

Ezra Pound in London. Enjoying Kensington.

Six months after 'Personae' had been published, a second volume of Ezra's poetry was dispatched to the printer. In the meantime, on Monday evenings at 8.30 he began to deliver the polytechnic lectures that were to be published as *The Spirit of Romance*. Olivia and Dorothy Shakespeare attended faithfully but there were only about 20 in the audience on the first night and the numbers did not take up. The new volume of poetry titled 'Exultations' appeared in October 1909. The reviews were not as good as those for his previous volume. And there were still money problems and although he made a little extra by giving literary classes for Society ladies, he was obliged to write to his father requesting a further four pounds. He even applied for a job at Pennsylvania University and also made inquiries at Princeton. Neither wished to acquire his services. Ezra suggested to his mother that she might insert the following ad. in some reputable paper: "poet-out of a job. Speciality-incisive speech, meditation, irony at special rates,. Will travel or stand unhitched while being fed. Price one pound per hour-special rates for steady consumers."

Nonetheless life was enjoyable in Kensington and Ezra's social and literary circle of friends was expanding. He could often be found at the home of a Mrs. Hunt, 80 Campden Hill, where Ford Maddox Ford was frequently in attendance on Mrs. Hunt's daughter Violet. Mrs. Hunt was the widow of the Pre Raphaelite painter Alfred William Hunt and Violet wrote bad romantic novels. She was also known as "Immodest Violet" and several of Ford's more respectable social circle melted away. A contemporary observed that Ezra established himself as a kind of master of ceremonies in the household. Ford and Violet, both of whom adored every form of entertaining and loved to be surrounded by crowds of friends, were delighted. The garden was taken over and every afternoon a motley collection of people, in the oddest costumes, invaded it at Ezra's instigation and afterwards repaired to the house to discuss poetry, troubadours, and the villainy of contributors to the front page of the *Times Literary Supplement*. It was at these gatherings that Ezra's name was linked with many young women, ranging from society types to French dancers.

Opposite the house there was a communal garden containing tennis courts which were taken over by the group. Ford said that playing a game of tennis against Ezra was like playing against an inebriated kangaroo. Violet had a parrot that screamed "Ezra! Ezra!" when they came in from tennis. Indoors, Ezra would never sit still and apparently was always jumping and twisting in his chair which naturally endangered every chair he sat on. He managed to break delicate antique chairs in both Violet's home and in that of Gertrude Stein. He was not a favourite of Gertrude Stein who described him as a sort of village explainer. "Great if you are a village, if not, not."

D. H. Lawrence, a young schoolmaster in Croydon, was taken under Ezra's wing for a while but Ezra did not like the emphasis on sexuality in his stories. Ezra must have found some money somewhere because he took off for Europe and the U S A in March 1910 and returned in August 1911. During that time, "*The Spirit of Romance*" was published followed by another volume of poetry "*Canzoni*". The reviews of the poetry were not good although Walter de la Mare allowed that he was a true poet. During his stay in Italy he was joined by Oliver and Dorothy Shakespeare for a period. It seems that during their time together Ezra had reciprocated Dorothy's

romantic interest in him. However her mother was not in favour of the potential match as Ezra could not produce evidence of his capability of supporting her and, as she said, could not find "pounds 5000 a year". So Ezra was forbidden on his return to London, to come to the house or write to Dorothy. While in the USA, a selection of his poems were published to generally unhappy reviews. The Boston Evening Transcript said: "we began the examination of this book of poems with great expectations and we lay it down with considerable contempt for the bulk of English criticism that has pretended to discover in these erratic utterances the voice of a poet." Another Review described his poems as uncouth, hairy and barbarous, but liked their stark, heathenish music.

Back in London his old Church Walk room was not available so he took a flat with a friend in a remote part of Kensington, 39 Addison Road North.

He called on the Shakespears, hoping to obtain permission to visit Dorothy. She advised him to have a straight talk with her father, and so Ezra went, without appointment, to Mr. Shakespear's office where he stated that he received a regular income of £200 a year quite apart from his literary work. Mr. Shakespear was not unimpressed by this but asked for proof. Nobody knows if this mysterious income actually appeared in Ezra's pocket or whether it was more imaginary. None the less, Ezra was allowed to see Dorothy from time to time in the hope that eventually his finances would clarify themselves or be improved.

