Wai-lim Yip

Ezra Pound's *Cathay*

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Ezra Pound's *Cathay*

for Ezra Pound
if he wants it

preface

TEN YEARS ago, when I translated T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land* into Chinese,[1] and two years later, when I wrote a thesis on his poetry, I wondered what sort of poem *The Waste Land* was before Ezra Pound laid hands on it. I had hoped that someone close to Eliot could examine his original manuscript and make public the process of transformation so that we could tell for sure in what way the poem could be rightly called Eliot's and how much of it was actually Pound's own work. A comparison of the original *Waste Land* and its present form would be useful as a revelation of Pound's mind at work. We would be able to understand the peculiar methods by which he incorporated his own principles into Eliot's.

The present attempt to examine the poems in *Cathay* as translations—focusing upon the three stages: the original, Fenollosa's English crib, and Pound's version—is aimed at a similar understanding of the poet's mind at work. The major difficulty in this kind of study is the unavailability of the manuscript. Due to some legal complications, which I need not go into here, access to the Fenollosa notebooks is denied for an uncertain period of time.

However before the notebooks were sealed, three scholars had read, recorded, and published several examples. These are: the text of "Song of the Bowmen of Shu" and a poem by Oshorei [i.e. Wang Ch'ang-ling][2] in Lawrence W. Chisolm's *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture* (1963); the annotations for "The Beautiful Toilet" in *Ezra Pound: Perspectives*, edited by Noel Stock (1965); and several examples

[1] Published in *Ch'uang-shih-chi* (*The Epoch Poetry Quarterly*), No. 16 (Kaohsiung, Taiwan, January 1961), 28-39.

[2] Although Pound did not translate this one, it is still worthwhile to include it in the Appendix because it shows the format of Fenollosa's transcription.

in Hugh Kenner's "The Invention of China" (1967).[8] I am indebted to these fragments for the present study. Mrs. Dorothy Pound has been most generous in extending her assistance. She kindly allowed me to use a copy of Fenollosa's glosses on the "Lament of the Frontier Guard" that Mr. Kenner possessed. I am particularly grateful to the latter who not only sent me that copy but also allowed me to have a carbon copy of "The Invention of China" several months before he published it in *Spectrum*. He also answered freely some of my questions concerning misprints and revisions in *Cathay*.

All the above cribs are reprinted with proper acknowledgments for their sources in Appendix I. One poem, the text of "The Unmoving Cloud," which is in the University of Virginia Library, is not reprinted. I believe Mr. Kenner's treatment of it in his article covers all the pertinent points.

In order that the reader can have an idea of the general format of the Chinese poems and the original line units, I have provided in Appendix II literal translations of all the *Cathay* poems, facing Pound's versions. I have also numbered the lines for the sake of comparison.

I also wish to express my gratitude to Professors Robert Fagles and A. W. Litz, both of Princeton University, for turning me back from other distractions toward this present study. The latter, in supervising the writing of my original dissertation, has been most sympathetic and helpful. He recommended many significant improvements in style and organization. Thanks are due to Professor Kao Yu-kung, also of Princeton University, for taking the trouble of going over my translations and correcting some of the errors therein, and to Professor F. Mote, Chairman of the Oriental Studies Department, Princeton University, for his warm and helpful

[8] *Spectrum*, IX.1 (Spring 1967), 30-31. (See Appendix I.) Kenner also includes in this article the annotations for "The Beautiful Toilet."

criticism of parts of the book. To Professor Edmund Keeley I owe several hours of discussion on the problem of presentation in the second and the third chapters. Professor Roy Harvey Pearce of the University of California at San Diego has assisted me in various ways for which I would like to acknowledge my gratitude. My wife's encouragement and love are beyond acknowledgment here.

WAI-LIM YIP

University of California at San Diego
1967

acknowledgments

I WANT to express my deep appreciation to New Directions for allowing me to use all of Pound's *Cathay* as well as excerpts from *Personae* and *The Cantos*. I also wish to thank Dorothy Pound, Committee for Ezra Pound, for giving me permission to use the Poem "Lament of the Frontier Guard" from the Fenollosa manuscript.

The following authors and publishers graciously gave me permission to quote from books which they have published: Harvard University Press for permission to use some of the verse of Emily Dickinson; Francis A. Johns, Rutgers University Library; Yale University Press; Jonathan Cape, Limited; Paragon Book Reprint Corporation; the Meredith Press of D. Appleton and Company; Harcourt, Brace, and World for permission to quote some of the verse of T. S. Eliot; Alfred Knopf; Houghton Mifflin; Macmillan; A. C. Graham for permission to use verse from *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*, edited by C. Birch and D. Keene, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; *Poetry Australia*; Bernhard Karlgren, The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm; and Hugh Kenner for permission to use his journal articles.

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Ezra Pound's *Cathay*

Abbreviated Titles by which Ezra Pound's Works Are Cited

P—Personae (New Directions [1926]).

SR—The Spirit of Romance (New Directions [1953]).

