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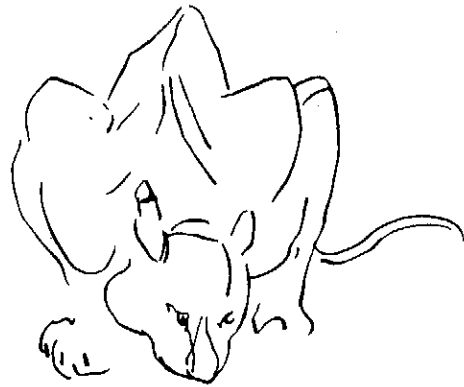
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THE INVENTION OF CHINA

"...it must be pointed out that Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time."

—T. S. Eliot, 1928

On 22 August 1901, late in the last weeks he was ever to spend in Japan, Ernest Fenollosa smoothed a fresh page of his notebook and filled with black ink his calligraphic brush. He had been paraphrasing Kainan Mori's discourse on Chinese poetry in the rapid hand of one whose pencil has filled a great many books. Now onto four consecutive unruled pages he transcribed the 50 ideographs of a ten-line poem, chosen by Mori to illustrate an historical point. The characters, decisively stroked after years of practice, ran according to his custom in horizontal lines from left to right, to facilitate a Westerner's exegesis. Under each ideograph he pencilled the Japanese sound by which he and his instructor designated the words: *sei . . . sei . . . ka . . . han . . . so . . .* Under each sound in turn went an English word or two, glossing nodes in the structure of meaning. And having mounted and labelled the exhibit, he resumed his scribbling of interpretative notes.

This notebook, in brown mottled binding, labelled "Prof. Mori's Lectures: Vol. II," came 12 years later into Ezra Pound's keeping, having crossed two oceans and "the American continent *en route*, one of some 16 from which Pound first chose, as literary executor, to extract the notes on Noh drama. Late in 1914, in his odd-shaped flat in South Kensington, he turned at last to the poem above which Fenollosa had pencilled "(no name)." Below the characters stood the merest glosses, but sufficient:

blue	blue	river	bank, side	grass
luxuriantly	luxuriantly	garden	in	willow
fill full	fill full	storied house	on	girl
in first bloom of youth				
white brilliant luminous	(ditto)	just face	window	door
beauty of face	(ditto)	red	powder	toilet
slender	slender	put forth	white	hand
in former times	was	courtesan	house	girl
now	is	dissipated	son's	wife
dissipated	son	go away	not	return
empty	bed	hard	only one, alone	keep

Six lines present her situation, four more explain it. To mark off this structural division, like a sonnet's, each line in the first section of the poem begins with a reduplication: blue, blue; luxuriantly, luxuriantly; . . . slender, slender. Pound judged his English needed some less obtrusive principle, and though the version

he published in early 1915 commences, to strike the keynote, by reduplicating—

Blue, blue, is the grass about the river

it modulates at once into a less obvious pairing:

And the willows have overfilled the close garden.

The third line relies on paired m's and clustered short i's:

And within, the mistress, in the midmost of her youth

The fourth line returns to reduplication:

White, white of face, hesitates, passing the door.

The fifth line of the Chinese he omitted, taking from it only a title, "The Beautiful Toilet." From the sixth he made another reduplication, its members gracefully separated:

Slender, she puts forth a slender hand.

A pairing, an internal rhyme, an assonance, a pairing, a split pairing: without recourse to anything insistent the structure of the poem's first lobe has been shaped into cohesion, aided by the opening of two consecutive lines with "And," aided too by the delicate pathos of her white face and her slender hand put forth. Then imitating the structural division, Pound contracted his line to utter a quiet quatrain:

And she was a courtesan in the old days
And she has married a sot,
Who now goes drunkenly out
And leaves her too much alone.

A former year's study of Giles's *History of Chinese Literature* had brought before his eyes a version which begins

Green grows the grass upon the bank,
The willow-shoots are long and lank;
A lady in a glistening gown
Opens the casement and looks down,

and it seems a fair guess that he now turned this up to verify that he had indeed reworked the same poem. Certainly he got from Giles the poet's name (Mei Sheng, the only name in *Cathay* not in Japanese form) and the date, 140 B.C.; and reinspecting as he did so Giles's empty couplets, he was entitled to reflect that a China of the mind existed at last.

Implying, syllable by syllable, with cunning governance of pace, an alien poetic which works by nuance even when iterating its monosyllables, such artistry deserves better than one sinologue's dismissal of "so-called 'free verse'," or another's pidgin fumbling with the same poem, published in implied rebuke three years later:

Green, green,
The grass by the river bank,
Thick, thick,
The willow trees in the garden.
Sad, sad,
The lady in the tower . . .

This version (yes, it is Waley's) closes lamentably:

Now she is a wandering man's wife
The wandering man went, but did not return.
It is hard alone to keep an empty bed.

This is a resourceless man's verse; the resourceless man wrote but did not transmute; it is hard alone to wring song from philology.

* * *

Waley was but one of many who rushed in as word of the two-shilling pamphlet, *Cathay*, got around. *Vers libre* with an Oriental décor looked easy, like the automatic writing of the Zeitgeist. In those years writers dabbled in *vers libre* if they were alive in the present, and *chinoiserie* had been floating about for some decades. John Gould Fletcher has recalled the power of Lafcadio Hearn, Giles's *History*, and Judith Gautier's *Le Livre de Jade* over a young imagination first quickened by the treasures in the Oriental Wing of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, circa 1905. (He may never have known that the collection had been assembled by

Fenollosa, whom Boston chose to forget after his 1895 divorce.) Fletcher cites a poem—

The lanterns dangle at the ends of long wires, the breeze bobs
them to and fro.
My soul is in love with that lazy lantern dance.
Oh how the autumn gusts through the dark gardens
Rattle them together, rending their crimson sides

—which he entitled, in 1913, “From the Chinese,” though it actually recalled “a far-off garden party I had witnessed as an extremely young man in Arkansas.” For, “Its substance was no more taken from any particular Chinese poem than was the substance of certain other experiments in the same book, labelled ‘From the Japanese,’ actually taken from that language. I knew nothing of either.” Composition *à la mode chinoise* was one of the directions the *vers-libre* movement, guided by current intuitions of beauty, was fated to explore had there been no Fenollosa and no Pound. And someone, surely, would have attempted *vers-libre* versions of actual Chinese poems, as inevitable corrective to post-Symboliste nostalgias. Someone in fact had; Pound himself had, with no Chinese to draw on but only Giles’s couplets. Giles’s *History* for instance contains this version of the Han emperor Liu Ch’ê’s threnody for a harem favorite—

The sound of rustling silk is stilled,
With dust the marble courtyard filled;
No footfalls echo on the floor,
Fallen leaves in heaps block up the door. . . .
For she, my pride, my lovely one, is lost,
And I am left, in hopeless anguish tossed.

And early in 1913 Ezra Pound, beater on impossible doors, had rewritten this (this!) with a graver decorum:

The rustling of the silk is discontinued,
Dust drifts over the courtyard,
There is no sound of footfall, and the leaves
Scurry into heaps and lie still,
And she the rejoicer of the heart is beneath them:
A wet leaf that clings to the threshold.

This was meant for inclusion in the first “Imagiste” affirmation, and “A wet leaf that clings to the threshold” simply applies Imagist canons, the mind’s creative leap fetching some token of the gone woman into the poem’s system. [No wet leaf clings in the Chinese, and there is no indication that Pound supposed one did; he simply knew what his poem needed.] In the same way he condensed 12 lines from Giles—

O fair white silk, fresh from the weaver’s loom,
Clear as the frost, bright as the winter snow—
See! friendship fashions out of thee a fan,
Round as the round moon shines in heaven above . . . [etc.]

to the masterly

Fan-Piece, for her Imperial Lord

O fan of white silk,
clear as frost on the grass-blade,
You also are laid aside.

This is contemporary with “In a Station of the Metro,” which early in 1913 he had instructed Harriet Monroe to print thus:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.

—two lines, five phases of perception. Later typesetters, thinking this queer, have closed up the spaces. There is no indication that he was thinking of Chinese characters when he grouped sensations that way, but he was clearly ready for the gift Mary Fenollosa made him during that year, prompted, it appears, by the command of idiom displayed in that poem and in 11 others of the *Contemporanea* group in the April 1913 *Poetry*.

