

1915

EXILE'S LETTER

Ezra Pound

Translated from the Chinese of Lo T'ai Po (Rihaku)

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. Exile's Letter (1915) - From the collection, "Cathay." Pound's adaptation of a translation of the great Chinese poet, Li Po. Opening line: To So-Kiu of Rakuyo, ancient friend, Chancellor Gen.

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EXILES LETTER

TO So-Kiu of Rakuyo, ancient friend, Chancellor Gen.

Now I remember that you built me a special tavern By the south side of the bridge at Ten-shin.

With yellow gold and white jewels, we paid for songs and laughter
And we were drunk for month on month, forgetting the kings and princes.

Intelligent men came drifting in from the sea and from the west border,
And with them, and with you especially There was nothing at cross purpose,
And they made nothing of sea-crossing or of mountain-crossing,
If only they could be of that fellowship, And we all spoke out our hearts and minds, and without regret.

And then I was sent off to South Wai, smothered in laurel groves,
And you to the north of Raku-hoku, Till we had nothing but thoughts and memories in common.

And then, when separation had come to its worst, We met, and travelled into Sen-jo,
Through all the thirty-six folds of the turning and twisting waters,
Into a valley of the thousand bright flowers, That was the first valley;
And into ten thousand valleys full of voices and pine-winds.

And with silver harness and reins of gold, Out came the East of Kan foreman and his company.

And there came also the "True man" of Shi-yo to meet me, Playing on a jewelled mouth-organ.

In the storied houses of San-ka they gave us more Sennin music,
Many instruments, like the sound of young phoenix broods.

The foreman of Kan-chu, drunk, danced because his long sleeves wouldn't keep still
With that music playing, And I, wrapped in brocade, went to sleep with my head on his lap,
And my spirit so high it was all over the heavens, And before the end of the day we were scattered like stars, or rain.

I had to be off to So, far away over the waters, You back to your river-bridge.

And your father, who was brave as a leopard, With governor in Hei Shu, and put down the barbarian rabble.

And one May he had you send for me, despite the long distance.

And what with broken wheels and so on, I won't say it wasn't hard going, Over roads twisted like sheep's guts.

And I was still going, late in the year, in the cutting wind from the North, And thinking how little you cared for the cost, and you caring enough to pay it.

And what a reception: Red jade cups, food well set on a blue jewelled table, And I was drunk, and had no thought of returning.

And you would walk out with me to the western corner of the castle, To the dynastic temple, with water about it clear as blue jade, With boats floating, and the sound of mouth-organs and drums, With ripples like dragon-scales, going grass green on the water, Pleasure lasting, with courtezans, going and coming without hindrance, With the willow flakes falling like snow, And the vermilioned girls getting drunk about sunset, And the water, a hundred feet deep, reflecting green eyebrows -Eyebrows painted green are a fine sight in young moonlight, Gracefully painted And the girls singing back at each other, Dancing in transparent brocade, Ant the wind lifting the song, and interrupting it, Tossing it up under the clouds.

And all this comes to an end.

And is not again to be met with.

I went up to the court for examination, Tried Yo Yu's luck, offered the Choyo song, And got no promotion, and went back to the East Mountains White-headed.

And once again, later, we met at the South bridgehead.

And then the crowd broke up, you went north to San palace, And if you ask how I regret that parting: It is like the flowers falling at Spring's end Confused, whirled in a tangle.

What is the use of talking, and there is no end of talking, There is no end of things in the heart.

I call in the boy, Have him sit on his knees here To seal this, And send it a thousand miles, thinking.

THE END