

COMMENTARY

EZRA POUND. Nearly ten years have passed since Ezra Pound surrendered himself to the American Army in Italy, a decision that was to lead to his confinement in a lunatic asylum in Washington, for he was declared unfit to stand trial on a charge of treason. Officially insane, he was never more intellectually alive than he is today. Even under the unimaginable stress of his imprisonment for months in a cage at Pisa he wrote the *Pisan Cantos*, perhaps his greatest achievement in poetry. And since his return to America he has been awarded the Bollingen Prize by the Librarians of Congress and has been recently considered a serious candidate for the Nobel Prize for Literature. These are unusual achievements in a criminal lunatic.

Years ago Wyndham Lewis described Ezra Pound as 'the revolutionary simpleton' and his treasonable activities (if indeed they deserve so serious a name) were consistent enough with a career that was designed to make enemies. His broadcasts from Rome during the war (the ground of his indictment for treason) repeated his conviction that the Western world had been sold to 'usurocracy', that conspiracy of international finance which he conceived to be the primary cause of all our ills. Innocent of political device, Mr Pound was incapable of that calculated zeal which the charge of treason must suppose. He claimed indeed that he was the defender of the classical principles of Jefferson, John Adams and the American Constitution which the usurers had betrayed. And the text of his broadcasts (as yet not publicly printed) give no evidence of any desire to subvert American citizens from their patriotic duty. Almost obsessively he insists: 'Profits do not profit a nation. Lucre does not profit a nation. The sense of equity, sense of justice is that wherefrom a nation hath benefit. The whole of your ruling class has run plumb haywire on profits.' He laid himself open to accusations of anti-Semitism; he seemed unaware that in the middle of a war these academic diatribes against usury, mingled with literary reminiscence and typical titbits of Poundian paradox, might appear a treachery.

But whatever the final judgment may be on Ezra Pound as a political economist—and 'simpleton' would seem still to be the

name for him in this respect—his continuing imprisonment can hardly give pleasure to any who care for the humane values which he has so courageously vindicated throughout his life. No one man has worked with such seriousness and generosity for the proper recognition of the artist, and Mr T. S. Eliot's acknowledgment of what he and many others owe to *il miglior fabbro* is sufficiently well known.

In a talk broadcast earlier this year from Vatican Radio, Professor de Pina Martins made a moving appeal for his release. He points out that, however mistakenly, Ezra Pound was faithful to his own conscience. ('I was not sending out Axis propaganda but my own', he wrote to his lawyer in 1945.) Deprived of his freedom, Ezra Pound remains a reproach to the American love of freedom and its capacity for clemency. And it may be argued that his ten years of captivity—a longer term than many Nazis or any Fascists have had to serve—have in any case purged his offence. A disinterested gesture of mercy could scarcely be misinterpreted now.

THE NORMS OF CENSORSHIP. A system of moral classification of films, familiar in most countries where there is an effective Catholic opinion, can never be a substitute for the necessary work of positive criticism. It has its uses, but American experience has amply shown that a legalistic code of the permissible, while it can eliminate the ostensibly outrageous, can yet fail to affect the deeper levels of moral value. It is possible to ensure that adultery must never be condoned, that the suggestive gesture shall be eliminated, but so univocal a judgment can achieve little unless it has the support of informed opinion and an adult respect for what the medium of the film can properly attempt. That is why the Catholic Film Institute in this country deserves the fullest support, for its work has done much to show that a criticism of Christian inspiration can be technically accomplished and generous in its recognition of the film as an art, while at the same time insisting that the very power of the cinema carries with it social responsibilities which, if betrayed, betray the medium itself. It is to be hoped that the recent financial difficulties of the Catholic Film Institute may be resolved so that its constructive work may not only continue but be extended, as it deserves to be.