They met under the roof of Sarajini Naidu, a Hindu nationalist poetess. In the five years since her husband’s sudden death Mrs. Fenollosa had been occupied with his masses of manuscript material. By 1912, after a special trip to Japan and a spell at the British Museum, she had brought his *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* into publishable form, a handsome two-volume work. There remained hundreds of pages on Japanese plays and Chinese poetry, which demanded not an editor but a poet; Fenollosa himself had

✓ written that ["the purpose of poetical translation is the poetry, not the verbal definitions in dictionaries."]

The notebooks record his five years' furious quest for the facts which should underlie a grasp of the poetry. Three sessions with a Mr. Hirai in September 1896 yielded detailed if sometimes vague glosses on 22 poems by Wang Wei and Li Po ("Omakitsu," "Rihaku"; all the proper names in the notebooks are in Japanese form). With a Mr. Shida two years later he studied T'ao Ch'ien ("To-Em-Mei"). Then in February 1899 he commenced two years' intensive work with Professor Mori (1863-1911), a distinguished literary scholar and himself a practitioner of the delicate
 X [art, called in Japan *kanshi*, of writing poems in Classical Chinese.] Mori spoke no English, and though Fenollosa's Japanese was adequate he often brought with him to their private sessions his own former philosophy student Nagao Ariga, who had at one time written out for him texts and translations of early Chinese poems. Ariga, one surmises, helped Fenollosa be sure he understood Mori's discourse when the talk got technical.

For a year and a half they worked through "Rihaku"; two very large notebooks contain cribs, glosses, comments, scholarly apparatus for 64 poems. (These furnished the backbone of *Cathay*.) Toward the end of this time Fenollosa was also working at early and Taoist poems with another teacher. Finally, on his last sojourn in Japan (April-September 1901) he commissioned from Mori a course of systematic lectures in literary history, commencing with the legendary invention of the written characters. A Mr. Hirata interpreted. They filled three notebooks; the last entry (19 Sept. 1901) is dated just days before Ernest Fenollosa left Japan for ever.

And the record of all this study, eight notebooks in all, plus the volumes of notes on *Noh* drama, plus the books in which he was drafting his lectures on Chinese poetics, plus a sheaf of loose sheets, all these his widow in late 1913 transferred to Ezra Pound, some in London, some later by mail from Alabama. So it came about that the opportunity to invent Chinese poetry for our time fell not to some random modernist but to a master. [The 14 poems in the original *Cathay*, selected from some 150 in the notebooks, were the first *vers-libre* translations not derived from other translations but from detailed notes on the Chinese texts.]

No follower profited by the mastery. *Cathay* encouraged subsequent translators of Chinese to abandon rhyme and fixed stress counts. It also inaugurated the long tradition of Pound the inspired but unreliable translator. In the subsequent half-century's sniffing and squabbling its real achievement went virtually unnoticed.

* * *

Its real achievement lay not on the frontier of comparative poetics, but securely within the effort, then going forward in London, [to rethink the nature of an English poem.] It consisted in maximizing three criteria at once, criteria hitherto developed separately: the *vers-libre* principle, that the single line is the unit of composition; the Imagist principle, that a poem may build its effects out of things it sets before the mind's eye by naming them; and the lyrical principle, that words or names, being ordered in time, are bound together and recalled into each other's presence by recurrent sounds.

These things had been done before but not simultaneously. In Pound's earlier work we can point to a *vers libre* that proceeds line by line but allows the lines to seem disconnected gestures

(Lo! this thing is not mine
 Nor thine to hinder
 For the custom is full old . . .);

and to an imagism of things named that names them as though arbitrarily

(I have known the golden disc,
 I have seen it melting above me.
 I have known the stone-bright place,
 The hall of clear colours);

and to a craft of sound only languidly attentive to denotations

(My love is lovelier than sprays
 Of eglantine above clear waters,
 Or whitest lilies that upraise
 Their heads in midst of moated waters).

Pound's sound

Much of the work of Pound's twenties, including work he later chose not to reprint, was a search for poems that should have some structural principle other than the writer's mood or the strophe's requirements. He tried turning the mood into a mask, an exiled troubadour, a Ninevite bard; he built strophes into canzones or sestinas ("Altaforte") and dissected other strophes down to their ossature ("The Return"). He iterated elementary syntactic members ("Commission") and dissolved syntax in iridescences of diction ("The Alchemist"). And in his thirtieth year, in *Cathay*, guided by notes that plotted the nodes of meaning and obligated by their concision and clarity, he managed for the first time to articulate numerous extended poems in a *vers libre* not confoundable with cut-up prose, answerable to no overt system of counts or assonances, but held together from within by so many filaments, syntactic, sonoric, imagistic, that any change, as surely as change in a verse of Pope's, will be change for the worse. Thus:

Light rain is on the light dust
The willows of the inn-yard
Will be going greener and greener . . .

—three lines of a tiny vignette worked up from a quatrain Fenollosa studied with Hirai, noting that in Japanese transcription it rhymed like an Omar Khayyám stanza.* Pound used it as epigraph to "Four Poems of Departure," and contrived for it a delicate formality. Each line has its own entelechy.

Light rain is on the light dust

* The notes, omitting the Japanese sounds, run:

I castle morning rain wets light dust
The castle on the I river, i.e. a walled city

Guest house blue blue willow color new
in the inns where you will stay thereafter, the new color of the willow trees will be green green

Advise you lord newly annihilate one cup saki
I advise you, however, to put an end to a cup of wine

West departure Yo gate, barrier not original, old man
Going westward through the Yo gate there will not be any old friend.

The pencil scribble lays frequent traps. It is easy, as Pound did, to misread *Yo* as *Go*. The poem is by Wang Wei ("Omakitsu").

—square symmetry of phrasing; symmetry of metrical emphasis, the three little words slung between two spondees; a word that recurs in two senses;

The willows of the inn-yard

—again three little words and two spondees, but the first spondee ("willows") blunted and moved one step into the line, and the sounds of the two of them this time quite dissimilar;

Will be going greener and greener

—a triple alliteration; a doubling, "greener" repeating "greener" as "light" previously echoed "light"; an assonantal linking, the sound of "willows" repeated by the sound of "will," and this assonance, now that three instances rule out accident, clearly a carrying forward through all three lines of the liquid syllable introduced by "light."

More: the terminal syllable of "greener" sponsors a line keyed by r's—

But you, Sir, had better take wine ere your departure;

and here, just as the second person enters the poem, we realize that every line has featured a word in "n"—rain, inn, greener, wine—to recur, sure enough, in the "friends" of the next line also—

For you will have no friends about you

—and to initiate the last line of all as (echoing the "no" of "no friends") alliterated gates clang with an eerie finality:

When you come to the gates of Go.

On its page in *Cathay* the whole poem is scarcely larger than a postage stamp. Its sonoric intricacies would have delighted Pope.

And it has another claim on our attention; it documents the year it was written in more than one way. Dating from the first winter of the war, it is like a poem abstracted from the departure of troop trains. For *Cathay*, April 1915 (which did not, we should remember, include the last four of the poems now gathered under

that title) is largely a war book, using Fenollosa's notes much as Pope used Horace or Johnson Juvenal, to supply a system of parallels and a structure of discourse. Its exiled bowmen, deserted women, levelled dynasties, departures for far places, lonely frontier guardsmen and glories remembered from afar, cherished memories, were selected from the diverse wealth in the notebooks by a sensibility responsive to [torn Belgium and disrupted London;] and as "The Jewel Stairs' Grievance" is "especially prized because she offers no direct reproach," so *Cathay* essays an oriental obliquity of reference to what we are to understand as its true theme. In the same way, two years later, Pound was to handle the plight of the poet in wartime by way of a transposed Propertius; and much as the title alone connects "In a Station of the Metro" with its occasion, so the date on the title page connects *Cathay* with the privations of the Expeditionary forces across the channel. "I keep the book in my pocket," Gaudier-Brzeska wrote from the Marne of the little two-ounce pamphlet. "Indeed I use [the poems] to put courage in my fellows. I speak now of the 'Bowmen' and the 'North Gate' [i.e. 'Lament of the Frontier Guard'] which are so appropriate to our case." He had had typescripts of these two poems and a third—presumably "South Folk in Cold Country"—four months previously in the marshes of the Aisne ("a sight worthy of Dante, there was at the bottom [of the trenches] a foot deep of liquid mud in which we had to stand two days and two nights"), and "the poems depict our situation in a wonderful way."