LE—Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, edited and with an introduction by T. S. Eliot (London, 1954).

MIN—Make It New (New Haven, 1935).

GB—Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir (New York, 1916).

Letters—The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941, edited by D. C. Paige (New York, 1950).

Translations—The Translations of Ezra Pound, edited and with an introduction by Hugh Kenner (New Directions, 1953).

ALS—A Lume Spento and Other Early Poems (New Directions [1949]).

All references to *The Cantos* follow the page number in the 1956 edition by New Directions. Hence 16/69 means Canto 16 and page 69 in that edition.

introduction

"CATHAY, TRANSLATIONS BY EZRA POUND, FOR THE MOST PART FROM THE CHINESE OF RIHAHU, FROM THE NOTES OF THE LATE ERNEST FENOLLOSA, AND THE DECIPHERINGS OF THE PROFESSORS MORI AND ARIGA."

WITH these words, Pound introduced his book of translations of Chinese poetry in 1915. The books was immediately received with excitement by his contemporaries. Mr. Ford Madox Hueffer, for example, said, "The poems in *Cathay* are things of a supreme beauty. What poetry should be, that they are."[1]

But the most formidable statement which has gone solidly into the opinions of later Pound critics was made by T. S. Eliot. He called Pound "the inventor of Chinese poetry" and said that "through his translation we really at last get the original."[2] There is no indication anywhere that Eliot had the knowledge of the Chinese language and Chinese poetry to warrant this influential statement. Mere acquaintance with Legge and Giles could not qualify him to assume this authority. And yet, for many decades, critics have taken his words rather seriously. They probably do so not because Eliot is a qualified judge of Chinese, but because he is a supreme judge of poetry. And because *Cathay* is at root a group of superb poems, Pound's total ignorance of the Chinese language does not seem to have bothered his English readers. In fact, it did not even bother some Chinese readers. Hsieh Wen-tung, for instance, has ignored the obvious mistakes Pound has made

[1] Quoted in T. S. Eliot's "Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry" (1917) in *To Criticize the Critic* (London, 1965), p. 181.

[2] Introduction to *Ezra Pound: Selected Poems*, ed., T. S. Eliot (London, 1928), p. 14.

and said that Pound's poetic acumen has made up for the loss incurred by linguistic errors.[3] Roy Earl Teele (a sinologist), in his study of English translations of Chinese poetry, *Through a Glass Darkly* (Ann Arbor, 1949), attacks the Fenollosa-Pound approach, but thinks Pound superior to other translators, because these poems are (he borrows Eliot's word here) "translucencies."[4]

To take *Cathay* for a group of excellent English poems based upon some Chinese text rather than for translations as such has become *the* attitude of most Pound critics. Hence Hugh Kenner, the most vigorous interpreter of Pound's poetry, is tempted to sidestep the issue of translation and reads *Cathay* mainly as if they were English poems: "*Cathay* is notable, considered as an English product rather than [as a] Chinese product."[5] He thinks these poems serve "to extend, inform, and articulate the preoccupations of the present by bringing the past abreast of it."[6] "The preoccupations of the present," we are told recently, are those with World War I: "For *Cathay* . . . is largely a war-book, using Fenollosa's much as Pope used Horace or Johnson Juvenal, to supply a system of parallels and a structure of discourse . . . the *Cathay* poems paraphrase, as it were, an elegiac war-poetry nobody wrote. Perfectly vital after half a century, they are among the most durable of all poetic responses to World War I."[7] Although Kenner hints here and there that, as translations, they are equally superb, he never says that they are *positively* so.

What about the merits or demerits of these poems as translations? The reader naturally expects the Chinese scholars to answer this question. But, to our despair, there is scarcely any

[3] "English Translations of Chinese Poetry," *Criterion*, XVII (April 1938), 423.

[4] Pp. 6, 8, 107.

[5] *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (London, 1951), p. 154.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 144.

[7] Kenner, "The Invention of China," *Spectrum*, IX.1 (Spring 1967), 30-31. (Hereafter abbreviated as *Spectrum*.)

intelligent discussion at all. Arthur Waley, a regular diner in the Pound group,[8] apparently did not approve these translations, but he did not criticize Pound openly. Soon after the appearance of *Cathay*, he retranslated several of Li Po's poems in *Cathay* in a paper delivered before the China Society at the School of Oriental Studies, London.[9] But his translations there prove no better than Pound's. In fact, his language is very much indebted to Pound's *Cathay*, as we shall see in Chapter III.[10]

Many Chinese scholars simply cannot believe that translations can be made without any knowledge of the language to be translated.[11] Hence, both George Kennedy's essay on Pound's ignorance of the Chinese language[12] and Achilles Fang's article, "Fenollosa and Pound,"[13] in which he catalogues without commentary numerous linguistic errors, deepen the impression that *Cathay* can in no way stand up as translations.

