Genius, Appropriation and Transnational Collaboration in Ezra Pound’s Cathay

Abstract

When we discuss the cross-cultural relationships of Euro-American modernists we often fall between the poles of either celebrating the ‘coming together of traditions’ or suspiciously decrying the power play involved. A case in point is the divergent critical understanding most often posited of Ezra Pound’s relationship to the materials he produced from Ernest Fenollosa’s notes – notably Classical Chinese poetry in the form of Cathay (1915). The first position is Hugh Kenner’s who holds that its meaning, its primary function, was as an anti-WWI volume, rather than as any representation of Chinese poetry or an extension of Imagism (1971, 202–204). In seeming opposition to this vision of an ideal aesthetic come at by the application of genius, we have those who highlight the source material of Fenollosa’s notes to discuss various modes of Pound as translator. Interestingly, these critics, who resist the Kennerian celebration of Poundian genius and insist that Pound is engaged here in an act of translation, “essentially […] appropriative” (Xie 232), or otherwise, also reinforce a reading whereby “the precise nature of the translator’s authorship remains unformulated, and so the notion of authorial originality continues” (Venuti 6). This is the issue I wish to address when we study the disparities between Fenollosa’s notes and the Cathay poems, i.e. Pound’s own choices with regard to those poems’ content, as a key chapter in the study of transnational collaboration.

Richard Sieburth points to the “heavy tan wrappers” of the “1915 edition of Cathay” in which “some have seen an allusion to the military apparel of World War I” (292) in his notes to New Selected Poems and Translations. Such descriptions of the text often see critics range themselves into already always defined critical positions. The first and, hitherto, most firmly entrenched position is Hugh Kenner’s take on Cathay, “never completely overturned” (Yao 33), with which A. David Moody, Pound’s latest biographer concurs (258, 271); Kenner holds that its meaning, its primary function, was as an anti-WWI volume, rather than as any representation of Chinese poetry or an extension of Imagism (1971, 202–204). Indeed translation is barely possible here because after he received Ernest Fenollosa’s notes from his widow, Mary Fenollosa, Pound made far too many errors. These can be explained away neatly when one appeals to the aesthetic value of
what was accomplished, rather than to make any serious (read: scholarly) representation of Cathay as translation continues Kenner (1971, 204). Ultimately we are given an understanding of Pound, horrified at what the war was doing to the genius of modern art, showing us how all war is futile by way of the classical Chinese mirror that reflects WWI, thus allowing Cathay to simultaneously stand out from the crowd while tapping into its Zeitgeist.

In seeming opposition to this vision of an aesthetic ideal-for-its-time-and-all-times, arrived at by the application of genius and the miraculous gifts and vagaries of the historical context, we have those who highlight the source material of Fenollosa’s notes to discuss various modes of Pound as translator. Interestingly, these critics, who resist the Kennerian celebration of Poundian genius and insist that Pound is engaged here in an act of translation, “essentially […] appropriative” (Xie 232), “as a literary mode” (Yao 32), or otherwise, also reinforce a reading whereby “the precise nature of the translator’s authorship remains unformulated, and so the notion of authorial originality continues” (Venuti 6). This, according to Lawrence Venuti, is an effect of the “individulistic conception of authorship that continues to prevail in the British and American cultures” (6). Herein lies the issue I wish to address when we study the disparities between Fenollosa’s notes and Cathay as Pound presented it, i.e. Pound’s own choices with regard to those poems’ content and presentation, as a key chapter in the study of transnational collaboration. The attempt to read beyond a study of sources and influences, to the idea that the notion of the individualist ‘author’ is not the sole, or even the key, method of critiquing the choices we see in the text matches the actual condition of the art’s production with the theoretical possibilities of the “dynamic set of relationships, practices, problematics, and cultural engagements […] rather than a static canon of works, a given set of formal devices, or a specific range of beliefs” (7) that Jessica Berman deals out as transnational modernism.