Parts IV and V of *Mauberley* paraphrase a genre of war poem that was to come out of the trenches later on—

hysterias, trench confessions,
laughter out of dead bellies.

[The *Cathay* poems paraphrase an elegiac war poetry nobody wrote] (though "Exile's Letter" is like an elegant "Tipperary"). Perfectly vital after 50 years, they are among the most durable of all poetic responses to World War I. They say, as so much of Pound's work says, that [all this has happened before and continually happens]. He even interpolated his 1911 version of *The Seafarer* between "Exile's Letter" and "Poems of Departure," noting that "Rihaku"

and the Anglo-Saxon poet were approximately contemporaneous, and allowing the reader to find parallels between

Not any protector
May make merry man faring needy. . . .
Moaneth always my mind's lust
That I fare forth, that I afar hence
Seek out a foreign fastness.

and

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.

—to which we may join another letter of Gaudier's:

The rain has stopped for several days & with it keeping the watch in a foot deep of liquid mud, also sleeping on sodden ground. The frost having set it we have the pleasure of a firm if not a warm bed & when you have turned to a warrior you become hardened to many evils. . . . like the chinese bowmen in Ezra's poem we had rather eat fern shoots than go back now. . . . If you can write me all about the Kensington colony the neo-greeks and the neo-chinese. Does the Egoist still appear? What does it contain? .

* * *

Vers libre, then, carried to new articulation; and new propaganda for a poetic of images (facts); and oblique war poems written in war time. But as a place to get what is in the Chinese? Consult an expert, and in ten minutes he will be spluttering, amid indignant asides on the Fenollosa-Pound theory of the Chinese Written Character, the "sheer nonsense" of which is usually presumed to underlie *Cathay's* derelictions. Of these there is virtually a canonical list. Thus in "Separation on the River Kiang" (where "kiang" by the way means "river" and is not the name of some river) a single line treats "Ko-jin" as a proper name, which it is not, and has him go west when he should (of course) go east; and in "The River Song" we have two poems conflated, the lines "And I have moped . . ." down to "aimlessly singing" being actually the title of the second, unrecognized as such and submerged in the continuum.

Such misadventures confirm what we already knew, that Pound did not bring to the notebooks a prior scholarly grasp of canonical Chinese poetry, and often made wrong decisions when he was unaware of making a decision at all. Their etiology is easily retraced. Thus in "Separation on the River Kiang" we find

ko	jin	sei	gi	Ko	Kaku	ro
old	acquaint-	west	leave	...		..
	ance,					

An old acquaintance, starting further West, takes leave of KKR

That "west leave" means to leave the west, not to go west, as in German "halb sechs" means half past five, not half past six, Fenollosa did not understand. Pound in turn picked up this misunderstanding; discarded, as overly picturesque, an earlier gloss on Ko Kaku ro, which was just as well since it was erroneous anyhow; and declining to open a poem with so bleak a periphrasis as "old acquaintance," turned "Ko jin," apparently with his eyes open, into a proper name. Hence the line in *Cathay*,

Ko-jin goes west from Ko-kaku-ro.

Chaucer in much the same way, perhaps misled by a scribe, mistook Boccaccio's "Fu mondo" for "Fumando," and instead of stating that the temple was clean, presents Emelye in *The Knight's Tale* "Smokyng the temple."

And as for the notorious conflation of two poems and one title into "The River Song," this came about because Fenollosa kept the left-hand pages of the "Rihaku" notebooks for comments by Professor Mori. Three right-hand pages of "River Song" face three left-hand pages of comment; then a blank left-hand page faces the long title of a new poem about Li Po in the garden full of spring softness. Pound mistook this for more of "The River Song," and the blank left-hand page, which signals a new poem, for absence of comment by Mori.

A surprisingly large number of the "errors" are quite deliberate. Chinese poets, practising an art which thrives, as did Pope's, on minimal variations within a tradition, summon up the tradition by constant allusion. Mori's notes normally explicated such matters. Pound, whose readers would see only 14 poems, very

deftly worked his way round them, avoiding notes. Thus "Poem by the Bridge at Ten-Shin" omits a reference to mandarin ducks which highlighted the extravagance of the courtiers by alluding, says Mori's note, to an old song about the décor of a rich man; Pound has only "the dance of the seventy couples." At the end of the same poem whole ganglia of allusion have been cut. "Rihaku" had accomplished his rebuke to the riotously ornamental courtiers with (1) a gnomic distich on the folly of hanging around, for instance at court, when one's job is done; (2) example of this: a minister who did not retire at the death of his emperor and was executed by the next emperor; (3) further example: a minister whose concubine caught the eye of a prince, whence the minister's execution and her suicide; (4) contrasting example: a man who on completing his service to the state had the wisdom to slip away. Pound's problems commenced with the distich, which as glossed and explained in the notebook is simply incomprehensible. He omitted it. This left the three exempla with nothing specific to exemplify. Moreover, none of them has torque unless we are well instructed. As to English readers a telescope and a blind eye will denote Nelson, so to literate Chinese the luckless Li Ssu is specified by sighs and a yellow dog; on his way to execution he wished he could go rabbit-hunting with his dog again. But from "Yellow dog useless lament," which is all the text provides, nothing intelligible can be done for an occidental. As for the second minister, the text gives only his concubine's name and the fact that there was tragic animosity; and as for the third, we are given only his name and the fact that he went off, with loosened hair, by boat. Mori's comments lay before Pound, explaining all these matters. He pushed them aside and ended the poem his own way:

... Night and day are given over to pleasure
And they think it will last a thousand autumns,

Unwearying autumns.

For them the yellow dogs howl portents in vain,
And what are they compared to the lady Riokushu,

That was cause of hate?

Who among them is a man like Han-rei

Who departed alone with his mistress,
With her hair unbound, and he his own skiffsman!

The yellow dog, pluralized, has become an omen; lady Riokushu, no longer typifying the snares of court life, shames today's courtiers with the decisiveness of her existence; and Han-rei has become a man who valued passion properly, the unbound hair (which he would have let down to improve his incognito) transferred to a mistress Pound borrowed from Mori's commentary; every detail feels intelligible without notes.

And every detail is misrepresented. One can sympathize with the exasperation of anyone whose intimacy with the Chinese original gives those bare names potency: such potency as Ezra Pound, on his home ground the most allusive of poets, conjures with in for instance the 80th Canto:

Mallarmé, Whistler, Charles Condor, Degas
and the bar of the Follies
as Manet saw it, Degas, those two gents crossing 'La
Concorde' or for that matter
Judith's junk shop
with Théophile's arm chair
one cd/ live in such an apartment
seeing the roofs of Paris
Ça s'appelle une mansarde
(80/504:538)

What might some translator in China do with that?

* * *

Instances could be readily multiplied: errors of Fenollosa's, errors of Pound mistaking the local intent of Fenollosa, who was not writing for publication but scribbling in a tutorial to aid his own recollection; deliberate alterations made by Pound to keep the poems in English either uncluttered or self-sufficient. Of the accuracy of his versions Pound was to claim only that they were "closer than the Rubaiyat," which is correct. And the first vial of expert derision to break on his head was occasioned by almost his only venture in trusting authority. When it printed "Exile's Letter, from the Chinese of Rihaku (Li Po)," the April 1915 *Poetry* carried for the edification of Chicago a little note on Li Po, "usually considered the greatest poet of China." Three years later Arthur Waley found this judgment ridiculous. But Pound was simply transcribing

from Giles's *History of Chinese Literature*, page 151: "By general consent Li Po himself (A.D. 705-762) would probably be named as China's greatest poet," and historians who say otherwise are not quarrelling with a brash interloper but with another historian.

* * *

Cathay has more instructive deviations to exhibit: the ones to which Pound was driven when the notes sagged. On one occasion we can follow him as he virtually invents a poem, an accretion of small deflections steering melancholy toward metaphysics, and the poet, unguided, conniving.

"With Mr. Shida Feb. 5 1899," Fenollosa had written, and Mr. Shida had not Mori's kind of authority. "From 'To-Em-Mei Shio' Work of Toemmei Both prose & poetry.

