1. **THE RIVER-MERCHANT'S WIFE: A LETTER**

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.

*by Rihaku.*

Ezra Pound, from *Cathay* (London, 6th April 1915), reprinted in *Collected Shorter Poems* (London, 1952), pp. 140-1. The above text is from the *Cathay* printing, since the CSP text shews significant variants, particularly in lineation (lines 25-6, as above, become one line, as also in the *Pers* text, p. 134, but not in *Poems and Translations*, ed. Sieburth, p. 252). The text printed in *The Translations of Ezra Pound*, with intro. by Hugh Kenner (London, 1953), implicitly purports to be that of *Cathay* but has also been tampered with. For other early English translations see Amy Lowell (with Florence Ayscough), *Fir-Flower Tablets* (London, 1921), pp. 28-9 (Complete
Pound made this translation from 'Rihaku' (i.e., Li Bai) from the annotated transcriptions made by Ernest Fenollosa; for a brief summary of this process see K.K. Ruthven, A Guide to Ezra Pound's 'Personae' (1926) (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), p. 222 (his notes on the text are at pp. 205-6), and, more fully, Sanehide Kodama, American Poetry and Japanese Culture (Hamden, Conn., 1984), Chap. 3; Zhaoming Qian, Orientalism and Modernism; The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams (Durham, N.C., 1995), pp. 76-82. For the evidence that by the date of Cathay Pound knew well enough that 'Rihaku' was in fact Li Po (Li Bai), see Hugh Kenner, 'Notes on Amateur Emendations' in Lawrence S. Rainey (ed.), A Poem Containing History; Textual Studies in The Cantos (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1997), p. 25, and Wenxin Li, 'The Li Po that Ezra Pound Knew', Paideuma, 27 (1998), 81-89. For the contradiction between imagism's direct treatment of the thing and translation's indirect treatment of an historically remote discourse see Paul Morrison, The Poetics of Fascism; Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Paul de Man (Oxford, 1996), pp. 16-19; Pound's idea to treat the ideogram as itself a talismanic, prediscursive thing was inherently self-contradictory, premised upon his lack of joined-up understanding, but sanctioned by his belief that only by such means could discourse participate in the nature of the reality that it renders intelligible.


Pound's version breaks the parallel couplet at lines 13-14, substituting 'Forever and forever, and forever' as a self-ironic echo of her naive trust in perpetuity; in 'I never looked back' he supplies a distantly sombre echo of Eurydice's fate. In his copy of Cathay (London, 1915), Yeats has altered l. 7 to read 'At fourteen we were married to one another'; also, l. 14 is cancelled; see Edward O'Shea (ed.), A Descriptive Catalogue of W.B. Yeats's Library (New York, 1985), p. 212. Bush comments astutely, about Pound's opening line: 'The word "still" here is Pound's invention, and not Li Po's (in his 'Pound and Li Po', p. 41); compare 'also' in 'Fan-Piece for her Imperial Lord'. Smith considers all this transcultural manoeuvring a blatant 'confidence-trick'; see

For a yet further translation of Pound’s version, into German (‘Das Weib des Flusshändlers’) see Eva Hesse (trans.), *Ezra Pound, Dichtung und Prosa* (West-Berlin, 1959), p. 63.

2. **THE BALLAD OF CH’ANG-KAN**

   *(The Sailor’s Wife)*

   I with my hair fringed on my forehead
   Breaking blossom, was romping outside:

   And you rode up on your bamboo steed,
   Round our garden beds we juggled green plums;
   Living alike in Ch’ang-kan village
   We were both small, without doubts or guile . . .

   When at fourteen I became your bride
   I was bashful and could only hide
   My face and frown against a dark wall:
   A thousand calls, not once did I turn;

   I was fifteen before I could smile,
   Long to be one, like dust with ashes:
   You’d ever stand by pillar faithful,
   I’d never climb the Watcher’s Mountain!

   I am sixteen but you went away
   Through Ch’ü-t’ang Gorge, passing Yen-yü Rock
   And when in June it should not be passed,
   Where the gibbons cried high above you.

   Here by the door our farewell footprints,
   They one by one are growing green moss,
   The moss so thick I cannot sweep it,
   And fallen leaves: Autumn winds come soon!

   September now: yellow butterflies
   Flying in pairs in the west garden;
   And what I feel hurts me in my heart,
   Sadness to make a pretty face old . . .

   Late or early coming from San-pa,
   Before you come, write me a letter:
   To welcome you, don’t talk of distance,
   I’ll go as far as the Long Wind Sands!

