

1920

E. P. ODE POUR L'ELECTION DE SON SEPULCHRE

From Hugh Selwyn Mauberley Ezra Pound

Pound, Ezra (1885-1972) - Controversial American poet, editor, and critic who had a major influence on 20th century literature. After making hundreds of broadcasts for the Italian Fascist regime, he was tried for treason, judged insane, and held in a mental hospital for over ten years. E. P. Ode Pour L'Election de Son Sepulchre (1920) - The opening of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," Pound's farewell to London and the English literary scene. Opening line: For three years, out of key with his time, ...

EPODE

I

FOR three years, out of key with his time, He strove to resuscitate
the dead art Of poetry; to maintain “the sublime” In the old sense.
Wrong from the start No, hardly, but seeing he had been born
In a half savage country, out of date; Bent resolutely on wringing lilies
from the acorn; Capaneus; trout for factitious bait; Idmen gar toi
panth, os eni Troie Caught in the unstopped ear; Giving the rocks
small lee-way The chopped seas held him, therefore, that year.

His true Penelope was Flaubert, He fished by obstinate isles;
Observed the elegance of Circe’s hair Rather than the mottoes on
sun-dials.

Unaffected by “the march of events,” He passed from men’s
memory in l’an trentuniesme De son eage; the case presents No
adjunct to the Muses’ diadem.

II

THE age demanded an image Of its accelerated grimace,
Something for the modern stage, Not, at any rate, an Attic grace;
Not, not certainly, the obscure reveries Of the inward gaze; Better
mendacities Than the classics in paraphrase!

The “age demanded” chiefly a mould in plaster, Made with no loss
of time, A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster Or the
“sculpture” of rhyme.

III

THE tea-rose tea-gown, etc.

Supplants the mousseline of Cos, The pianola “replaces” Sappho’s
barbitos.

Christ follows Dionysus, Phallic and ambrosial Made way for
macerations; Caliban casts out Ariel.

All things are a flowing, Sage Heracleitus says; But a tawdry
cheapness Shall outlast our days.

Even the Christian beauty Defects- after Samothrace; We see to
kalon Decreed in the market place.

Faun’s flesh is not to us, Nor the saint’s vision.

We have the press for wafer; Franchise for circumcision.

All men, in law, are equals.

Free of Pisistratus, We choose a knave or an eunuch To rule over us.

O bright Apollo, tin andra, tin eroa, tina theon, What god, man, or hero Shall I place a tin wreath upon!

IV

THESE fought in any case, and some believing, pro domo, in any case...

Some quick to arm, some for adventure, some from fear of weakness, some from fear of censure, some for love of slaughter, in imagination, learning later...

some in fear, learning love of slaughter; Died some, pro patria, non "dulce" non "et decor"...

walked eye-deep in hell believing in old men's lies, then unbelieving came home, home to a lie, home to many deceits, home to old lies and new infamy; usury age-old and age-thick and liars in public places.

Daring as never before, wastage as never before.

Young blood and high blood, fair cheeks, and fine bodies; fortitude as never before frankness as never before, disillusion as never told in the old days, hysterias, trench confessions, laughter out of dead bellies.

V

THERE died a myriad, And of the best, among them, For an old bitch gone in the teeth, For a botched civilization,

Charm, smiling at the good mouth, Quick eyes gone under earth's lid, For two gross of broken statues, For a few thousand battered books.

THE END