"'Teiwun' Fixed (not moving) Cloud
the subject of 4 connected poems"

Each poem contained eight lines of four characters each. Fenollosa did not copy the ideographs from the anthology they were using. He jotted down line by line the Japanese sounds dictated by Mr. Shida, beneath them the meaning of the separate words, beneath these in turn the running sketch of a provisional English syntax.

<i>ai</i>	<i>ai</i>	<i>tei</i>	<i>wun</i>
gathering	gathering	fixed	clouds
The fixed showers gather & gather			
<i>mo</i>	<i>mo</i>	<i>ji</i>	<i>u</i>
pattering	pattering	temporary	rain
& the intermittent showers patter & patter			
<i>Hachi</i>	<i>hiō</i>	<i>dō</i>	<i>kon</i>
eight	surface	same	dark
The earth in all directions is equally dark			
<i>Hei</i>	<i>rō</i>	<i>ī</i>	<i>lan</i>
flat	road	this	wide & flat
The level road stretches out into the flat distance . . .			

These notes, and similar notes on 28 more lines, were what Pound had before him when he made the poem called "To-Em-Mei's 'The Unmoving Cloud'," one of the four poems he added to

Cathay when the sequence was reprinted in *Lustra*. It is the only one of six poems by the same author that tempted his skills, in a notebook containing some 30 of which he used only two. He began by devising a rhetoric, of some interest since it controlled the subsequent course of the poem. He discarded, as conducive to fussiness, the antithesis between fixed clouds and intermittent rain, and commenced,

The clouds have gathered, and gathered,
and the rain falls and falls

Then coming to "The earth in all directions is equally dark," he sensed that having expended 12 words on rainfall his poem demanded a second impetus. The words "eight surface" in the gloss supplied his hint:

The eight ply of the heavens
are all folded into one darkness,
And the wide flat road stretches out.

Whether or not he recognized in "eight" a designation of Chinese compass points is neither ascertainable nor important. "Eight ply" gave the stanza what it needed, a focal strangeness at the center of its imitation of unyielding sameness, interminable rain, impenetrable flatness. Four Chinese lines have suggested five English, and these five cunningly built. Seven short a's and a parallel syntax unite the two opening lines, a shift from feminine stresses to masculine contrasts them, three thudding syllables mime the relentless rain. The spondaic "eight ply" in the third line echoes the spondaic "rain falls" in the second, while a longer fourth line imitates a longer first; the metric has reversed its direction. Yet the stanza does not reverse its structure but repeat its structure, the structure each time of two declarative clauses linked by "and." Repetition, however, is not mechanism. The first member of the pair is in one case a single line, in the other case two lines; the single line tells us that the clouds have gathered and gathered, the two lines re-examine this fact and tell us how the eight ply of the heavens are folded, statement now reinforced with image. The first "and" joins effect to cause, clouds therefore rain. The second "and" joins perception to perception, dark heaven, empty road. The five lines constitute

one sentence, an overbalanced quatrain, ceremonious, self-terminating, grown, by way of Fenollosa, Mr. Shida, and some textual tradition anterior to Shida, out of 16 Chinese monosyllables never heard nor seen by Pound.

This verse is free in one respect only, that it does not agree to count stresses and then repeat that count. Its syllables are tied by more complicated laws. We accept the division into lines because it follows the divisions of the syntax; we allow each of the five lines so isolated to take up the same time, though no two have the same number of syllables nor even the same number of stresses. And as the lines alter their pace, the imagination permits metric to seem mimetic: the stresses seem expressive because nothing but natural emphasis seems to dictate their fall.

And the rain falls and falls

mimes a redoubled downpour;

And the wide flat road stretches out

mimes a prolonged monotony. Meanwhile across lines innocently parallel, innocent of enjambment, cuts a syntactic ordering as cunningly simple as a diagonal brace, supporting the passage from within. Other translators of Chinese, marvelling at Pound's translucency but deploring his want of scholarship, have supposed themselves to have learned his lesson when they have kept the syntax simple and the line-length irregular, and have composed nothing it is possible to remember.

The lingering clouds, rolling, rolling,
And the settled rain, dripping, dripping,
In the Eight Directions—the same dusk.
The level lands—one great river.

—so Mr. Waley, whose principle is to represent each ideogram by a stress (hence here a four-stress line): "but between the stresses unstressed syllables are of course interposed."

Lowering, lowering, the lingering clouds,
Drizzling, drizzling, the seasonal rains.
The Eight Directions are all alike in twilight,
The level roads all but impassable.

—So Mr. Acker, who does not disclose his principles.

How fair, the lingering clouds!
How misty, the seasonal rain!
Darkness fills the universe,
Blurring the level pathway.

—So Lily Pao-Hu Chung and Marjorie Sinclair, pooling, in Honolulu, their taste for the indefinite.

The clouds have gathered and gathered
and the rain falls and falls,
The eight ply of the heavens
are all folded into one darkness
And the wide, flat road stretches out.

—So *il miglior fabbro*.

The question of fidelity remains, adjuring us to interrogate three separate transactions: Mr. Shida's with the Chinese, Fenollosa's with Mr. Shida, Pound's with the Fenollosa notes. The first two are now inextricable; though the notes did go wrong more than once, there is no way of being sure how. The third, Pound's way of dealing with what confronted him, may profitably hold our attention a little longer. The way of a mind creating is more interesting than a record of inattentions.

"Eight ply," we have seen, was a *trouvaille*, obligated by the rhetoric; Pound had Fenollosa's syntactic guide in front of him and preferred to disregard it. The rhetoric has also obligated subjects, verbs, numbers and tenses, of which the notes (like the originals) are innocent. In Chinese, the language accretes processes—

Lowering, lowering, the lingering clouds

In Pound's English, a man makes affirmations—

The clouds have gathered and gathered

—affirmations, moreover, about a universe structured by western preoccupations with time and causation. "Have gathered . . . falls": the logic that small alteration of tense imports was eventually to take charge of Pound's poem, when the notes left him in difficulties.

The notes showed no difficulties just yet. Pound completed the first section of the suite in four more lines, omitting nothing and adding nothing except a doubled adjective:

I stop in my room toward the East, quiet, quiet,
I pat my new cask of wine.
My friends are estranged, or far distant,
I bow my head and stand still.

The second section opens with the same three lines as the first, but with the order of the ideograms slightly altered. Pound accordingly alters the order of his words, compressing three lines into two as he does so—

Rain, rain, and the clouds have gathered,
The eight ply of the heavens are darkness.

—and continues with his mobile variably stressed line, following the sense of the notebook scrupulously. But in the third part the sense of the notebook suddenly turns banal. After four lines about boughs, Fenollosa has written,

<i>jin</i>	<i>shaku</i>	<i>yu</i>	<i>gen</i>
man	again, too	is	speaks
Men often are saying			

<i>jitsu</i>	<i>getsu</i>	<i>kan</i>	<i>sei</i>
sun	moon	have	turn
The sun and moon have their turning			

<i>An</i>	<i>toku</i>	<i>soku</i>	<i>seki</i>
tranquil	get	place	seat
Setting my mat where I can be at ease			

<i>Setsu</i>	<i>hi</i>	<i>hei</i>	<i>sei</i>
to be glad	his, its	flat	born
 natural or customary			

Let me take joy in this course of nature.

This is hopeless; for the poem so far has projected an unwavering elegiac mood that can no more effect a *volte-face* than can a smooth river. What went wrong we can look at later; our attention is claimed by Pound's problem, which was to sustain the poem of

which he had now written 19 lines, a poem in which a sudden decision to take joy in the course of nature will seem fatuous. His solution was ingenious. Rejecting the obvious meaning of the line about sun and moon—that seasons come round, that dawn succeeds darkness, sunshine rain—he concocts a decorous piece of folk wisdom;

The trees in my east-looking garden
are bursting out with new twigs,
They try to stir new affection,

And men say the sun and moon keep on moving
because they can't find a soft seat.

The syntactic guide has been jettisoned, "tranquil" associated with "seat" and seat with sun and moon, and [a Chinese proverb originated in South Kensington.] And the rescription firmly continues. Having lost all parallelism with the first two sections, section three must make the most of affinities with section four. (They are both about Nature.) Pound simply amalgamates them, and proceeds;

The birds flutter to rest in my tree,
and I think I have heard them saying
"It is not that there are no other men
But we like this fellow the best,
But however we long to speak
He cannot know of our sorrow."