Li Bai, or Li Po (701-62), from Arthur Cooper (trans.), *Li Po and Tu Fu* (Penguin Classics; Harmonsworth, 1973), pp. 125-6. Pound perhaps did not
know that the original poem was probably one of a pair, since the second poem has sometimes been excluded from the canon; Cooper translates both poems, and provides a first-rate brief commentary ('The poem is a love-poem to his wife but written as if from her to him, which was a common practice at the time'--p. 127). For another modern translation of both poems see, e.g., Elling Eide (trans.), *Poems by Li Po* (Lexington, Ky., 1983), XXVII, 1-2 (pp. 39-40). For an idea of the method and problems of such translation see David Hawkes, *A Little Primer of Tu Fu* (Oxford, 1967; reprinted, Hong Kong, 1987). David Hinton in a note to his translation, *The Selected Poems of Li Po* (London, 1996), comments that ‘there is no reason to think that the husband is a river-merchant’ (p. 125). It is useful to know (maybe Pound did) that all marriages at this time were arranged by family match-makers: the girl probably had no part at all in the arrangements. Also, already by the start of the T’ang dynasty (618-907) a vast network of canals and canalized rivers had been constructed, to connect northern and western with east-central China and to carry, silk, salt, trading goods and above all grain (see Gernet, *History of Chinese Civilisation*, pp. 238-42); rich merchants controlled fleets of river-vessels whose crews led a hard life with long absences from home. The places named in this poem, entrepôts and danger-spots on the Yangtze waterway system, are very widely separated (though the Japanese transliterations suggest that Pound didn’t know this directly). On the traditional danger of these gorges see Hinton’s note, p. 129; on the emotional geography see Bush, op. cit., pp. 41-2.

Beneath the surface of Pound’s version we may sense the effects of many features of Chinese social practice which Pound could not know and must therefore intuit. The uneasiness of the young wife relates to the Confucian values which insist on her husband as the sole source of validation in their union; and his expertise is the merchandising of goods and their exchange values: relative market prices. She by contrast clings to an alternative romantic scheme of values, of tender constant affection, all too vulnerable, as clearly she recognises, to the erosion of distance and absence. Her only protection is both a demure self-irony (‘for ever and ever and ever’) and the implicit pain of unguarded affectionate totality; even this is ironised in the anecdotes about ‘climbing the lookout’ (a reference to legendary romantic loyalties which Pound evidently didn’t comprehend). This is her only negotiating asset, and not wishing to play the market she keeps all her feelings to herself; thus feeling them more sharply as the price of continuing hope and trust, even despite all the omens of seasonal change and the shifts of time. Neither eager (running out too far) nor timid (not leaving the house) she will go just so far to meet him, her delicate modesty traced out by the mute space of the indented last line (which in Cooper’s version carries a clumsy exclamation mark, not of course in the Chinese). Pound’s skill lies in the exceptionally acute reconstruction by nuance and obliquity of this most complex state of internal feeling; a skill learned (perhaps) from Browning.
3. **Chokanko**

regular 5
name of town
  Chokan= ko=uta=narrative song
place
  long-Mt. side

**Sho** mistress **hatsu** hair **sho** first **fuku** cover **gaku** brow
Chinese lady’s I or my beginning
My hair was at first covering my brows.
  (Chinese method of wearing hair)

**Setsu kwa** break flowers **mon** gate **zen** front **geki** play
Breaking flower branches I was frolicking in front of our gate.

**ro** Second person **ki** ride on **chiku ba rai** bamboo horse come masculine 
you, young man 
lit. young man
When you came riding on bamboo stilts

**Gio** going round **sho ro sei bai** seat play with blue plums (fruit)
And going about my seat, you played with the blue plums.

**Do** same **kio cho kan ri** dwell village 
Together we dwelt in the same Chokan village.

**rio** double **sho mu ken sai** small not dislike suspicion 
"the two"
And we two little ones had neither mutual dislike or suspicion.
  (no evil thoughts or bashfulness)

**ju shi i kun fu**
Fourteen became lord’s wife your
At fourteen I became your wife--

**shu gan mi jo kai** bashful face not yet ever open
Bashful I never opened my face (I never laughed)

**Tei to ko am peki** lowering head face black wall
but lowering my head I always faced towards a dark wall ashamed to see anybody--she sat in dark corners
Sen kan fu itsu kai
thousand call not once look back
And though a thousand times called, not once did I look around......

ju go shi tem bi
15 first time open eyebrows
At fifteen I first opened my brows
i.e.
I first knew what married life meant now she opens her eyebrows.
i.e. smoothes out the wrinkles between her brows. She now began
to understand love, and to be happy.

