the lack of a court ruling. However, more than fifty years after the indictment, an objective examination of both sides of the argument is possible, and in doing so, it is imperative not merely to look at the reasons for the indictment, but at mitigating factors as well. Foremost, in such an examination, the United States definition of treason must be applied to Ezra Pound's specific case. The precedents of radio broadcasters and others who were

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indicted for treason after World War II, whose verdicts both constricted and loosened America's narrow definition of treason, provide some insight into a possible outcome of the Pound case. The content of Pound's broadcasts must be examined, along with the context of the war and Pound's life in Italy. An objective analysis must also attempt to understand the purpose and reasons behind his radio broadcasts. In addition, Pound's actions in Italy that are not included in the indictment (which concerns only the broadcasts) must be taken into account as well. These include disputed attempts to return to the United States after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and his ardent support of Mussolini and fascism in general. Any deep respect for Ezra Pound as one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century, along with a natural repugnance towards his anti-Semitism, and an inherent prejudice that the connotation of a treason charge brings, must be put aside if an analysis of his guilt or innocence is to succeed.

Many inferences of Pound's guilt or innocence come from interpretations of the United States' definition of treason in the Constitution:

Treason against the United States shall consist only in levying war against them or, in adhering to their Enemies, giving them Aid and Comfort. No person shall be convicted of Treason unless on the Testimony of two Witnesses to the same overt Act, or on Confession in open court...(U.S. Constitution)

Legally, the provision has been construed very narrowly because a person must not only adhere to the enemy, but he must also actually give them aid and comfort in order to be convicted of treason. The need for two witnesses to the same overt act has made convictions extremely difficult and, crucial for the Pound case, is that the courts have ruled that the "overt act must demonstrate treasonous intent."³ That proof of intent to betray was not judged sufficient, for example, "during the Vietnam war, even though protesters 'adhered to the enemy'—'Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh'—and gave them aid and comfort—'Hell no, we won't go.'"⁴

Ezra Pound has long been respected as one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, and as one of the most important and influential artists of the modern era. Pound's creative genius

was already recognized before World War I, yet it was during the 1930s that he became truly established as an influential and significant poet. It was also during this time that critics disagreed on whether Pound was the greatest living poet or a clever fraud.

After the disillusionment that followed World War I, Pound turned his attention and sometimes his poetry to economics. Pound's major work consists of the 117 *Cantos* (including fragments and drafts) in which he tried to encompass all of world history. In addition, "[m]uch of the life and energy of *The Cantos* is bent to the struggle of reforming society and to achieving a kind of earthly paradise free of economic and political poisons."⁵ Much of Pound's dissatisfaction with the economic state of the world is found in *Cantos* "XLV" and "XLVI." Pound believed that usury was the cause of the economic ills of the world, which he defines in *Canto* "XLV" as "A Charge for the use of purchasing power, levied without regard to production; often without regard to the possibilities of production." In *Canto* "XLV," Pound writes, "With usura hath no man a house of good stone.../WITH USURA/wool comes not to market.../Usura slayeth the child in the womb."⁶ His feelings about the economy were strong and colored his whole approach to his art and the ills affecting society.

That passion only grew over time. Pound believed that the economic ills of society were largely a result of an international conspiracy of Jewish bankers who controlled the British crown and had "succeeded in duping the government of the United States."⁷ Because of his beliefs, Pound established connections with the social credit movements in both America and England, which sought to put money directly in workers' pockets, instead of having it controlled by large profit-seeking banks. His obsession with economic conspiracy theories developed into an anti-Semitic view that was both "pervasive and obscene."⁸

Pound, like many American writers, moved to Europe in the 1920s. In 1924, Pound took up residence in Rapallo.⁹ He lived there during the war years, and returned there late in his life, after his release from St. Elizabeth's. Mussolini was in power when Pound moved to Italy and remained so until he was overthrown by