This terminal episode, conflating the original's third and fourth parts, has an ingenious unity of concept; [the trees "try to stir new affection," the sun and moon seek for rest, the birds yearn for communion with man, and all in vain.] The rain-beaten estrangement of the poet, solacing himself with wine during an interminable solitude through which no one comes, is absorbed into a cosmic estrangement, all nature suffused with dumb longing. "To-Em-Mei," as transcribed by Fenollosa, contains nothing of this; his third section speaks of being cheered up by burgeoning nature, his fourth of being sung to by the birds (who cannot of course speak his language). Pound has unified the poem, obligated by a diction and a movement that expect unity, and done so by imposing on the notes just three distortions. He has slipped a stressed "try"

into the passage about the twigs, he has allotted to the birds incommunicable sorrow, he has given sun and moon no place of rest. Each time he has built on something in the text. The trees in the notebook "vying to make the most of their new beauty, with this they appeal to my affection"; "vying" has suggested "try." The birds in the notebook "hold deep sorrow in [their] minds," not out of *Angst* but because their favorite man cannot understand their speech; Pound has moved their sorrow into the speech itself. The sun and moon in the notebook are mentioned in conjunction with a tranquil seat, but for "To-Em-Mei," not for them.

These are what are normally called mistranslations, in one case grotesque mistranslation. Let us be quite clear that they are deflections undertaken with open eyes. There is no question of seduction by half-understood ideograms; no ideograms are in evidence on these pages of Fenollosa's. There is no question of misunderstanding; the notes are unambiguous. It is a question, purely and simply, of taking all necessary measures to protect the course of a poem, which having begun as it did (and brilliantly) could only finish in accordance with the mood of its beginning; meanwhile making contact, for as many words as possible, with the notes in front of him. Pound's poem is not one "To-Em-Mei" would have recognized, despite his familiarity with its components. It is newly invented in an unrelated language; almost as much so as the "Come my Celia" which Ben Jonson wrote, with Catullus in mind, for the insidious Volpone to sing.

What caused the troubles from which we have watched Pound rescuing his poem? The short answer is that Fenollosa's notes at several points are not such as a better-guided scholar would have made. Scholarship more amply endowed with works of reference has no difficulty in identifying "To-Em-Mei" with T'ao Ch'ien (A.D. 365-427), and "The Unmoving Cloud" with his "T'ing-yün" (T'ao Yüan-ming 1.1.1b); and knowing that Chinese nouns (if one may speak of nouns) do not indicate number, other translators have enjoyed the luxury of deciding whether the poem laments the absence of someone special or of friends in general, tradition indicating the former view. Scholarship tends also to agree that the tranquil mat (Pound's "soft seat") in the third stanza is to be

imagined as set vis-à-vis the longed-for visitor, not as a coign of vantage for looking at the buds; thus Mr. Acker has,

People also have a saying—

"The days and months are on the march"

Would that I could sit face to face with you

And settle the problems of our daily life.

Scholarship would assert, in short, that the line which drove Pound to invent a proverb about the restless heavens, Fenollosa's "Let me take joy in this course of nature," does not correspond at all to T'ao Ch'ien's ideograms; for the first character, which Fenollosa glossed "to be glad," refers to discourse, and the last two, the "flat born" which he glossed as "natural or customary," are less misleadingly combined to mean something like "whole life," and the whole line says "Talking about each other's lives." Did Mr. Shida misunderstand the Chinese, or did he misunderstand what Fenollosa understood him to be saying? Whatever happened, Pound had little chance of making an orthodox guess.

There is a similar tangle earlier in the third stanza, and a subtler one in the fourth from which there is more to be learned. Orthodoxy finds in the last four lines of the poem not the plaint of the birds but the poet's wish for one friend more than any other.

- 1 Fluttering, fluttering, the flying birds
- 2 Settle on the branches in my courtyard
- 3 Gathering their wings they stop at leisure,
- 4 And harmonize together tunefully.
- 5 Surely many other people
- 6 Are thinking of you constantly,
- 7 But when I cannot have you with me
- 8 Oh, how resentment burns my heart.

So Mr. Acker. Fenollosa's transcriptions of the last six lines give us these words to work with;

3	Folding	wings	quietly	stop
4	Lovely	voice	each other	to be familiar
5	(negative)	not	other	man
6	love	you	truly	much
7	wish	speak	not	reach
8	bear in mind	deep sorrow	like	what

Mr. Acker takes the last word of line 5 as plural in intention, and combines the double negation into a "many." I am told that there is no philological reason for not glossing the first negative (a different character from the second) by "why," and making the line read "Why is there no one else [to talk with me]?" Fenollosa's note runs, "It is not that there is no other man than he," and determines that "he" means the poet, to whom the birds are speaking, a decision that follows naturally from his dealings with line 4. For his gloss on line 4 runs, "as with sweet voice they speak thus with each other," and he sets lines 5 to 8 in quotation marks. His "thus" and his quotation marks are interpretative additions, which Pound followed.

Familiarity with Chinese poetry and with the work of T'ao Ch'ien may encourage the decision that this is improbable. So may an intuition that the four episodes are parallel in structure, the first half of each establishing a setting against which the second half laments the absence of a friend. A developed sense of probabilities, often an inherited consensus of probabilities, guides our understanding of all verse; notably so when the verse is in a language to which indications of number, of tense, of gender are foreign, in which "parts of speech" are barely to be distinguished, in which doings are commonly named without specification of the doer.

In the field specified by a cluster of ideograms, the mind of a western reader supplies whatever syntax he assumes responsibility for, and small errors impose strange deflections. In a prose poem where a character meaning "palace" turns up next to characters pronounced "Lan t'ai" (Orchid Terrace), Fenollosa under his teacher's eye transcribed the Japanese pronunciation, Ran-tai, and then left open the supposition that he was dealing with a proper name. For in his gloss he wrote "palace of Ran-tai," as who should say, "Castle of Windsor." That small word "of" was taken by Pound as turning Ran-tai into a person, hence the owner of the palace, hence the king; and in Canto 4 we read of "Ran-ti, opening his collar" (4/15:19).*

And syntax, imported by the mind of a western translator, imposed on "The Unmoving Cloud" a subtler deflection still;

* The 1970 New Directions printing corrected "Ran-ti" to "Hsiang."

for syntax, an apparatus of verbs with discriminated tenses, implied for Pound what it naturally does imply, a mind making affirmations and setting them into relation. That is finally why, when the notes faltered and Pound had to impose a direction, he imposed the direction he did, making "To-Em-Mei" affirm a cosmos saturated with solitude to give his own solitude context. Had tradition guided him toward what appears to be the traditional reading of the poem, four glimpses of the world paired with four complaints of the lonely heart, he would very likely not have found it sufficiently interesting to translate.

* * *

Time and again the only meaning of "correct" is "traditional." We can sometimes say that a word cannot possibly mean what a translator has written in response to it; more often we can say that he has not written what readers of the original usually understand. The poem called by Pound "The Beautiful Toilet" opens in *Cathay*

Blue, blue, is the grass about the river

but in all other translations "green, green." The character in question is Ch'ing, Mathews 1168, the 174th radical, glossed in Mathews' *Chinese-English Dictionary* "The color of nature, green, blue, black," and in Karlgren's "Green; (various kindred colors;) blue, azure, greyish." It is a component in compounds meaning "green grass," "blue sky," "young foliage." In Mei Sheng's poem (if it is Mei Sheng's; the usual citation is to a collection called "Nineteen Old Poems") custom seems to demand the reading "green," no doubt because grass is present, but Fenollosa has only "blue, blue," and one can perfectly well imagine a light in which river grass is bluish. Was Ariga's mind's eye on such a light when he told his pupil to write the English word "blue"? Or was Ariga uncertain of the demarcation between the English words "blue" and "green"? The Chinese mind sees one color as a shade of the other. When the same character occurs at the beginning of the poem Pound calls "Taking Leave of a Friend," his "blue mountains" is more plausible than "green mountains," yet an expert gloss by Professor Roy E.

