

1915

THE RIVER-MERCHANT'S WIFE:

A LETTER

Ezra Pound Translated from the Chinese of Li 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. The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter (1915) - An adaptation of a translation by Ernest Fenollosa of the Chinese poet Li Po, collected in "Cathay." Opening line: While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead ...

RIVER MERCHANTS WIFE

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead I played
about the front gate, pulling flowers.

You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse, You walked about
my seat, playing with blue plums.

And we went on living in the village of Chokan: Two small people,
without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.

I never laughed, being bashful.

Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.

Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

At fifteen I stopped scowling, I desired my dust to be mingled with
yours Forever and forever and forever.

Why should I climb the look out?

At sixteen you departed, You went into far Ku-to-yen, by the river
of swirling eddies, And you have been gone five months.

The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.

You dragged your feet when you went out.

By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses, Too deep
to clear them away!

The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.

The paired butterflies are already yellow with August Over the
grass in the West garden; They hurt me. I grow older.

If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,
Please let me know beforehand, And I will come out to meet you
As far as Cho-fu-sa.

THE END