Italian partisans in 1943. Already skeptical of democracy, Mussolini and fascism provided the strong leadership¹⁰ that Pound looked for as a “ready prescription for the World’s ills.”¹¹ Yet, it is important to understand that because of “his obsession to promote social credit [Pound] would have been willing to talk to any leader or regime on the topic.”¹² Pound’s meeting with Mussolini in 1933, after a year of trying, “seems to have created...an unquestioning idealization of the leader and probably the beginning of his real commitment to the fascist cause, even if he was never a member of the Fascist party.” It is very unlikely that Il Duce ever read *The Cantos*, but Pound took Mussolini’s comment on the work as “amusing” very positively.¹³ Pound was attracted to fascism because it seemed to provide, at that time, the only vehicle for solving what he considered the economic ills of the world. He was, after all, a man who “had solutions for all human problems, including traffic”—his idea for curved streets lined with 40-story buildings with underground parking for 20,000 cars cannot help but be seen as deeply illusionary.¹⁴ The radicalism of Pound’s solutions to economic and social problems, and his inability to see the impossibility of their realization were the precursors to his ideas about war. Pound believed that he had all the answers for solving both the worldwide economic depression of the 1930s and the oncoming war.¹⁵ Thus, it was Pound’s belief in his solutions for the world’s ills and his sense of mission that ultimately led him to fascism as a vehicle of reform. He did not start out with a deep-rooted belief in it.

Pound, by his own admission, had been trying for almost two years to get his hands on a microphone.¹⁶ The idea of broadcasting was originally suggested to Pound in 1935 by C.H. Douglas, his economics mentor.¹⁷ But Pound began his broadcasts for two major reasons: money and a commitment to his cause. Royalties and money from his father’s pension were arriving “erratically,” and when a German officer at the Rapallo tennis club told him that broadcasting paid good money, Pound applied to become a regular broadcaster.¹⁸ Pound’s main reason for pressing for a broadcasting position and eventually obtaining one in the winter of 1940-1941 at *Entre Italiano Audizione Radio* (EIAR) was

largely a financial decision, as even the very anti-Pound author, E. Fuller Torrey, admits. In fact, most of Pound's wartime earnings came from his broadcasts for Rome Radio.¹⁹

Although Pound may have been supporting Mussolini and fascism with his broadcasts, he began broadcasting because of his life-long quest for economic and political reforms. The radio broadcasts were another means for Pound to spread a message that was entirely his own, and for which fascism provided the closest approach to a solution. One author, Harry M. Meacham, writes that Pound spoke not "to betray his country for he spoke as an American citizen and for the Constitution...Pound broadcast because he was committed."²⁰ This commitment to social and economic reform was the spark behind his radio broadcasts.

At the heart of the grand jury indictment and most of the debate over Pound's guilt or innocence are his EIAR radio broadcasts, which he began to give, and not just write, on January 21, 1941. Pound's broadcasts were part of the American hour, a program consisting of music, comment and news.²¹ Pound was charged with treason because he continued to broadcast after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and the United States subsequently went to war against the Axis powers. In 1946, Pound said his mistake "was to go on after Pearl Harbor."²²

Pound was deeply shocked by the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The American correspondent Reynolds Packard told Pound that he would be considered a traitor if he remained in Italy, and that he should keep quiet about his fascist beliefs. In reply, Pound said, "But I believe in Fascism," to which he gave the fascist salute (something he is reported to have done on more than just this occasion). "And I want to defend it. I don't see why Fascism is contrary to American Philosophy. I have nothing against the United States, quite contrary. I consider myself a hundred percent American and a patriot. I am only against Roosevelt and the Jews who influence him."²³ These remarks are used to emphasize Pound's sense of his own mission, and the delusional nature of his beliefs. Pound frequently reiterated that he was speaking as an American, and only trying to reform America. Pound is also

reported to have said after the bombing of Pearl Harbor that he was “first of all an American. I stand with my country right or wrong. I will never speak over the airwaves again.”²⁴ Of course, Pound broke his promise, even though he did cease broadcasting for a month.²⁵

Whether or not Pound actively made attempts to return to the United States continues to be hotly debated. If, in fact, he did try to return to the United States on at least one occasion, this would severely weaken the argument that Pound was guilty of treason. It would show that Pound did not wish to adhere to the enemy, and the United States government would have had major problems in trying to prove an intent to betray.

The sides of the treason debate are mainly drawn by the pro- or anti-Pound stance of the author writing about Pound. Noel Stock has made the most thorough exploration into the actuality of Pound’s attempts to return to the United States. There are stories from Packard and others that Pound was not allowed to board the last diplomatic train out of Rome. In addition, there is a June 5, 1942, article in the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* citing Nancy Horton, an American woman who left Italy on a diplomatic train, which claims Pound was denied permission to board.²⁶ The author Eustace Mullins also verifies this report.²⁷ It also appears that Pound’s passport was extended only for six months in 1941 to try to compel him to return, and on July 12, 1941, the Department of State instructed the American Embassy in Rome to restrict Pound’s passport to a return to the United States only. The Department of Justice claimed that this action was precipitated by a report in the American press that Pound intended only to return to the United States to collect royalties with the purpose of returning to Italy; however, Stock says he has found no evidence to support this allegation.²⁸ Both Stock and Mullins mention that the United States refused to give Pound a passport.²⁹ And Mullins goes as far to write that the denial of a passport:

