

## EZRA POUND

“A PACT”            “IN A STATION OF THE METRO”

“THE RIVER-MERCHANT’S WIFE: A LETTER”

This handout was prepared by Dr. William Tarvin, a retired professor of literature. Please visit my free website [www.tarvinlit.com](http://www.tarvinlit.com). Over 500 works of American and British literature are analyzed there for free.

**An ANSWER KEY is provided at the end of this handout (p. 4).**

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The influence of Ezra Pound (1885-1972) on other poets was probably greater than the poetry he himself wrote.

2. Very early in his life, he was convinced that he must leave America and go to Europe if he was to develop as a poet. He left in 1908 and settled in London, quickly becoming involved in its literary life.

3. In 1912, Pound coined the term Imagism and founded the school that bore that name. Rather than describing something—an object or situation—and then generalizing about it, imagist poets attempted to present the object directly.

4. Pound railed against literary diction, poetic metrics, and abstract vocabulary: “Go in fear of abstraction,” Pound cautioned.

5. He was to be helpful to aspiring writers such as T. S. \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ Joyce, William Carlos \_\_\_\_\_, Robert \_\_\_\_\_, H. D., and \_\_\_\_\_ Hemingway in their writing careers, to name just a few.

6. He began work on his major book of poetry Cantos in 1915 and continued working on it the rest of his life.

7. He settled in Italy in 1925. Because of some radio broadcasts he made during World War II praising fascism and criticizing America, Pound was indicted for \_\_\_\_\_.

8. Declared insane and thus unfit to be tried, he became a patient and a prisoner in a mental institution in Washington, D. C., in 1946.

9. Many major poets lobbied for his release; after gaining it in 1958, Pound returned to \_\_\_\_\_ where he lived until his death in 1972.

10. He remains one of the most controversial poets of the twentieth century.

11. The major stylistic features of his poetry are the following: (1) tremendous erudition, (2) startling images, and (3) stream-of-thought progression (one image leading to another without transition).

## II. “A PACT”

1. THEME: The poet’s gradual recognition of Whitman as a great poet.
2. STRUCTURE: Four principal structuring devices are used:

(1) Pronouns: “I” vs. “you” at the beginning: “\_\_\_\_\_ have detested \_\_\_\_\_ long enough” (2). This becomes “we”/ “us” at the end: “\_\_\_\_\_ have one sap and one root— / Let there be commerce between \_\_\_\_\_” (8-9).

(2) Child/father rivalry: The speaker says his first evaluation of Whitman was as a “\_\_\_\_\_” (a young poet) who felt he had “a \_\_\_\_\_-headed \_\_\_\_\_ [Whitman as the founder of American poetry]” (3-4). However, this poetic rivalry over time became a friendship: “I am old enough now [mature enough as a poet] to make \_\_\_\_\_” (5), that is, to appreciate Whitman’s poetic greatness.

(3) Wood/Tree imagery: He recognizes that Whitman “broke the new \_\_\_\_\_” (6), that is, revolutionized American poetry. He concedes that all succeeding American poets are simply “carv[ers]” (7) from Whitman’s “new wood.” Therefore, because of Whitman all American poets have as their poetic origin “\_\_\_\_\_ sap” and “one \_\_\_\_\_” (8).

(4) Title of the poem: “Pact” comes from the Latin word pax (“peace”). Thus the speaker begins by announcing that he has made his peace with Whitman: “I make a \_\_\_\_\_ with you, Walt Whitman” (1). Having made that peace, he is willing to take from Whitman, that is, have “\_\_\_\_\_” (9) with him, recognizing that only through studying Whitman’s poetry can he become as great a poet as Whitman.

## III. “IN A STATION OF THE METRO”

1. This most famous of all Imagist poems is a description of people in a Paris subway on a dark, rainy night.

2. IMAGERY: According to the speaker, the poem presents an “\_\_\_\_\_” (1), that is, “something that appears unexpectedly and in an extraordinary way.” Thus in this poem the contrasting imagery transforms a realistic setting into a transcendent experience.