Teele again elects "green." Does either "blue," or one of them, reflect Kainan Mori's poetic judgment? Is there a traditional way to understand either poem? If so, did Mori know it, or not?

Consider, by way of analogy, what would happen if all existing translations of Homer were destroyed, leaving us to confront in a sceptical spirit the epithet which he applies 17 times to the sea and twice to oxen, and which Sophocles at one point applies to a human forearm. We find it in Liddell and Scott's *Lexicon* under a nominative singular form which occurs in no ancient text but has had to be invented to keep the lexicons consistent, and this invented form contains the judgment that the word is compounded from *oinos*, wine, and *ops*, eye or face. Wine-eyed? wine-faced? and of the sea, of oxen, and of a forearm? W. H. D. Rouse surmised that the etymology was false and the word simply an ancient blunder which there is no chance any longer of unstitching. Tradition instructs us to understand that the sea, modified by this epithet, shall be understood to be "wine-dark," and the oxen "deep red" or perhaps "brown." About the Sophoclean forearm tradition leaves us free to guess. But one can imagine, unguided by this tradition, some Mori instructing some Fenollosa to etymologize, "wine-faced," and think of the sheen of the sea and write "shining sea," and some Pound perhaps improving "shining" to "lucent," and scholars complaining of inaccuracy.

Lexicography is compendious illusion; words are strangely implicit; they "mean" here, here, here. And traditions of what we are to understand here and here, lacking which we often find modern poetry difficult, guide us so constantly that we are only aware of them when they lapse, as they often do in classrooms. Mr. Auden has described an entanglement with Keats' lines,

The wakeful bloodhound rose, and shook his hide,
But his sagacious eye an inmate owns;

two meanings, "inhabitant" for "inmate" and "accepts" for "owns" having dropped out of the current vernacular, a student with only the vernacular to guide her postulated a lunatic who had removed the dog's eye. Glossaries admonish us that the devotion of Chaucer's Knight was not given to truth and honor, freedom

and courtesy, but to fidelity (*trouthe*), chivalrousness (*honour*), magnanimity (*freedom*) and the knightly code (*curteisie*); by ignoring the glossaries we alter this line completely, as the meaning of the *lewed observances* of lovers (*Troilus and Criseyde*, I, 198) is altered when nothing prompts us to understand "lewed" as "ignorant." A text, a word, means what has been continuously understood by it, and systematized understanding has sometimes come late and perpetuated guesswork (hence the plausibility of "winedark sea"). There are words in Homer that Hesiod misunderstood; we depend for our understanding on Alexandrian conjectures framed some 600 years after the Homeric world of discourse had vanished. Certain abstractions in Aristotle (what is *hybris*? what is *hamartia*?) remind us how we depend, for most of the Greek vocabulary, on a long tradition of interpretation, surely not always accurate. The first word in Sappho's second most famous poem is almost impenetrable: *poikilothronos*, on a rich-worked throne, say Liddell and Scott, evading the undecidable, for what did Sappho mean us to see? An upholstered throne? carved? studded? "Variegated," we guess from the etymology; but in color? in texture?

We know most of Sappho's words, and that knowledge steadies our guesses when we must guess. At the furthest extreme, where there is no tradition at all, we may learn humility from the luckless scholar who saw reason to approach the Linear B script by way of Basque, and eventually derived elegiac poems from what are now taken to be storehouse inventories. His book was published, in 1931, by the Oxford University Press.

Classical Chinese need occasion no such desperation. Yet today's understanding of what many details in many poems may mean is steadied by glosses that come down with the texts, and perhaps did not always come to Fenollosa's instructors in Tokyo. Mori, Ariga, Hirai, Shida, are not seldom acceptably philological, where tradition would have them wrong; and are sometimes, to judge by Fenollosa's notes, simply wrong; and in the main, it seems, right. Small or large errors committed in Tokyo cast shadows on *Cathay's* page.

* * *

But the major deviations from orthodoxy represent deliberate decisions of a man who was inventing a new kind of English poem

and picking up hints where he could find them. Thus in the second movement of "Sennin Poem by Kakuhaku" he has transformed Fenollosa's

Green vines hang on and twine the high forest
Darkly they cover the whole mountain
In it there is a silent and solitary man

by glancing at the literal dissections:

to wear on the head	to put into
to cover	basket
obscure, dim	

—from which he derived the verb "weave," and

silent (lit. dark
sometimes used in
shutting the eyes)

—from which he made a striking locution; Hence—

Green vines hang through the high forest,
They weave a whole roof to the mountain,
The lone man sits with shut speech . . .

For when the single line is the unit of composition it must contain some minute torsion, something to justify its separate existence.

Each line a little strange, yet each line clear; and when clarity lay before him he did not tamper. "Song of the Bowmen of Shu" departs hardly at all from a version written out by Mr. Ariga himself, ideographic text, English paraphrases and notes, in his clear hand and quaint English. When Pound made the "tied" horses "tired" it is hard to know whether his eye failed or his dramatic sense prompted an improvement; presumably the latter, since the writing is very clear. The other two battle poems he tightened and reshaped, guided not only by local canons but by the structure of his book. The third battle piece was to go at the end of the sequence; so he made it terse and stark, the least decorative poem in *Cathay*, the most "Attic." The notes from which he worked are worth inspecting entire, as a measure of his way of transforming them. Fenollosa made them with Mori on 10 December 1899. Pound

finished his version on 21 November 1914, nearly four months into the war. Louvain was in ruins, Belgium overrun; there had been three waves of slaughter at Ypres; the lines were stalemated.

Dai horse not think of Etsu
(place in north) in the south

The horses of Dai, tho taken to Etsu, care nothing for Etsu

Etsu birds not love En
-a north region

So the Etsu birds have no love for an alien En

Emotion nature has that which is habituated
Human emotions & natures are things that spring from habit

local manners of course that (ly) adj.
(earth) (mind) ending
The powers which local manners have on our mind are so—necessarily thus.

(ancient) separate wild goose gate fort
former name of gate yesterday

Yesterday one has left the wild geese Tartars. (This is in the Northern province of Dai. Why called wild geese? Because believed to come from north.)

now garrison dragon yard before
(verb) name of locality—desert

Today one has already come so far as the Dragon yard deserted front. (What sort of life do we live here? is supplied)

surprised desert turmoil sea sun
sand-sea

Sands surprised by wind cover in their turmoil the desert sea sun.

flying snow wanders northern heaven
errs barbarian
Tartar's

(When once winter comes) the flying snow lets go astray the Manchurian heaven—one loses sight of the sky.

ants fleas grow on tiger (a kind of
ants like lice (part of bird famous
lice (many) armor) for bravery)
fight till death.
Soldiers wear
their feathers on
their helmets
on armor

(Such life continuing for long) swarms of lice grow on the accoutrements.

mind spirit drive banner made banner made
of feathers of silk

(And yet under such difficulty can one's mind be easy? No!) Because our mind and spirit must drive upon (keep close attention to) the motion of the banners.

hard fight merit not reward
Although one fights so hard his merit is not rewarded. (The whole intent of this is that to let soldiers undergo such distant hardship is inhuman for an Emperor.)

loyalty faith difficult to tell-express
[as one is not a horse or a bird] so if one were allowed to express all he feels of loyalty & faith he would be satisfied) "There is no chance to express one's loyalty and faith."

who will be (General) flying general
sorry for Ri of quick motion

Who is sorry for flying general Ri. (History: in Kan Dynasty was famous Ri Shogun who fought more than 74 battles with the northern barbarians who called him the Flying Shogun. So skilful, he was constantly sent out for some expedition, and was never recalled—so he died in old age in one of the border battles.)

white head lost three outside provinces
outskirt
border regions

Ri[haku] is expressing the soldier's feelings. "The fate of Ri Shogun is probably mine too." "Whose white head was lost (died) in the three frontiers" Who died of old age. "Who will be sorry for the fate of Rishogu?"

Having made what he can of this, the reader may examine what the poet made of it:

SOUTH-FOLK IN COLD COUNTRY

The Dai horse neighs against the bleak wind of Etsu,
 The birds of Etsu have no love for En, in the north,
 Emotion is born out of habit.
 Yesterday we went out of the Wild-goose gate,
 To-day from the Dragon-Pen.
 Surprised. Desert turmoil. Sea sun.
 Flying snow bewilders the barbarian heaven.
 Lice swarm like ants over our accoutrements.
 Mind and spirit drive on the feathery banners.
 Hard fight gets no reward.
 Loyalty is hard to explain.
 Who will be sorry for General Rishogu,
 the swift moving,
 Whose white head is lost for this province?