was a clear violation of Pound’s constitutional rights. He had never been charged with any wrongdoing; he was a citizen in good standing, and the State Department officials had absolutely no grounds for refusing him permission to travel. This was one of the more important

reasons that the Department of Justice officials did not wish to prosecute Pound on a charge of treason. The charge could have been dismissed on the grounds that Pound was denied a fundamental right as an American citizen, that he should be allowed to travel abroad and return without let or hindrance. The Supreme Court has repeatedly upheld this right.³⁰

It should be noted that Mullins' book was published in 1961, when Pound was still alive. He was a member of the avant garde movement, and was among those who visited Pound during his incarceration in St. Elizabeth's. Noel Stock's book was also published relatively early (1970), but was revised and expanded in 1982, more than ten years after Pound's death. When examining these sources, it must be taken into account that the amount of time between the events and the date of publication may not always have given the authors sufficient distance or access to pertinent documents to evaluate Pound's case objectively.

In 1984, E. Fuller Torrey, the ardently anti-Pound author, writes, "Contrary to claims made by Pound and his supporters in later years, there is no contemporary evidence that he considered leaving Italy following Pearl Harbor."³¹ In addition to Torrey's report, Stanley I. Kutler writes in 1982, the same year as Stock's expanded edition, that the "most recent analysis, largely based on State Department documents, concludes that Pound made no serious effort to return to the United States."³² However, Stock discusses numerous accounts from Pound's family and an Italian friend, where Pound had given them the impression he was about to leave. His daughter even remembers Pound coming to Siena to say goodbye.³³ J.J. Wilhelm also mentions Pound's attempt to return to New York by clipper ship in his 1994 monograph.³⁴ Based on these various accounts, it is likely that Pound made some attempt to leave Italy after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

In any event, Ezra Pound did stay in Italy after America's entry into the war and, after a short break, resumed his broadcasting for the EIAR. Pound's regular income of seventeen dollars from Rome Radio was essentially his only means of support during the war years for him and his aging parents, which is another possible reason why Pound remained in Italy.³⁵

Pound did, however, provide himself with what he thought was some protection against a possible treason charge. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Pound wrote a preamble to be read before his customary seven-minute talk:

Rome Radio, acting in accordance with fascist policy of intellectual freedom and free expression of opinion by those who are qualified to hold it, has offered Dr. Ezra Pound the use of the microphone twice a week. It is understood that he will not be asked to say anything whatsoever that goes against his conscience, or anything incompatible with his duties as a citizen of the United States of America.

The number of times the preamble was read is somewhat in question. One source claims that the preamble was read at every broadcast,³⁶ while another one disagrees, contending Pound abandoned it after only a few times, because of its forced definition of fascism and the overall feeling by both Pound and the radio authorities that it was unnecessary.³⁷

Even with the preamble, the government of the United States began to take an interest in Pound early in 1942 because of the continuation of the radio broadcasts. The FCC monitored 125 of his broadcasts between Pearl Harbor and July 25, 1943, the day the Justice Department moved to indict.³⁸ The transcribed broadcasts contained numerous errors, and “[t]he transcribers were insufficiently competent (writing for instance ‘confusion’ for ‘Confucian’) and the reception [was] often bad.”³⁹ Pound was not considered the “heavy” or most serious offender of the eight people who were named in the indictment. Although Pound was the first to be brought into custody, he was the only one who had not worked in Germany.⁴⁰

When he learned of the indictment, Pound fired off a letter to Attorney General Francis Biddle proclaiming his innocence of the treason charge. While this letter may help to prove Pound’s competency during the war years, the arguments Pound made for his innocence are worth looking at in terms of the treason debate. In fact, some of the arguments which Pound originally made in his defense are used later on by others to maintain his innocence. Comments made by Pound in his letter

also provide some insight into his rationale for his World War II radio broadcasts.

The letter to Biddle, dated, August 4, 1943,⁴¹ was “civil, temperate, and lucid.”⁴² Pound expounds on the three main points that he would use in his defense for the rest of his life. He believed “first, that the comments were protected by his First Amendment right of free speech; second that the contents of the broadcast were not treasonous; and third, even if construed as treasonous he had no intent to betray because (in part) of the preamble that had been read out before each of the broadcasts.”⁴³ The intent to betray is extremely important to any treason conviction and, in Pound’s defense, it has been argued over and over that Pound was merely trying to reform America as an American within the framework of the Constitution.