Gan do jin yo bai
desire same dust together with ashes
and
And so I desired to live and die with you even after death, I wish
to be with you even as dust, and even as ashes--partially together.

Jo son ho chu shin
eternally preserve embrace pillar faith
I always had in me the faith of holding to pillars.

Ki jo bo fu dai
Why should climb look out husband terrace
And why should I think of climbing the husband looking out terrace.

ju roku kun en ko
16 you far go.
At 16, however, you had to go far away.

fearful riverside both yen & yo are adj. expressing form of
water passing over hidden rocks

Ku to yen yo tai
name yenyo-rock
of locality eddy?
(towards Shoku passing through the difficult place of Yenyotai at Kuto.)

Go getsu i ka shoku
5 month not must touch
In May not to be touched.
The ship must be careful of them in May.

En sei ten jo ai
monkeys voices heaven above sorrowful
Monkeys cry sorrowful above heaven.

Mon zen chi ko seki
gate front late go footsteps
reluctant
Your footsteps, made by your reluctant departure, in front of our gate.
itsu itsu sei rioku tai
one one grow green mosses
one by one have been grown up into green moss.

Tai shin fu no so
mosses deep not can wipe away
These mosses have grown so deep that it is difficult to wipe them away.

Raku yo shu fu so
Fallen leaves autumn wind early
And the fallen leaves indicate autumn wind which (to my thought only) appears to come earlier than usual.

male female
Hachi gatsu ko cho ko
8th month butterflies yellow
It being already August, the butterflies are yellow.

So hi sei yen so
pairs fly western garden grass
And yellow as they are, they fly in pairs on the western garden grass.

Kan shi sho sho shin
affected (by) this hurt (female) mind
normal my pained
Affected at this, (absence) my heart pains.

Za shu ko gan ro
gradually lament crimson face decay--older become old.
The longer the absence lasts, the deeper I mourn, my early fine pink face, will pass to oldness, to my great regret.

So ban ka sam pa
sooner (or) later descend three whirls
name of spot on Yangtze Kiang, where waters whirl
If you coming down as far as the Three Narrows sooner or later.

Yo sho sho ho ka
beforehand with letter report family-home
Please let me know by writing

Sho gei fu do yen
mutually meeting not say far
coming to meet
For I will go out to meet, not saying that the way be far.
And will directly come to Chofusha.
(the port just this side of Sampa)

Ernest Fenollosa, Notebook transcription and annotation of Li Bai, 'Changgan Xing' ('Chokanko' in Japanese). Text from 'Early Chinese Poetry / Kutsugen / KA-GI / E.F.F. / translation by Ariga', notebook now in the Beinecke Library at Yale University, File 20, pp. 128-35, as reproduced in Sanehide Kodama, American Poetry and Japanese Culture, pp. 80-4. The Japanese romanisation follows the Hepburn system, then in vogue. The title of this poem in the original eighth century Chinese does not refer to the narrative at all, but is the name for a specific classical type of poetic form, in which the number of lines, the exact number of characters (5) within each line, the mandatory rhyme scheme, and so on, are strictly determined; the 'thematic title' to the English version is entirely Pound's invention. On the other side of the page across from the lines about 'holding to pillars' and 'husband looking out terrace' are Fenollosa's pencil notes:

'referring to the story of a yangster [sic] called Bisei who once promised his love to be waiting for her below a bridge --she was late in coming, and the water gradually rose in tide, yet faithful to promise he clung onto the pillar and was drowned.'
'Reference to story where a wife, looking out for her husband, who was late in returning, she died in that position and was petrified. The rock still pointed out and was called Bofutai.'

Kodama's commentary (pp. 74-80) is informative but deaf to Pound's irony and its expressive obliquities, which are qualities stationed in the Chinese original by quite different means. For a more modern character-by-character account of this poem, with the Chinese calligraphic text and a modern English translation, see also Wai-lim Yip (ed. and trans.), Chinese Poetry; An Anthology of Major Modes and Genres (Durham, N.C., 1997), pp. 274-7; modern or not, the line which Pound renders 'They hurt me' and which Yip glosses as 'moved-by this hurt my heart' is then translated by Yip as 'These smite my heart'. Pound had some fun with 'smite' in the Yankee pastiche of his 'A Villonaud: Ballad of the Gibbet', a carouse set in a medieval French brothel (Poems and Translations, ed. Sieburth, p. 30). Verb sap.

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