(1) The people’s faces are compared to flower “\_\_\_\_\_” (2): This image is delicate, radiant, and lovely. The flowers are round and vibrant like the faces of the people.

(2) The subway platform is compared to the “wet, black \_\_\_\_\_” (2) from which the petals hang: the bough image is dark, cold, and wet. A branch is oblong like the shape of the platform.

#### IV. “THE RIVER-MERCHANT’S WIFE: A LETTER”

1. THEME: The deep \_\_\_\_\_ of a wife for her absent husband.
2. STRUCTURE: The poem is structured by the speaker’s unwillingness to go to the man before their marriage and her willingness to \_\_\_\_\_ far to see him only two years after their marriage.
3. STANZA 1: The letter-writer remembers when she, a young girl, first saw the person who would be her husband: The parallel structure of lines 2 and 3, ending with her “pulling \_\_\_\_\_” and him “playing \_\_\_\_\_,” presents her early contrast between the two. Neither seems aware that their parents have arranged their marriage.
4. STANZA 2: At \_\_\_\_\_, she finds that she is forced to marry this neighboring young man, whom she must now regard not as a playful boy on “\_\_\_\_\_ stilts” (2), but as “My \_\_\_\_\_” (7). She is hesitant to go to him, seemingly angry at being compelled into marriage.
5. STANZA 3: At \_\_\_\_\_, she says she had “stopped \_\_\_\_\_” (11). Having married without love, she has miraculously fallen deeply in love with her husband and now desires “my \_\_\_\_\_ to be \_\_\_\_\_ with yours / Forever and forever, and \_\_\_\_\_” (12-13).
6. STANZA 4: At \_\_\_\_\_, she says her river-\_\_\_\_\_ husband went on a business trip, which took him up a dangerous river of rapid currents (15-16). He has been gone “\_\_\_\_\_ months” (17). She had noticed that as he left, “You \_\_\_\_\_ your feet” (19), an indication that now he was hesitant to go from her just as earlier she had been hesitant to come to him.
  - a. Why does she use the monkeys’ image (18) and the moss image (20-21)?  
It is she, who is filled with loneliness, who turns the monkeys’ noise “\_\_\_\_\_” (18). The moss image suggests that her love for her husband has “grown,” become “\_\_\_\_\_,” and is “Too deep to \_\_\_\_\_ . . . away” (20-21)
  - b. Why do the “paired butterflies” (23) “hurt” (25) her?  
The butterflies are together, that is, “\_\_\_\_\_” (23), making her realize painfully—her “\_\_\_\_\_” (25)—that she is alone.
  - c. What is ironic in line 26?  
It is ironic for a 16-year-old girl to say, “I grow \_\_\_\_\_.”
  - d. How are lines 29-30 ironic?  
At fourteen, she had not wanted to go from her house to his neighboring house (in essence, across the street) to be with him. Now she is willing to travel from their home in Chokan “As \_\_\_\_\_ as Cho-fu-Sa” (30), a distance of several hundred miles “to \_\_\_\_\_” (29) him.

**ANSWER KEY**

I. INTRODUCTION

5. Eliot; Joyce; Williams; Frost.
7. treason.
9. Italy.

II. "A PACT"

2. I; you; We; us; child; pig; father; friends; wood; one; root; pact; commerce.

III. "IN A STATION OF THE METRO"

2. apparition; Petals; bough.

IV. "THE RIVER-MERCHANT'S WIFE: A LETTER"

1. love.
2. travel.
3. flowers; horse.
4. fourteen; bamboo; Lord.
5. fifteen; scowling; dust; mingled; forever.
6. sixteen; merchant; five; dragged.
  - a. sorrowful; different; clear.
  - b. paired; hurt.
  - c. older.
  - d. far; meet.