In the letter to Biddle, Pound also discusses the purpose of his broadcasts: “I have not spoken with regard to this war...but in protest against a system which creates one war after another...” He goes on to claim “that he had not spoken to troops and had not suggested that the troops should mutiny or revolt; the idea of free speech became a mockery if it did not include the right to broadcast over the radio.”⁴⁴ The letter shows that Pound intended the purpose behind his broadcasts to advocate the ending of an economic system that created war after war, a conviction which obsessed Pound throughout his adult life. The letter makes clear that Pound was not interested in furthering Italy’s cause in the Second World War, but was intent on spreading his own cause to as many people as he could, something that the medium of radio can do exceptionally well. For Pound, as he wrote in his letter to the Attorney General, his radio broadcasts “set out facts that he knew to be true.”⁴⁵

So what exactly did Pound talk about in these broadcasts that are at the center of the treason controversy? Before the actual content of the broadcasts, and both sides of the treason argument are examined, it is important to look at Pound’s radio transmissions in a quantitative manner. Pound discussed disarmament, criticized government policy, and analyzed economic problems in

96 percent of the transmissions monitored, making them the most recurrent themes of the broadcasts. He made references to communication 95 percent of the time, and he mentioned the social structure of society in 91 percent of the broadcasts. World War II was mentioned 90 percent of the time in the broadcasts, while wars in general were mentioned 44 percent of the time. The cycle of wars created by economic conditions was, of course, what Pound claimed he was truly denouncing in his radio broadcasts. The fact that he referred to World War II significantly more times than he talked about wars in general can be used to refute this claim, and lends credence to the argument that Pound was committing treason because so many of the broadcasts were focused on the Second World War. In those broadcasts pertaining to the ongoing war, Pound most frequently talked about its effects (50 percent) and its future outcome (49 percent). Of all the countries mentioned, only the United States is referred to in every single one.⁴⁶

However, over time, “fewer broadcasts referred to the ongoing war” when the transmissions were divided into three separate groups chronologically. References to the “futility of war in general [became] more frequently mentioned...” In terms of “economic matters,” Pound consistently paid “attention to money and the banks, but references to productivity via trade and exchange increased.”⁴⁷ These statistics advance the argument that Pound was primarily focused on economics, caring only about economic reforms that would stop the endless cycle of wars. In his mind, fascist Italy was more likely to accomplish the reforms he envisioned. Because he saw fascism as the instrument for such reform does not necessarily imply he had the intent to betray the United States.

Finally, 48 percent of the “broadcasts contained a call for action...[and]...the specific action[s] Pound advocated appear in retrospect to be somewhat mild...” One of these calls for action comes from a transcript dated July 13, 1942. It is related to Pound’s economic conspiracy ideas, and appears to be directed at anybody: “You ought to organize against the world-wide sabotage, sabotage

of everything that makes life fit for a human being, and for a sense of justice.” Another one dated March 30, 1943, seems to be explicitly directed at the American people and, an argument could be made, to American troops as well: “Use your personal influence with Congressmen and particularly let your wishes be known to your Senators.”⁴⁸ However, even if directed at American troops, Pound’s call for action does not openly call for any sort of revolt or mutiny; in fact, he appears to be advocating working within the American system.

At the center of the debate is the content of Pound’s World War II radio broadcasts. However, a discussion of Pound’s guilt or innocence during the war years should not limit the evidence to only the broadcasts cited in the indictment. Even though they are the main reasons behind the indictment, all of Pound’s actions in Italy during the war and all pertinent court precedents should be examined as well.

The most damaging evidence against Pound, besides his radio transmissions, is E. Fuller Torrey’s report that Pound “invested his meager financial resources in the equivalent of the Italian war bonds...”⁴⁹ (However, it should once again be noted that Torrey is ardently anti-Pound, and his choice of words may indicate a bias on his part as to Pound’s guilt or innocence. Humphrey Carpenter mitigates this damaging piece of evidence with his statement that Pound’s capital was mostly in Italian government bonds, which he bought before the outbreak of war with the United States.⁵⁰ It is also appropriate to question Torrey’s use of the term “equivalent” of war bonds in his description. Were these bonds, indeed, the same? What were they called when Pound invested in them? In fact, the bonds may very well have been used to further Italy’s effort against the Allies before America’s entry into the war. Looked at thus, Torrey’s statement could be seen as correct. If Pound purchased these war bonds after America entered the war, the pro-treason argument is significantly strengthened. Then, it is conceivable that Pound had some intent to betray his country. In that case, Pound was financially supporting the Italian war effort with these purchases.