T. S. Eliot, averring that Pound had invented “Chinese poetry for our time” (qtd. in Moody 272) in his 1928 “Introduction” to Pound’s Selected Poems, gives us the pithiest quote on Cathay; however another, less famous, opinion of his is rather more germane to the question of what Pound was doing in Cathay rather than why he undertook to “invent” Chinese poetry.4 “He is more himself,” Eliot explains in 1919, “more at ease, behind the mask of Arnaut, Bertrand, Guido, Li Po and Propertius, than when he speaks in his own person. He must hide to reveal himself” (qtd. in Badenhausen 32). Typically, Eliot is identified as having developed Laforgue’s ironic ‘I,’ and his personae were Prufrock and Sweeney; Pound’s were troubadours, Li Po, Propertius, and Mauberley before he moves into the historically and economically significant personae of The Cantos. Whereas Eliot used “masks” to distance himself from aspects of modern life that he found repulsive (Scofield 76–77), Pound’s personae were poets and could be considered in good part alter-egos. In this reading, the personae are a way of working through a specific poetic problem, the persona is a transparent mask, wearing the
traits of two poets and responding to two situations, old and new, which overlap significantly and with significance (Klapheck 11). One might thus associate the reticent “Possum” with the desire to hide rather than the confident “Brer Rabbit,” yet there we have it. With Eliot’s insightful description of Pound “hiding to reveal himself” in mind, we can investigate the basic paradox of the poems in Cathay such that it becomes difficult to accept either of the two mainstream critical models for categorizing what he accomplishes in them.

A study of one literal version of the poems in Fenollosa’s notebooks will show the extent to which Pound collaborated with the materials available to him for the Cathay poems, rather than translating them (vide Xie/Yao) or creating them (vide Kenner) in an act of modern genius. Along with these notes and their corresponding published poems we can then see how the messy reality of collaboration operates both for and against Pound’s attempt to bring cultures closer, ultimately serving to reify their distinctions. Here, according to Lawrence Chisolm, is the version from the Fenollosa notebooks of Cathay’s opening poem, the “Song of the Bowmen of Shu”:

We pick off the “Warabi” (an edible fern) which first grow from the earth. We say to each other, “When will we return to our country?” It will be the last of the year. Here we are far from home because we have the “ken-in” as our enemy. We have no leisure to sit down comfortably (as we did at home) because we have the “ken-in” as our enemy. We pick off the “Warabi” which are soft. When we say the returning our mind is full of sorrow. We are very sorrowful. We are hungry and thirsty. But our defense is not yet settled, so we cannot let our friends return to our country and ask how our family lives. We pick off the “Warabi” which have become already rough. We say to each other, “When will we return to our country?” It will be October. We must be prudent for our affair (which is the order of the emperor); we have no leisure to sit down comfortably. Our sorrow is very bitter, but we would not return to the country. What is that blooming flower? Whose is that chariot? That is our general’s. The horses are hitched already to the chariot; they seem to be vigorous. How dare we repose? We must conquer the enemy even three times a month. Those four horses are tied; they are very strong. The generals are on their backs and the soldiers are by their sides. The four horses are well educated; the generals have the ivory arrows and the quivers which are ornamented with the skin of fish. We must be careful every day, because the enemy is very quick. Other time when we started the willows are drooping by spring wind.
But now we come back when it snows.
We go very slowly and we are thirsty and hungry.
Our mind is full of sorrow; who will know of our grief? (qtd. in Chisolm 252)

It is one of the clearest and most informative examples of the material to be found in the notebooks according to Kenner (1967, 46). Chisolm attributes these notes specifically to Fenollosa (252). However Kenner disagrees categorically, stating that the notes on this particular poem are not Fenollosa’s own running translation, but rather Mr. Ariga’s, “a version written out by Mr. Ariga himself, ideographic text, English paraphrase and notes, in his clear hand and quaint English (1967, 49). There seems to be no reference to this major disagreement in any other critical discussion of this poem, with Yip (97) and Qian (59) deferring to Kenner’s interpretation and Xie (256) quoting Chisolm’s publication of the notes as I have done above. The need to study the implications of the multiple foci which form the collaboration that resulted in Cathay could not be better illuminated. Admittedly these notes are far from poetry; some of the lines are not even effective prose. To be fair, these are study notes, not finished translations. The magic touch of creativity was Pound’s, as Kenner might have put it, to give us:

Here we are, picking the first fern-shoots
And saying: When shall we get back to our country?
Here we are because we have the Ken-nin for our foemen,
We have no comfort because of these Mongols.
We grub the soft fern-shoots,
When anyone says “Return,” the others are full of sorrow.
Sorrowful minds, sorrow is strong, we are hungry and thirsty.
Our defense is not yet made sure, no one can let his friend return.
We grub the old fern-stalks.
We say: Will we be let to go back in October?
There is no ease in royal affairs, we have no comfort.
Our sorrow is bitter, but we would not return to our country.
What flower has come into blossom?
Whose chariot? The General’s.
Horses, his horses even, are tired. They were strong.
We have no rest, three battles a month.
By heaven, his horses are tired.
The generals are on them, the soldiers are by them.
The horses are well trained, the generals have ivory arrows and quivers ornamented with fish-skin.
The enemy is swift, we must be careful.
When we set out, the willows were drooping with spring,
We come back in the snow,
We go slowly, we are hungry and thirsty,
Our mind is full of sorrow, who will know of our grief? (1915, 5–6)
Pound has, seemingly, made no major changes in the meaning of the Fenollosa lines. The poetic changes appear to transform the notes into poetry without substantially altering the meaning. Kenner celebrates this as a depiction of suffering humanity inherent in the situation of war where Cathay forms “among the most durable of all poetic responses to World War I” and of the poetics that Pound brought to the selection and translation involved here a “sensibility responsive to torn Belgium and disrupted London” (1971, 202). Yao’s point about the enduring nature of Kenner’s view is borne out by the critique of this poem (and indeed the depiction of the whole “mood” of Cathay) in Pound’s latest scholarly biography, by A. David Moody, stating that it is a “soldier’s chorus” (267). However if we take the subtle differences in content, as opposed to poetics, between notes and published poem into consideration, then we start to see a somewhat different image emerge. Does the attempt to conjure up a connection between the cultures of ‘China’ and the Britain of WWI really bear fruit, or does the inherent inclusivity of collaborative endeavors allow us to better capture the range of ideas at play here?

Pound plays, for example, on the suffering of the general’s horses – but it is only his horses that do so. So far we seem to match the idea of WWI generals and marshals enjoying themselves behind the lines as the men suffer in the trenches. In contrast, the lines in Fenollosa’s notes give us a general on a chariot with “vigorous” horses and other generals riding “tied […] strong” ones. An image of resolute strength and if the horses were suffering the generals might have been tired themselves. Indeed a general on a “tired” horse, as in the Cathay version, would arguably be more tired since he would, realistically, have access to more than one horse, ridden in turn, but only the one body. Pound simply repackages the point by giving us only a chariot pulled by “tired” horses, emphatically so; presumably the people in the chariot, removed from physical labor by image and station, are not so fatigued. Why, when Fenollosa glossed the horses as “vigorous,” has Pound simply made the whole image one of weariness? Rather than: “the horses are hitched already to the chariot; they seem to be vigorous” which would create a subtle shading, Pound repeats and echoes the previous use of “strong”: “Sorrowful minds, sorrow is strong, we are hungry and thirsty […] / Horses, his horses even, are tired. They were strong.” Notwithstanding later critique that lauds the poems for showing us the common humanity of soldiers engaged in a thankless war, the tired horses make the possibility of tired leaders more possible, not less. We start to lose traction on those paths that attempt to guide us in reading this poem as solely an attempt to bring worlds closer or to push them further apart or, by extension, that see here an exemplar of one particular mode of artistic production. Transnational collaboration is the practice that best fits the evidence of a Pound retaining ideas and changing them, in at times almost paradoxical themes, with an able interplay of inputs rather than a final act of appropriation or genius.

The use of “Ken-nin” may form a curious exemplar of this too. Pound glosses them as “Mongols,” rather than “Huns” as he might have done, to greater
effect, the latter term being one of common derogation for the Germans by the Allies. The point becomes clearer if we consider the version Pound went on to publish almost forty years later in *The Confucian Odes* (1954):

> Pick a fern, pick a fern, ferns are high,
> 'Home,' I'll say: home, the year's gone by,
> no house, no roof, these huns on the hoof.
> Work, work, work, that's how it runs,
> We are here because of these huns. (qtd. in Froula 94)