An important event occurred in Ezra's life at the end of 1911 when he made contact with A.R. Orage, the editor of a weekly called "New Age". Orage was a former elementary school teacher from Leeds who had come to London as a free-lance journalist and had bought the moribund weekly. Its pages were considered a little dull and the fee paid to Ezra was small - someone nicknamed the paper the "No Wage" weekly - but during the next decade Orage published nearly three hundred of Ezra's articles proving to be the most reliable of all his literary employers for quite some time.

Ezra had started attending Monday evening salons at W. B. Yeats flat - at 18, Woburn Buildings - earlier in the year and during the winter of 1911-12 he became a regular and welcome visitor. He and Yeats became good friends and a visitor described one of these evenings as events when Ezra took charge, dominated the room, distributed Yeats' cigarettes and Chianti, and laid down the Law about poetry. Yeats made no pretence of sharing any of Ezra's views on anything, least of all poetry. Later, when Yeats was unwell he engaged Ezra to read to him in the evenings and also to teach him fencing as part of a recuperation process. Ezra respected Yeats hugely for his past achievements and Yeats said of Ezra that he would quarrel with him more than with anyone else, were they not united by affection.

Early in 1912 he concluded an arrangement with a publisher, Swift and company. They were to pay him one hundred pounds a year for ten years as an advance on royalties against forthcoming books. For Mr. Shakespear this was still not enough to enable Ezra to marry Dorothy, although it appears that there was an "engagement" as Dorothy now had a ring, which she however opted not wear on her finger but round her neck.

Early in 1912, Ezra handed in, to Swift & Co., the typescript of a new collection of poems to be called "Ripostes". It contained translations and original poems. Yeats called it distinguished and other reviews were encouraging. Somewhat surprisingly, this book of poems was not limited to his own work. Ezra had included as an

appendix five poems by an unknown, T. E. Hulme. This was due to a real wish to gain some attention for Hulme's poetry, and is one of the earlier indications of what would occupy a lot of Ezra's time throughout his career - a desire to be helpful, in the most practical way possible, to those whom he considered had real talent.

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However Ezra was not kind to everybody and apparently did not like the poet Abercrombie whom he challenged to a duel for advising young poets to abandon realism and study Wordsworth. Abercrombie, it is said, took the challenge seriously and became alarmed when told that Ezra was an expert fencer. He took advantage of the challenged party's right to choose the weapons and proposed that they bombard each other with copies of their unsold books. Nothing further happened.

Two fledgling poets he was helping at this time were William Carlos Williams and Robert Frost. Williams was a life-long friend but the friendship between Ezra and Frost eventually cooled probably because Ezra wanted to edit Frost's work before sending it to publishers. But when Ezra and Frost were first acquainted they enjoyed each other's company and Ezra would take Frost to little known Italian restaurants where he could show off his Italian and order dishes he had tasted in Venice. They recited their poems to each other, on one occasion becoming so raucous that a waiter hastened to place a screen round them. Towards the end of one bibulous meal, Ezra wanted to demonstrate ju-jitsu to Frost - who readily agreed - took Frost's arm as they stood up and threw him over on his back. Later Frost referred to Ezra as "a boastful, flashy dresser" while Ezra called him "a barnyard poet".

Out of the blue, he received a letter from a lady in Chicago, Harriet Monroe, asking him to contribute to a new magazine she was about to launch under the title "Poetry".

Harriet Monroe was a spinster of 52 years who had for a long time been writing mediocre verse, which she had difficulty getting published. So she decided to start her own poetry magazine and raised money from a hundred patrons, after which she sent out a circular to possible contributors. Ezra responded immediately offering to become her foreign editor and promising that he would publish all his work in America through her magazine, exclusively. So began a long association with Ezra sending his own poetry and much of others whom he admired.

Shortly after the publication of 'Ripostes' by the aforementioned Swift & Co, the manager ran off to Morocco with the company's cash.