The fact that Pound appeared to be well aware of the consequences of his broadcasts, yet proceeded with them anyway, is another argument used by the pro-treason side. Pound was warned more than once that he risked being charged with treason because of his broadcasts for Rome Radio.⁵¹ “Because of repeated State Department warnings to Pound in 1941, it must be assumed he understood the citizenship issue,”⁵² which entailed risking the possibility of a treason charge in broadcasting for an Axis power while still a citizen of the United States. Since Pound was well aware of the predicament that the radio broadcasts were putting him in, it can be argued that Pound did adhere to Italy and was willing to place his allegiance to Italy and Il Duce above the risk of a treason charge.

Even before he began broadcasting in 1941, Pound was already very committed to the fascist cause. Pound was an ongoing contributor to *Meridano di Romano*, a predominantly fascist periodical. In “December, 1939 a note from Ezra reached Luigi Villari, in charge of relations with the USA, who rejected the plan [to do a study of American ‘politicians of the past, whose ideas could be compared to Fascism’] on the grounds that it would be a tactless intervention in American domestic affairs at a time when there were no hostilities between the two countries.” Pound was also fascinated by the art of propaganda and believed that a chair dedicated to that subject should be established at some university. Presumably, Pound wished to be named to such a chair.⁵³ Even before his broadcasts began, it can easily be established that Pound was deeply committed to fascism.

Several court cases of radio broadcasters indicted for treason at roughly the same time as Pound are helpful to the pro-treason argument. These precedents provide a look into the possible outcome that might have awaited Pound had he ever stood trial. Axis Sally and Tokyo Rose, two World War II radio broadcasters who were far more famous than Pound, were both convicted because of their radio transmissions.⁵⁴ The trials and convictions of these two women confirm without a doubt that radio broadcasting can constitute treason, a form of aid never seen until World War II.⁵⁵

To further its argument, the pro-treason side has also used the treason cases of Douglas Chandler and William Joyce (who is better known by his broadcast name, Lord Haw Haw). In his broadcasts from Germany, Chandler, using the pseudonym Paul Revere, emphasized the “Nazi anti-Semitic line and stressed the cost and futility of war to the United States.” Chandler brought up two arguments in his defense that Pound also used, plus another one that could easily apply to Pound’s case. Pound argued in his letter to Biddle that words were not enough to establish a charge of treason and that he had the right to freedom of speech. The trial court rebuffed both of these claims in Chandler’s case, saying in part that “speech writing...is as much of an act as is throwing a brick.” According to the court, “[w]hether the act is done with intent to betray becomes the determining factor.” The Court also rebuffed Chandler’s contention that because his broadcasts were ineffective, he was not guilty of treason. Because the Supreme Court failed to review the Chandler case, the lower court’s ruling could be used as precedent in other treason trials.⁵⁶

Lord Haw Haw was an American who did vicious radio broadcasts that were aimed mainly at the British. (Incidentally, Ezra Pound took up a brief correspondence with this infamous propagator, even signing his letters Heil—although spelling it wrong—Hitler and on one occasion with a swastika.) The British, of course, had no right to try a citizen of another nation for treason. “English common law was stretched to the breaking point” when the British captured, convicted, and executed him. Yet, their actions did not forebode well for Pound since Joyce was one of the first broadcasters tried for treason, and his case demonstrated the extent to which radio broadcasting during the war was considered a treasonous act.⁵⁷

Without question, certain comments made by Pound in his transmissions sound very treasonable. He certainly gives the impression that, at the very least, he is adhering to enemy nations, and at times it can be argued that he appears to be addressing American troops. The following are some of the statements made by Pound that could be considered treasonable:

“You are at war for the duration of the Germans’ pleasure; you are at war for the duration of Japan’s pleasure.” [February 3, 1942]

“For the United States to be making war on Italy and on Europe is just plain nonsense, and every native-born American of American stock knows that it is plain and downright damn nonsense. And for the state of things Franklin Roosevelt is more than any other one man responsible.” [April 16, 1942]