The nursery rhyme cadence here may have been for easy commitment to memory but the reference to “huns” would have served the first version well if the poet’s primary concern had, indeed, been to make the poems more accessible. “Ken-nin” is the Japanese Romanization for 燕狁 Xianyun, which was an ancient name for 匈奴 Xiongnu – nomadic tribes thought to be the origin of the catch-all “Huns” in what is now acknowledged to be a mistaken conflation but which was common historical belief in Pound’s time (Beckwith 404–405). Pound also calls the Ken-nin, “Mongols” (“We have no comfort because of these Mongols”). Even though the connections are historically and ethno-linguistically inaccurate, Pound uses Ken-nin and Mongols interchangeably – perhaps because of Ariga if we accept Kenner’s view of the notes? To a fin de siècle Japanese all Central Asian ‘barbarians’ might have been synonymous with ‘Mongols’ (the only Central Asian culture ever to threaten Japan in 1274 and 1281), just as the Central European threat of Germany and the Habsburgs were ‘Huns’ to the British. Thus, rather than emphasizing the easy thematic similarity of Rome, classical China and the Allies fighting a common ‘barbaric’ foe, we have this arbitrary anachronism of Mongols where no Mongols should be. The Kennerian critique of *Cathay* showing us the common humanity of these disparate cultures together surely dictates that the suffering soldiers face a foe with the same name that Pound’s friends were fighting in France, yet Pound eschews the ease of using the loaded term, “huns.”

The ease of a collaborative endeavor may provide a part answer here.

There is far more of Pound’s collaborators and his own decisions in this work than is commonly acknowledged by either one critical side or the other. As an elegy, Pound’s work performs more than simple reconstruction of the sorrow of soldiers in common by way of an ancient Chinese poem, connecting archives of struggles to maintain culture amid barbaric invasions as it were. One simply has to note the retention of the collective (and, I daresay, collaborative) pronoun at the outset of the lines. Jacob Edmond points out that since the Chinese characters themselves would have carried no pronominal markers (such to be added in actual speech/recitation), then Pound is, perforce, sticking with what has been provided. In the same vein, tense too is not marked in writing so that the immediacy of the present is no application of modernist genius but the work of Ariga/Fenollosa. Where they maintained an *ubi sunt* sense of the passage of times past
as we saw above with the persona of “The Exile’s Letter,” Pound follows suit and even provides “The Seafarer” as commentary, gloss, ideological counterpoint.

In this first poem of Cathay the reader also encounters sympathetic figures against the backdrop of a lush and fertile land. These bowmen are “picking the first fern-shoots” suggesting a gentle nurturing nature. Yet against this idyllic setting (flowers, fern-shoots, willows drooping with spring) is human sorrow and lexical uncertainty. Clearly we are in a tradition of spring rendered forever tainted by its associations with the Great War (Copp 54); “April is the cruelest month,” being the most famous expression of this, and thus calculated to appeal to the ideal of common humanity across the cultures. These Bowmen are very human, not just “of Shu;” they express a sensitive vulnerability as they wonder, “when shall we get back to our own country?” They possess “sorrowful minds” and they experience basic human needs: they are “hungry and thirsty” and worry about their friends. Although at war, these men are not inured to hardship, hence one may sense that they were used to something better in times past. They are no caricatured warriors but they are, as Pound seems to emphasize, close to the soil. And here again, in his attempt to make comprehensible the foreign while staying ‘true’ to the notes, Pound reveals the temporal and cultural divide. Rather than “we pick off the ‘Warabi’” that foreign-sounding kickshaw, “Here we are, picking the first fern-shoots,” and again “We grub the old fern-stalks.” Time passes with the Warabi in Fenollosa’s notes quite distinctively with shoots that “first grow” and are then “soft” and finally “already rough.” Clearly too, Pound tries to use the ferns to fulfill the same purpose and also repeats and echoes words like “fern” to amplify the emotional tone of preceding and following lines. But these activities are certainly strange and alienating in and of themselves, as strange, perhaps, as stories of soldiers of opposing trenches playing football with each other during a Christmas truce in 1914 (Eksteins 109–115; Fussell 10), something unimaginable only a few months later, let alone during the holocausts of WWII. Such things then come across as part of a particular time and ethos and so, although Pound’s poetics strive to produce accessibility in one view, in fact, there is an undeniable counter-melody that continues to carry a sense of ‘otherness’ in the material of the poems and in the personae the poet adopts to represent them. This poetry of war, of parting, longing and of loss, certainly reflects the experience of war at the time – but it also shows us, in its interstices, the differing ways that soldiers from disparate times and divergent cultures may experience it, both together, and apart. This is not solely, as Kenner lauded it, “an elegiac war poetry” (1971, 202) nor an exemplary translation produced by, as Qian understandingly excuses, a “Pound [who] may have […] deliberately suppressed […] in order to restore the consistent tone of the ancient song” (7). The fact that the two themes of critique consistently find fuel for their arguments should allow us to accept the appearance of a third option – that of Pound not really knowing what he wrought, “an elegiac war poetry nobody wrote” (202), to complete Kenner’s observation,
since he was not the only one who wrought it; the dialog, between the poems in Chinese, Mori, Ariga, Fenollosa, the notes and Pound, that gives us “Song of the Bowmen of Shu,” both draws us closer and yet maintains the sense of ‘other’ in an act of transnational collaboration.

