

## **Ezra Pound**

It was about a hundred years ago that Ezra Pound - the American-born poet who was to become both famous and infamous - decided to seek his fortune in the Old World. He spent a few years in London before moving on to other parts of Europe. Those years were formative for him and his circle of acquaintances and we shall look at them in some detail in forthcoming editions of this magazine.

Poet and propagandist, editor and innovator, genius of metrics in poetry, he was one of the most enigmatic and controversial literary figures of the twentieth century. He was a great poet - and also a great publicist for others. He helped a very large number of poets and writers to improve their craft and to get published. Ernest Hemingway said that he learnt more from Pound about how to write, and how not to write, than from anyone else.

It was due largely to Pound's efforts that the outstanding poem of the twentieth century - 'The Waste Land' by T.S. Eliot - and the outstanding novel of that century - 'Ulysses' by James Joyce - were published. When authors who had talent were penniless and unrecognised, Ezra Pound befriended them and shared his meagre resources with them and unremittingly pushed their work with publishers until it was given space. He was a close friend of W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot and numbered among his acquaintances over a long life: Bertrand Russell, Isaiah Berlin, Kenneth Clarke, Auden, Spender, Samuel Beckett, Rabindranath Tagore, Henry James, to name a few. His poems and his writings influenced poets over several generations.

In addition to a large and varied collection of poetry, which includes the twentieth century landmark 'The Cantos' - all 800 pages of it - he wrote an opera which was featured at the Spoleto Festival and performed on BBC3, and he played a large part in the rediscovery of the music of Vivaldi.

After education in America he spent several years in London and then Paris before settling in Italy. During the Second World War he foolishly gave talks on Italian Radio about politics and economics concerning which he had ill-formed ideas, and these broadcasts were considered treasonable by the U.S. Government. At the end of the war, he gave himself up and was held prisoner in a re-inforced steel mesh cage in a U.S. Army detention centre at Pisa. He continued to write poetry. After a few months he was taken to Washington for trial where he was judged unfit to plead and placed in St. Elizabeth's Hospital for the Mentally Deranged in Washington. Many public figures, including Arthur Miller, said he should be executed.

After 12 years, during which time he was allowed to study, write and receive visitors, and during which time he was awarded the Bollingen Prize for Poetry, he was released - mainly due to the efforts of friends: Eliot, Robert Frost, Hemingway, William Faulkner and many non-literary admirers including the architect Frank Lloyd Wright. He returned to Italy, where he now had grand-children, visited London and Vienna for the memorial services of Eliot and Stravinsky and eventually died in Venice - aged 87 - and is buried in the municipal cemetery there.