“Every hour that you go on with this war is an hour lost to you and your children. And every sane act that you commit is committed in homage to Mussolini and Hitler. Every reform, every lurch toward the just price, toward control of the market, is an act of homage to Mussolini and Hitler. They are your leaders, however much you think you are conducted by Roosevelt or told by Churchill. You follow Mussolini and Hitler in every conservative act of your government.” [May 26, 1942]

“You are not going to win this war...you have never had a chance in this war.” [June 28, 1942]⁵⁸

It is difficult to claim that Pound in these excerpts was not adhering to enemy nations of the United States. Certainly, it can be more easily argued that he was giving them aid and comfort with his broadcasts, even though there is some question of who the “you” refers to in the broadcasts. While it is more likely that the May 26th broadcast was aimed at the population of the Allied nations in general, in the February 3rd and June 28th excerpts, Pound is probably speaking directly to American troops.

The excerpts show both adherence to the enemy and the giving of aid and comfort. The key argument in the anti-treason case is that they do not show intent to betray. The anti-treason side maintains that Pound believed himself to be an American, and that he merely wanted economic and political reform within the American system. Unlike the opposing side, the anti-treason argument uses court precedents, in particular the case of Anthony Kramer, to show that the Supreme Court has given a very narrow construction to the definition of treason. Although the anti-treason argument centers mainly on Pound’s broadcasts, Pound’s advocates, like the pro-treason side, also look at everything in the poet’s life during the war years in Italy to prove their case.

The feelings of the American people before Pearl Harbor and during the time of Pound's initial broadcasts are brought up to a certain extent in defense of the poet. An article in the March 17, 1941, issue of *Newsweek* reported that Pound was "counseling the United States against providing aid to Britain. Some eighty-five percent of the American public at that time felt the same way. This was the editorial policy of the *Chicago Tribune* and many other important newspapers..."⁵⁹ In 1941, before Pearl Harbor, there were many Americans who would have agreed with practically everything Pound said regarding "the United States government, the European conflict, and the power of the Jews."⁶⁰ Although a minor defense, it does show that much of America shared Pound's views. However, this defense fails to look at the fact that once America entered into the war, almost all Americans fully supported the Allies. The bombing of Pearl Harbor becomes the dividing line for really scrutinizing Pound's actions. Italy was now an enemy nation.

The case of Anthony Kramer provides insight into the possible outcome of a treason trial against Pound. If this particular court case raises doubt about the possibility of Pound being found guilty, it also weakens the argument that Pound was, in fact, guilty of treason against the United States. The Kramer case "arose out of one of the most exciting events that occurred inside the United States during the Second World War: the landing of a German submarine off the East coast in June 1942, which put ashore armed saboteurs to disrupt war industry." Kramer, a good friend of one of the saboteurs named Thiel, was contacted by the saboteurs after their landing. Kramer essentially did everything for the German saboteurs: he "deposited money for them; he ate and drank with them;" he put them up in his home. He even "suspected their money...came from the German government..."⁶¹ But the Supreme Court reversed Kramer's conviction by a trial judge. In its decision, the Supreme Court laid out the first two defining factors for treason, but also stated, "The acts must be intentional. *The intent sufficient to sustain a conviction must be an intent, not merely to commit the overt acts complained of but to betray the country by means of such acts.*" (author's italics)⁶² If the court ruled that Kramer did not

intend to betray his country by knowingly harboring and taking care of German saboteurs, it is much easier to argue that Pound did not betray the United States through his radio broadcasts.

This lack of intent to betray is the main and most plausible argument set forth by those who feel Pound was not guilty of treason. They point to the fact that Pound was always speaking as an American during the war. He was legally an American because he never renounced his citizenship. If Pound “had given up citizenship prior to Pearl Harbor, he would not have been prosecuted at all.” Carl Gobel, Pound’s supervisor at the EIAR, gave up his citizenship, and the United States took no action against him. Because he was warned by the State Department to stop broadcasting, it can be inferred that Pound was aware of the citizenship issue.⁶³ Since Pound did not renounce his citizenship, it can be argued that there was a lack of intent to betray. During the war, Pound still considered himself 100 percent American.⁶⁴

In fact, Pound always referred to himself in the radio broadcasts as an American,⁶⁵ and he told his listeners that he spoke as an American citizen. Pound always contended that his radio broadcasts were supporting the “‘United States Heritage,’ and he challenged his audience to ‘find anything hostile to the Constitution of the USA in these speeches.’” Pound believed it was only because he was an American that he could demand that the United States put its “house in order,” which was one of the major themes of his broadcasts.⁶⁶ In speaking as an American, and demanding that reforms take place within America, it becomes difficult to assert that Pound had treasonous intent, even if it can be said he was adhering to Italy. “And one can only wonder how the government officials could have proved that Pound’s broadcasts exhorting his fellow citizens to live up to their constitution could ‘increase the morale of the subjects of the Kingdom of Italy,’ as charged in count 3” of the indictment.⁶⁷