_Cathay_ thus represents an important development in Pound’s oeuvre as he began to apply various translation techniques to Chinese poetry for experimenting with longer forms, and abandoning the compression of Imagism for an expanded lyrical assemblage of Vorticism. In addition to representing a stepping-stone in Pound’s attempt to theorize a _Gestalt_ poetics, _Cathay_ has been a central focus of critical scrutiny for modernist experimentation with Orientalism and primitivism. But more than just an event for literary modernism, _Cathay_ represents a model for the strategies used by avant-garde poets to work traditional Chinese literature into modern American poetic discourse. As Steven Yao notes,

Pound’s _Cathay_ stands as the formative translation not only for roughly contemporaneous feats of collaborative translation specifically of Chinese poetry as _Fir Flower Tablets_ (1921) by Amy Lowell and Florence Ayscough and _The Jade Mountain_ (1929) by Witter Bynner and Kiang Kang-hu, but also more generally for the current approach to the rendering of other languages into English […]. (32)

Indeed Yao goes so far as to identify that

Pound […] also helped to inaugurate the common contemporary practice in English of producing translations (especially of poetry) _through the collaboration of two or more people_, one (or more) who possesses an actual understanding of the original language, and the other who boasts an ostensibly more supple English literary sensibility. (32, emphasis mine)

Yao continues on to study the “fundamental importance of gender issues” (33) in _Cathay_ and so does not follow up on his idea about the collaborative procedure inherent to its production. Certainly the idea of transnational collaboration is one way to ask questions other than those posed and unresolved by the basic paradox of the critical positions on _Cathay_.

By investigating the critical trend that sees Pound attempt to present China as familiar, instead of alien, and as knowable, instead of inscrutable, we begin to see that the contradictions to both critical positions in the notes, the poems and their publication allow us to experience the reality of a collaboration that encompasses the contradictions and paradoxes of lived reality as opposed to the neat definitions of dogma. Perhaps Pound wanted to turn the image of two diametrically opposed traditions into one of complementary relationships but could not do so. His failure is implicit in the nature of the transnational collaboration Pound undertook with the works he produced by way of Fenollosa’s famous notes. Peter Jaszi’s formation of “serial collaboration” (50) encompassing borrowing, synthesis and appropriation,
best captures the intricacies of their relationship. Richard Badenhausen posits the model of an Eliot who “repeatedly locates the artist in a passive position surrendering to a more active agent” (68) in a discussion of Pound’s work on *The Waste Land*. The point is well taken, especially given Eliot’s politico-religious longings. It leaves us with the intriguing image of Pound, the “more active agent” just as he is “il miglior fabbro” who was, ironically, the relative failure in the canonical Modernist triumvirate of Yeats, Eliot and Pound. Is it because he had more in him of the “unfinished business of our times” (viii) that Michael North believes Modern literatures to have an abundance of? It seems that it would follow that that “unfinished business” of Pound is the business of his transnational collaboration and his inability to make of those kennings the socio-political changes he desperately sought, even while he gained, for himself and his championed artists, a “granted” (viii) aesthetic status as canonical. Thus, in terms of Pound’s position in the Modernist canon, *Cathay* has almost come to represent a “salvageable Pound” – the admirable transnational, the avant-garde poet engaged in a progressive cross-cultural poetics of the fin de siècle, not the ranting anti-Semite with a morbid fascination for Mussolini’s fascism of the 1930s.

The story of how *Cathay* came into being, one of Modernism’s foundational myths, has, appropriately enough, twin personae. According to Zhaoming Qian in *Orientalism and Modernism* there are two stories, not greatly differing in substance but rather, in style, that explain how Pound acquired from Mary Fenollosa her late husband’s notebooks. According to Qian, Mary Fenollosa’s side of the story, as retold by Lawrence Chisolm, suggests that during a brief meeting at the Indian Nationalist poet Sarojini Naidu’s London house in late September 1913 (1995, 9, 24), an eager and inquisitive Ezra Pound, after expressing interest in and some knowledge of Chinese literature, received a promise that the notebooks would be passed on to him (1995, 23). The story told by T. S. Eliot (and Ezra Pound, himself, much later) is that after reading Pound’s work, Mary Fenollosa felt, “[Pound] […] was the only person who could finish up these notes as Ernest would have wanted them done” (qtd. in Qian 1993, 23). In the former version, Pound actively sought out the poems, much as he did his association with Yeats, while in the latter, like a deserving artist waiting patiently for the muse, Pound’s writing proved that he was worthy enough for Mary Fenollosa to award them to him so that “these treasures c[ame] out of a clear sky” (qtd. in Qian 1995, 57). The implication of this difference uncannily doubles the critical debates about *Cathay*.