Pound went to great labor; the notes often put him to it. Was he deterred from seeking expert advice by the supposition, based on the frequent state of the notes, that Chinese poetry was an entity as barely comprehended as Linear B today? The acknowledgment page speaks of the *decipherings* of the Professors Mori and Ariga. These decipherings in turn he was often forced to decipher. Yet he never shirked his great debt to Fenollosa, nor concealed the devious chain of transmission. Though he knew the name of Li Po he let the Japanese form "Rihaku" stand when the little book went to press, content to leave it on record that the Chinese had come to him by way of Japan, as "Jupiter" comes from "Zeus" by way of Rome. That Li Po should reach Kensington by way of Tokyo, through the intercession of a Harvard-educated enthusiast of Spanish descent, was but a global recapitulation of the steps by which the Arabs transmitted Aristotle to 12th-century Paris, or Francesco da Bologna was set to work cutting Greek dies for Aldus' printing house as a consequence of the fall of Constantinople.



THE PERSISTENT EAST

The Chinese Written Character caught Francis Bacon's attention before 1605, when he stated as "now well known" the proposition that "in China and the more Eastern provinces they use at this day certain real, not nominal characters, to express, not their letters or words, but things and notions; insomuch, that numerous nations, though of quite different languages, yet, agreeing in the use of these characters, hold correspondence by writing." For it seemed clear, from Jesuit intelligence even then filtering back to Europe, that the characters registered things, not the mere sounds men emit in things' presence; and as to their notorious multiplicity—

日 月 山 人 馬

Sun Moon Mountain Man Horse

... and on, into many thousands—this was evidently due to their being exactly as numerous as were the classes of things created by God. Such notions were to polarize western speculations about language for many decades: "so many things, almost in an equal

number of words," ran (1667) the formula according to which dozens of 17th-century savants, each one aware of ideographs and several fascinated by them, attempted to construct ideal languages which should promote orderly thought and be comprehensible everywhere. The supposition, itself Chinese, that the ideographs were bestowed by a single innovating emperor, lent plausibility to such projects.

And all such projects, though Newton and Leibniz were among the projectors, foundered on their own unwieldiness. The stubborn conviction remained, that symbols ought to correspond with things, the ideal language thus a system of nouns and modified nouns, a taxonomy of objects. (In Lagado Lemuel Gulliver encountered savants who saved breath by holding up the objects themselves, and a peripatetic conversation was as wearisome to the back as to the arms.)

The ideal language, and subsequently the written vernacular language when notions of ideality began to stylize it, was embarrassed by verbs, which it took for specializations of the copula, and scandalized by metaphor. A verb is not a thing, and in a universe of things we must take "John runs" to mean that John is included in the class of running objects. And a metaphor is not a proposition, for to say that my love is a red red rose is merely to publicize an error of classification, no doubt understandable when emotion beclouds perception, but scarcely admissible in discourse meant to detain cooler heads. The man who first called *hippopotamus amphibius* a river-horse, ἵππος + ποταμός, made a taxonomic mistake (it is not a horse) and also yielded to a false economy (a new species wants a new name, not an effort to make do with old ones). When *so many things* are at last represented by *an equal number of words*, then everything will have its own name, and metaphor (whale's acres, breast-cares) will be not only unneeded but excrescential.

So ideograms during their first Western incursion presided over what was to become an anti-poetic. The Descartes who (Boileau complained) had "cut the throat" of poetry, and the Locke who made poetry a diversion of relaxed or enfeebled minds, lived among learned men whom the rumors of Chinese analogy

had encouraged to think of words naming things, and words as many as there were things, and language a taxonomy of static things, with many an "is" but ideally no verb. And it was just such notions, mistakenly by him styled "mediaeval," that Ernest Fenollosa, encouraged by ideograms, set out to refute, on behalf of "the language of science which is the language of poetry," unaware, certainly, that their prevalence had been sponsored by a 17th-century misunderstanding of Chinese as fecund as his own.

He warred on the copula: "There is in reality no such verb . . . , no such original conception; our very word *exist* means 'to stand forth,' to show oneself by a definite act." In the Chinese "is" he found "a splendid flash of concrete poetry": "to snatch from the moon with the hand." He assailed negation as parvenu ("we can assert a negation, though nature can not"), and derived a Chinese sign for non-existence from "to be lost in the forest," not a non-being but a specifiable plight. And the sentences that turn on "is" and "is not," and became in Boole's hands the algebra of classes, he referred to "the tyranny of mediaeval logic," "mediaeval" being a fusty polemic gesture though the focus of the infection was locatable not in Abelard's century but in Locke's. For behind Boole stood the *De Arte Combinatoria* of Leibniz (1666), which expressed comprehensive indebtedness to Chinese analogies; just as behind the language of today's computers, which do nothing but shift symbols very rapidly into and out of categories, lay Leibniz' invention of binary arithmetic, encouraged by yet another sinological misunderstanding. Leibniz thought he was fleshing out a Mandarin discovery enshrined in the *Book of Changes*.

Ideographs, supposed to correspond with things, had sponsored the very habits Fenollosa was to refute by positing that ideographs corresponded with actions. His great, his unassailable originality stemmed from his conviction that the unit of thought was less like a noun than like a verb, and that Chinese signs therefore denoted processes ("the ideograph meaning 'to speak' is a mouth with two words and a flame coming out of it"). Metaphor so seen was a centrality, not an embarrassment ("Metaphor, the revealer of nature. . . . The known interprets the obscure, the universe is alive with myth.")

But the Chinese written language, like any other, is entailed in the sounds of speech: a fact Fenollosa could resist as sturdily as did any Royal Society projector. In the course of lectures he was drafting about 1901-4, his remarks on Chinese sound have so little to do with the thrust of his argument that Pound when he extracted the great Essay for publication imposed no distortion in simply omitting them.*

* * *

Give it time, and Pound's flywheel always restored a balance. "The whole Occident is still in crass ignorance of the Chinese art of verbal sonority": 1935, footnoting a reprint of the essay he had then known more than twenty years. He went on to pay Chinese sound his supreme compliment: "I now doubt if it was inferior to the Greek." He was to work on Chinese sound in the tolerant madhouse, where his fame attracted informal instructors; the *Confucian Odes* (1954, ninth year of incarceration) display results, and the Chinese in *Rock-Drill* (1955) and *Thrones* (1959) is as likely to appear in phonetics as in ideographs. This is simply to say that Pound was always interested in *melopoeia*, and eventually brought it into touch with his sinological pursuits. But there is no sign of such an interest in the published version of Fenollosa's essay, where of Chinese sound we find remarked only its paucity.

* * *

The author of *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* of course lived through his eyes, and naturally regarded ideographs as visual registrations of things seen. Moreover, studying Chinese with Japanese instructors, he was impressed by what had impressed Bacon three centuries before, the fact that one could read it without knowing what sounds a Chinese reader makes, or in the knowledge

* One bee in Fenollosa's bonnet deserves notice: his idea that primitive Chinese sounds are less well represented by modern Mandarin ("this barbarous guttural dialect") than by modern Japanese: so that in transcribing in Japanese syllables a poem such as that attributed to the Emperor Shun (2255 B.C. if he existed) he could claim to be offering "for the first time an approximation to the old sounds." That is probably why Shun's poem appears among primeval things in Canto 49 not in Chinese but in the sounds—Kei men ran kei . . .—Fenollosa wrote down at Mori's dictation, 4 June 1901. (And *men* should be *wun*, but Fenollosa's rapid pencil is unclear and Pound mistranscribed.) Scholarship now tends to concur with Fenollosa.

that in different regions they make different sounds entirely: hence his nearly inevitable supposition that the characters imitated not speech but Nature. And in being willing to suppose that human speech is peripheral to orderly communication he exposes his inheritance from those 17th-century theorists of System whose anti-poetic legacy dismayed him. Their mark is on all linguistic theory from their time to his and beyond: long after Fenollosa's essay was current we find I. A. Richards, another amateur of Chinese (whose sinology—see *Mencius on the Mind*—has a pleasant 17th-century flavor) supposing that metaphor does not blaze with process but unites two *things*, called tenor and vehicle.