The anti-treason side frequently uses the argument that none of the broadcasts advocated any mutiny or revolt by American or Allied troops. “There was no criticism of the allied war effort in the broadcasts; nothing was said to discourage or disturb

American soldiers or their families.”⁶⁸ Even though he talked about the war, the war itself meant something entirely different to Pound than to everyone else. “[T]he conflict seemed to exist for him on a purely intellectual plane.” This is most obvious when Pound alludes to Allied victories, and immediately asserts that they are losing the real war.⁶⁹

Yet, even if the broadcasts never advocated mutiny or revolt by American troops, they still reached them. George Dillon, the editor of *Poetry*, heard one of Pound’s broadcasts from Italy while serving in Europe. He later wrote in a magazine that “Pound was sometimes good for five minutes of modest entertainment. That is all it was, and I doubt whether any of us who listened to him felt anything but amusement, though we were not in a kindly mood...Pound...went on and on. But it was impossible to have any serious reaction.”⁷⁰ (It would be irresponsible not to note here that Pound had published his work in *Poetry* before the war, and Dillon most likely had some reverence for Pound.) The Chandler case had established that even if Pound’s broadcasts were ineffective, either because of their content or, more probable, because of their lack of understandability, that does not mean treason has not been committed. Although this argument is made frequently, it is a minor component of the anti-treason debate.

In the end, of course, Pound never stood trial on the treason charge. Instead, Pound’s mind was found unsound by a jury, and he was remanded to St. Elizabeth’s Hospital in Washington, D.C. Pound was incarcerated for thirteen years until his supporters, primarily through the efforts of Robert Frost, convinced the United States government to release him. Pound immediately returned to Italy, where he lived until his death in Venice on November 1, 1972.

An analysis of both sides of the treason debate leaves little doubt that Ezra Pound, the great American poet, did adhere during World War II to Mussolini and Italy, and to the Axis powers in general. His radio broadcasts, which openly supported the Axis nations, did give enemies of the United States aid and comfort. Without a doubt, Pound met two of the criteria for a treason

conviction. Yet, what must also be resolved is whether Pound had any intent to betray his country. Treasonous intent is the cornerstone to deciding Pound's guilt or his innocence.

Pound saw himself as waging a life-or-death struggle against the economic ills of the world, which in his mind perpetuated a deadly cycle of wars. He was a man who thought he had all the solutions for all the ailments of the world. Many of Pound's solutions were downright grandiose. Pound was too smart for his own good. A man of great intelligence, he was unable to grasp that many of his ideas were delirious, unrealistic, and inconsistent. For Pound, Italy and fascism were the closest opportunities for a solution. He certainly would have adhered to any government that appeared receptive to his ideas. To him, Mussolini's government seemed to do just that.

So, did Pound in his support of Mussolini, and an enemy nation of the United States in World War II, intend to betray the United States? The answer should be, unquestionably, no. His broadcasts may have betrayed the United States, but Pound himself had no intent to commit treason. He was first and foremost an American, who believed fervently that his country's heritage was slipping away. Pound wanted reform in America, and there is no question he would have been more than happy to see Roosevelt gone. Yet, he wanted reform to happen within the framework of the Constitution. His inability to see the absurdity of his intellectual ideas led Pound to believe that even with fascist-imposed changes, the United States could still exist with the same principles upon which it was founded. Pound failed to see the consequences that an Axis victory would have had on the very concept of America. The government of the United States would have been fundamentally and profoundly altered. Pound's inability to see such a contradiction in his thinking in his desire for a *reformed* and prosperous America, demonstrates that Pound *himself* did not intend to betray America. By the United States definition of treason, Pound was not a traitor.