The aesthetic importance of China to Euro-American modernism is no longer in question. More specifically, notions about both classical Chinese verse and the ostensibly innate poeticity of the Chinese written character played especially vital roles in the Anglo-American modernist poetic revolution. Thus, while during the late nineteenth century in the United States, as Eric Hayot writes, “ideas about China were intertwined with concepts of labor, and thence with the prospects of America’s relationship to the idea and possibility of [economic] modernization”
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(101), during the modernist period the notion of “Chineseness” in particular, and
“Asianness” more generally, came to be fundamentally connected with the project of specifically literary aesthetic modernization (121). The issue is more pertinently one of the perception of particular aesthetics and what that means for the modern. Whether one ascribes genius to it and, by association, excuses the excesses and prejudices of modern artists, or whether one sees it wholly as appropriative, and so overly simplifies the nature of the art produced, and, by extension, the collaborators who produced it, one smooths over the key contradictions which make the art vital, informative.

Robert Kern points out that the creation of an authentic American writing is a task that has been an issue of continual concern for American authors writing in an “American” tradition that was solidified by Emerson and the New England Transcendentalists (37). Kern argues such a formula reveals that one of the key roles of Orientalism in American writing is to create an experimental space “outside” of the conventions associated with enlightenment Europe. The “new” experimental work is given a deep historical temporality as a “found” text, like an archeological artifact that could append literary historiography. However, the field of Orientalism carries with it discursive problems as described by Rey Chow: “it is antiquity that remains privileged as the site of the essence of Chineseness, which appears to be more bona fide when is found among the dead” (120). It is easy to see how metaphorical distance and absence are built into Orientalist representations of China that are the sources of experimentation. For example, there is a continual flattening of the meaning of “China” and “Chinese” such that a diverse set of languages (from Cantonese to Hakka), an extremely long and complex history of different kingdoms and states (from Chu to Shu), a variety of ethnicities (from Xiongnu to Mongol), various synthetic cultural traditions (including many different literary genres), and the spatially diverse settings (from Mainland China to diasporic communities around the world) are reduced to Tang and Song dynasty Chinese writing in one genre. Foremost among these conflations, for the purposes of this argument, is that by which Japanese collaborators opened up the world of ‘Chinese’ poetry for Fenollosa and then Pound as we have seen, to then be funneled into dominant modes of critique which neatly excise the contribution of the collaborators while paying them the appropriate lip-service.

Ultimately we do not need to ignore either the work of translation or the feats of artistic achievement Pound accomplished with Fenollosa’s notes – only to emphasize that, in this case, focus on translation alone means focus on a translator acting with a text alone (since there were no living authors to refer to) and focus on the genius is even more solitary. It is the realization of collaboration at work that allows us to comprehend Pound’s acceptance of what he saw as the scholarship and nous of others allied to his own talent. Voices in the notes clearly pull him to one choice and then another, even as he strives to make the text cohere despite the clear negotiations that take place therein. Transnational collaboration
lies at the heart of what Pound achieved with *Cathay*. The famously acknowledged collaboration which resulted in *The Waste Land* is of a piece with what he achieved with Fenollosa’s notes to produce *Cathay* – i.e. to “turn […] a jumble of good passages into a poem” (qtd. in Jaffé 132) as Eliot himself maintained. The contrapuntal reading lies in seeing *Cathay* not as the genius of the individual author bringing the *Zeitgeist* to bear on a scholar’s dry studies, but rather as the “dynamic” (7) ideal that Berman declares for transnational modernism. The nature of such a collaboration gives us no neat flowchart of exchange to be valorized or denigrated given one’s political proclivities but rather calls for study of the lived reality.