Fenollosa was interested, as Bacon and Leibniz had been, in a relatively small class of characters, the ones that are totally independent of speech, either depicting something

人 man

木 tree

or else uniting depictions

明

[Sun + moon; originally window + moon]

bright

信

[man + word]

sincere

In 17th-century Europe it seems not to have been suspected that these, the "ideographs" proper, are both ancient and frequent but not numerous. They comprise perhaps a tenth of the written language. They are learned so early by foreigners, their mode of formation so pleases the systematizing intellect, and they encompass such persistent and elementary ideas, that they crowded out of the polymaths' attention the characters, nine times as numerous, that simply specify a sound and then tell us which of its homonymous meanings to select. Thus the right side of the character 訪, tells us to say *fang*, a syllable with many different significances: "square," "district," "spin," "ask," "room," "kettle," "board."

The other half of the character, 言, "speak," says that we are

dealing with the meaning of *fang* appropriate to speech: in short, "ask." If to *fang* we join the "earth" pictogram we get "district"; if we join the "silk" pictogram we get "spin"; if the "door" pictogram, "room," and so on. The *fang* radical by itself means "square." But in these compounds the squareness is never relevant, only the sound.* And Fenollosa had this omnipresent principle clearly explained to him, no doubt many times but certainly on 28 May 1901, in Prof. Mori's very first discourse on the scripts, and he didn't want to believe it. Later Ezra Pound marked the notebook entry for attention with a blue crayon, but didn't want to believe it either.

Yes, yes, it is true that the pronunciation varies endlessly through uncountable dialects, none primary; that many homophones when the characters were formed are homophones no longer; that one can understand the characters and understand written pages without learning to pronounce them at all. The point is that random similarities of sound have determined which elements are common to many sets of characters, so that they are not graphed metaphors as Fenollosa thought.

By the time he was drafting "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry" he had decided that the pictorial clues to such characters had merely been lost ("Many of our own etymologies have been lost. It is futile to take the ignorance of the Han dynasty for omniscience.")

Ingenuity can go a long way toward sustaining such a case, so adept is a mind seeking relevance. That a district is a square of earth, that a room is the square beyond the door, that a board is squared wood, these would be the plausible conjectures of anyone etymologizing the *fang*-words by eye. Only the most detailed philological learning, of a kind for which no one in 1904 was equipped, could carry conviction at last of their unsoundness. The bone inscriptions from which we now know the most primitive forms had been discovered only five years previously, and were

* That the main business of characters should be to distinguish among homophones is unsurprising when we began to grasp how many homophones there are; in the Mandarin dialect of Peking the entire spoken language comprises not more than 420 syllables, some having dozens of unrelated meanings.

just beginning to be worked on.* Fenollosa pressed on: "It is not true, as Legge said, that the original picture characters could never have gone far in building up abstract thought. This is a vital mistake. We have seen that our own languages have all sprung from a few hundred vivid phonetic verbs by figurative derivation. A fabric more vast could have been built up in Chinese by metaphorical comparison. No attenuated idea exists which it might not have reached more vividly and more permanently than we could have expected to reach with phonetic roots. Such a pictorial method, whether the Chinese exemplified it or not, would be the ideal language of the world."

"The ideal language of the world": Leibniz in the 1670's had been one of dozens pursuing a similar notion. It is difficult not to conclude that Fenollosa, so sensitive to poetic sound, was scandalized by semantic sound, mere usage, which will not lock down meanings but leaves the people on whose tongues language lives to remember what their words mean: as they tend not to do with any tenacity. Thus *buxom* once meant *obedient*, its root being the verb to bow; an ideograph preserving that bowing might have inhibited the subsequent drift toward generosity of figure. Latin etymologies, being referable to a static system, anchor meanings as would pictures, for people who remember them. When Dr. Johnson writes of a radical idea branching into parallel ramifications he is relying on *radix* and *ramus* for the tree that sustains his metaphor. Once Latin goes out of mind *radical* commences its vernacular slide toward *extreme*, and *ramification* toward *entanglement*.

* * *

Mallarmé learned English that he might read Poe (Poe!), and then supposed the subtleties alembicating in his brain to have boiled up out of Poe's depths: as they did, when Mallarmé was the

* And today's learning does not cancel the seduction. The single example of a phonetic compound given in James J. Y. Liu's *Art of Chinese Poetry* (p. 5) joins the phonetic *chung* with the determinant "heart," hence the meaning of *chung* relevant to the heart, hence "loyalty." But when he sees the graph *chung*, 中 "middle," the non-sinologue is not easily convinced that *chung* is merely a phonetic, and eleven pages later Mr. Liu is conceding that "It would not be out of place to think of 'loyalty' as 'having one's heart in the middle,' though this is etymologically unsound."

reader. Dante's coda to the *Odyssey* was made possible by his not having read it; he was able to suppose therefore that Odysseus was driven by lust for knowledge. Is the life of the mind a history of interesting mistakes?

More pertinently: is the surest way to a fructue western idea the misunderstanding of an eastern one? Fenollosa's rejection of phonetic characters not only did his literary studies no harm (since he wrote down simply his instructors' orthodoxies concerning poem after poem), but by encouraging him to universalize his intuition about verbs and processes freed him, as more scrupulous learning could not have, to compose the *Ars Poetica* of our time. For he needed to suppose that all ideograms followed one principle so that by gazing into them as into living monads he could expound, miraculously concentrated, the Emersonian organicism he had brought to Tokyo from Cambridge. He was teaching Emerson to his best Japanese students at the time he began looking closely into ideograms, there to find confirmation of Emerson's etymologist who "finds the deadest word to have been once a brilliant picture." More: the universe is alive, and the live mind part of the universe, and each one of these brilliant pictures made by some live mind is a living cell, specializing the life of the totality. And this, which he saw in the ideograms with an eye Emerson had trained, enabled Fenollosa for the first time in centuries to restore metaphor, "the swift perception of relations" (Aristotle's "hallmark of genius"), to the heart of a poetic process not peripheral to but concentric with the most intent working of the focused mind.

And that Emersonian organicism had known Chinese affinities before Fenollosa. In his Journal for 7 October 1863, Emerson copied passages from a copy of the same Confucius (Legge's, then newly printed) that Pound carried with him on the jeep into Pisa; and the Mailla *Histoire Générale de la Chine* that underlies nine consecutive Cantos was in the Boston Athenaeum, its presence bruited among the Transcendentalists; and the Confucian anecdote that opens Canto 13, with its talk of swimming in a pond and playing mandolins, exists on loose pages in the Harvard College Library, in a translation made, as was Pound's, from Pauthier's French version, in the handwriting of Henry Thoreau. Which is to say that

Transcendentalism was aware of its own affinities with the Far East; and Transcendentalism's other affinities are with Whitehead and Darwin and Frazer, and Gestaltists and field physicists, and the synergism of Buckminster Fuller: with the coherent effort of 150 years to rectify Newton's machine by exploring hierarchic interdependences in nature and in history and in myth and in mind, detecting wholes greater than the sum of parts, organisms not systems, growth not accretion: process and change and resemblance and continuity.

And behind that effort? Behind it, preparing for it, a chain of philosophers, a chain which "leads back through Hegel, Lotze, Schelling and Herder to Leibniz (as Whitehead constantly recognized), and then it seems to disappear": seems to disappear because we are looking for European predecessors, and Leibniz was indebted to China. So runs Joseph Needham's remarkable hypothesis, which attributes European organicism, via Leibniz' Jesuit friends of the China Mission, to neo-Confucian *Li* and the school of Chu Hsi: the same Chu Hsi (A.D. 1130-1200) who created the text of Confucius translated by Legge and Pauthier and Thoreau and Pound, and of whose *Thung Chien Kang Mu* Mailla's *Histoire Générale* is an 18th-century translation. These works, the argument might run, were congenial to the minds of Emerson and Fenollosa and Ezra Pound because of Chu Hsi's part in preparing their minds.

If so, then Fenollosa's sinological mistakes, rectifying 17th-century sinological mistakes, owed their right intuitions (brought with him from Massachusetts) originally after all to China: as though the east, with centuries-long deliberation, were writing the macro-history of western thought.