Notes

- ¹ Noel Stock, The Life of Ezra Pound (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982) p. 396
- ² Peter Wilson, A Preface to Ezra Pound (London: Longman, 1997) p. 75
- ³ J.H. Leek, "Treason and the Constitution," The Journal of Politics 13 (November, 1951) pp. 605-606, 609
- ⁴ Conrad L. Rushing, "'Mere Words': The Trial of Ezra Pound," Critical Inquiry 14 (Autumn 1987) p. 112
- ⁵ William M. Chace, "Ezra Pound: 'Insanity,' 'Treason,' and 'Care,'" Critical Inquiry 14 (Autumn 1987) p. 141
- ⁶ Ezra Pound, "XLV," The Cantos of Ezra Pound (New York: New Directions, 1995) pp. 229-230
- ⁷ Julien Cornell, The Trial of Ezra Pound: A Documented Account of the Treason Case by the Defendant's Lawyer (New York: John Day Company, 1966) p. 2
- ⁸ Stanely I. Kutler, The American Inquisition: Justice and Injustice in the Cold War (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) p. 61
- ⁹ Rushing, p. 113
- ¹⁰ Wilson, p. 59
- ¹¹ Kutler, p. 61
- ¹² Wilson, p. 59
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59
- ¹⁴ Robert Wernick, "The Strange and Inscrutable Case of Ezra Pound," Smithsonian 26 (1995) p. 114
- ¹⁵ Kutler, p. 61
- ¹⁶ Humphrey Carpenter, "'This is Ole Ezra Speaking!'" Encounter 71 (1988) p. 4
- ¹⁷ E. Fuller Torrey, The Roots of Treason: Ezra Pound and the Secret of St. Elizabeth's (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984) pp. 157-158
- ¹⁸ Carpenter, "'This is Ole Ezra Speaking!'" p. 6
- ¹⁹ Peter Ackroyd, Ezra Pound (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1980) p. 83
- ²⁰ Harry M. Meacham, The Caged Panther: Ezra Pound at Saint Elizabeth's (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967) p. 21
- ²¹ Carpenter, "'This is Ole Ezra Speaking!'" p. 4
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 11
- ²³ Torrey, p. 60
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60

- ²⁵ John Tytell, Ezra Pound: The Solitary Volcano (New York: Doubleday, 1987) p. 263
- ²⁶ Stock, pp. 391-392
- ²⁷ Eustace Mullins, This Difficult Individual, Ezra Pound (New York: Fleet Publishing, 1961) p. 203
- ²⁸ Stock, pp. 391-392
- ²⁹ Ibid., pp. 391- 392; Mullins, pp. 203-204
- ³⁰ Mullins, p. 204
- ³¹ Torrey, p. 160
- ³² Kutler, p. 62
- ³³ Stock, pp. 391-392
- ³⁴ J.J. Wilhelm, Ezra Pound: The Tragic Years, 1925-1972 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994) p. 185
- ³⁵ Stock, p. 392
- ³⁶ Rushing, p. 115
- ³⁷ Carpenter, “‘This is Ole Ezra Speaking!’” p. 11
- ³⁸ Charles Norman, The Case of Ezra Pound (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968) p. 47
- ³⁹ Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) p. 466
- ⁴⁰ Rushing, pp. 114-115
- ⁴¹ Stock, p. 397
- ⁴² Kenner, p. 467
- ⁴³ Rushing, pp. 114-115
- ⁴⁴ Stock, p. 397
- ⁴⁵ Kutler, p. 63
- ⁴⁶ Leonard W. Doob, ed., “Ezra Pound Speaking”: Radio Speeches of World War II (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978) p. 417
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 418
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 418-420
- ⁴⁹ Torrey, p. 163
- ⁵⁰ Humphrey Carpenter, A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988) p. 601
- ⁵¹ Torrey, p. 163
- ⁵² Rushing, p. 118
- ⁵³ Carpenter, “‘This is Ole Ezra Speaking!’” pp. 3, 5
- ⁵⁴ Cornell, p. 2
- ⁵⁵ Leek, “‘Treason and the Constitution,’” p. 613
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 614-615
- ⁵⁷ Rushing, pp. 118-119
- ⁵⁸ Stock, p. 395

- ⁵⁹ Mullins, p. 203
⁶⁰ Carpenter, “‘This is Ole Ezra Speaking!’” p. 10
⁶¹ Rushing, pp. 116-117
⁶² Meacham, p. 23
⁶³ Rushing, p. 118
⁶⁴ Tytell, p. 263
⁶⁵ Doob, p. xiii
⁶⁶ Carpenter, “‘This is Ole Ezra Speaking!’” p. 10
⁶⁷ Mullins, p. 236
⁶⁸ Cornell, p. 1
⁶⁹ Carpenter, “‘This is Ole Ezra Speaking!’” p. 14
⁷⁰ Carpenter, A Serious Character, p. 610

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