**Notes**

1 Although *Cathay*, as a collection, has been reprinted many times in various editions of Pound’s works, it exists in only two variant forms. The original edition (I base all my discussions of *Cathay*’s poems on the copy contained in the Special Collections at the Central Library, University of Otago) appeared in April 1915 with “Song of the Bowmen of Shu,” “The Beautiful Toilet,” “The River Song,” “The River-Merchant’s Wife,” “Poem by the Bridge at Ten-Shin,” “Jewel Stairs’ Grievance,” “Lament of the Frontier Guard” and “Exile’s Letter,” followed by the republication here of “The Seafarer,” and finished off with “Four Poems of Departure” and “South-Folk in Cold Country.” This Elkin Mathews publication was followed by *Lustra of Ezra Pound* (1916) which, among its other poems, added four “new translations from the Chinese” (Moody 286); repeated in *Personae* (1926), they are “Sennin Poem by Kukuhaku (Kuo P’u),” “A Ballad of the Mulberry Road,” “Old Idea of Chaoan by Roshorin (Lu Chao-Lin),” and “To-Em-Mei’s (T’ao Ch’ien) ‘The Unmoving Cloud’”) to which all other compilations of “Cathay” are devoted. The major difference between the two is, of course, the inclusion in the former of “The Seafarer” (first published in 1911), which was then shifted back to previous chapters/collections in all following editions and the addition of the four poems “from the Chinese.”

2 Ernest Francisco Fenollosa died in London in 1908 after a life spent studying the traditional art of Japan and China via his appointment as Professor of Political Economy and Philosophy at the University of Tokyo in 1878, his elevation to the post of Commissioner of Fine Arts in 1886 and his eventual Japanese Court rank and return to the US as Curator of Oriental at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (1890).

3 Pound received the notebooks from Mary Fenollosa in December 1913 (Qian 1995, 56–57) but probably did not start work on them until he had dealt with the Noh translations, i.e. “until the autumn of 1914” (Longenbach 41).
Eric Hayot, following Robert Kern (2004, 3) in pointing out that it is far from the unqualified praise that most critics take it to be, deconstructs this statement by arguing that Eliot is making two points in what follows: “first, that Cathay is not Chinese poetry, and second, that it is great poetry. The effect of the second of these points is to make the first hard to hear” (2004, 4). In effect, the critical arguments over whether Cathay is the product of Modern genius or translation (and still undeniably a great and popular read, then and now) fall prey to the deafening weight of Hayot’s “first” point.

Which supports Pound’s work on them in light of his March 1913 proscription in A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste to “not retell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose” (1985, 5).

See Paul Fussell’s The Great War and Modern Memory (82–89) on this divide. Kenner struggles to deal with the reason for this change too, settling for “his eye failed or his dramatic sense prompted an improvement” (219), which, of course, tells us precisely that there is no one answer for the choice Pound made.

This is precisely the gloss provided by Christine Froula in A Guide to Ezra Pound’s Selected Poems (71). Selected Poems (1928) corrects Cathay’s “Ken-nin” for, presumably, the Fenollosan/Arigan spelling “ken-in” (1971, 49).

“Mongols” as an ethnic grouping do not show up in Chinese records (Ebrey 111) until well after the composition of the Shijing Odes (Idema and Haft 94) from which this poem’s notes are culled (1971, 50; Yip 103; Moody 267).

After reading Cathay on the Western Front, Gaudier-Brzeska wrote, “the poems depict our situation in a wonderful way. We do not eat the young nor old fern-shoots but we cannot be over-victualled where we stand” (1970, 58).

On a more artistic level critics have identified that this repetition amid change incorporates standard chinoiserie patterns to show Chinese-ness (blossoms, willows) as well as a Chinese shanshui aesthetic of repeating a landscape through seasons, or from different vantage points. Jiangqing Zheng identifies this process in Pound’s work as a specific aesthetic strategy, terming it “re-imaging poems” found in works like Pound’s “Seven-Lakes Canto” (123).

Using a similar approach, Zhaoming Qian argues that Pound’s understanding of this aesthetic comes from his encounters with Chinese landscapes at the British Museum as well as from Whistler’s paintings (2003, 14). Qian’s inclusion of Whistler’s paintings (famous for their appropriations of Chinese landscapes, and their hybrid representations of Chinese and Japanese costumes, styles, and décor within a European mise-en-scène) as a model for understanding Chinese landscape explains Pound’s attempt to construct a poetry that suggests the structure of the original but does not exactly repeat the rhetorical techniques.
References