Although the recent joint effort of Pen-ti Lee and Donald Murray claims to do more than Fang,[14] the essay, typical of its kind, ends up in detecting linguistic errors only and fails to probe into the internal thought progress of either the orig-

[8] Iris Barry, "The Ezra Pound Period" in *The Bookman* (October 1931), 167.

[9] *The Poet Li Po, A.D. 701-762* (1918). See also Achilles Fang, "Fenollosa and Pound," *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies*, XX (June 1957), 221.

[10] It is probably for this reason that Waley never reprinted these translations (except one) in his life time.

[11] If Robert Lowell had included some translations from the Chinese in his recent *Imitations* (New York, 1961), a book of excellent translations from many languages he did not know, he would have been under the same attack.

[12] "Fenollosa, Pound and the Chinese Character," *Yale Literary Magazine* CXXVI (December 1958), 24-36.

[13] See note 9.

[14] "The Quality of *Cathay*: Ezra Pound's Early Translations of Chinese Poems," *Literature East and West* X.3 (September 1966), 264-277. (Hereafter abbreviated as *LE&W*.) For concrete example of their criticism, see Chapter III.

inal or the translations.[15] In fact, because they have ignored the Fenollosa manuscript made available by Chisolm and Stock[16] and Pound's own poetry and criticism, their conclusions are often false and lacking in perspective.

The criticisms of *Cathay* (none of which is book-length) fall into two obvious patterns: defense and condemnation. But mere defense or condemnation is bound to blur the true image of these poems. Most of Pound's defenders could not discuss the way in which some of the poems are said to be close to the original in the "sequence of images," "rhythm," "effects," and "tone."[17] Those who condemn Pound tend to concentrate on the scar and overlook everything else.

What is more important at this stage is neither to defend nor to condemn but to understand Pound as fully as we can without being led astray by predetermined conclusions.[18] To achieve such understanding is to widen the possibility of

[15] In the same issue we find two other articles on Pound's early translations, Angela Jung Palandri's "'The Stone is Alive in My Hand'—Ezra Pound's Chinese Translations" and Richard P. Benton's "A Gloss on Pound's 'Four Poems of Departure.'" The former, like her Ph.D. dissertation *Ezra Pound and China*, attends to Pound's general debt to China as seen in the *Cantos* and tries to see the poems in *Cathay* as illustrations of the imagistic theories. (For a summary of her dissertation, see the *Pound Newsletter: 9*, January 1956, pp. 9-10.) Like Lee and Murray, she did not consult the Fenollosa manuscript. The latter, again without resorting to the crib, is concerned with linguistic errors rather than literary tenets.

[16] Lawrence W. Chisolm's *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture* (New Haven-London, 1963) gives us the notes for "Song of the Bowmen of Shu," p. 249 and a poem by Oshorei (Wang Ch'ang-ling) which Pound did not translate. See illustrations following page 224. Noel Stock, ed., *Ezra Pound: Perspectives* (Chicago, 1965), gives us the notes for "The Beautiful Toilet" pp. 178-89.

[17] These are Hugh Kenner's searching words (*Translations*, p. 12). Even Kenner's recent article, "The Invention of China," in which he examines several of Fenollosa's cribs, fails to bring out *the* Chinese poems and their bearing upon the translations.

[18] "There were four things from which the Master was entirely free. He had no foregone conclusions, no arbitrary predeterminations, no obstinacy, and no egoism." *Confucian Analects*, Book IX in *The Chinese Classics*, tr., James Legge (Hong Kong, 1871), I, 217.

communication, and a clear measurement of Pound's achievement in this case will involve at least the following steps:

1. To look at the problems of translation from Chinese into English, and in particular, to discuss the difficulty of approximating in English the peculiar mode of representation constituted by Chinese syntax.

2. To look into Pound's mind as a poet, to know the obsessive concepts and techniques he cherished *at the time* he translated these Chinese poems and to see how these conditioned his translations.

3. Since Fenollosa annotated these poems under Japanese instructors ("Rihaku," for instance, is the Japanese name for Li Po), it is necessary for us to examine the triple relation, from the original Chinese to Fenollosa's notes and to the end products, in order to find out how the intermediary has obstructed Pound and how his creative spirit sometimes breaks through the crippled text to resurrect what was in the original.

4. No translator can claim to have actually translated the poetry. This is also true of Pound. How close, then, are the "equivalents"[19] he gets out of the Fenollosa notes to the original, the "cuts and turns"[20] of the Chinese poems? In other words, we need to compare carefully the original and the derivative "forms of consciousness" to see what has actually happened in between.

The present study of *Cathay* seeks, therefore, not to defend nor to condemn but to understand Pound by following these steps. It aims at widening the scope of understanding of Pound as poet by discussing his role as translator of Chinese. Hopefully, this will clarify certain stylistic directions in the entire development of Pound's poetry. As we shall see in the following chapters, *Cathay* in many ways forms a pivotal point in his development, and without understanding this no Pound study can claim to be complete.

[19] This is Pound's own term. See Chapter IV.

[20] For concrete examples of these points, see Chapter IV.