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Making It Old, Making It New, Making It Chinese:

Transcultural Imitation and the Palimpsest of Translation in Pound's *Cathay*

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*ABSTRACT*

In the vibrant field of research generated by Ezra Pound's *Cathay* (1915), an anthology of indirect retranslations of classical Chinese poetry reworked from the notebooks of Ernest Fenollosa, the publication of Timothy Billings' masterly critical edition of *Cathay* in 2019 is a landmark event. Drawing on the abundant archival materials and insights afforded by this critical edition, this article triangulates the discussion by examining Pound's methods of reworking the Fenollosa intermediary and reconstructs the multiple processes of mediation in the making of *Cathay*. It proposes a more capacious and versatile framework for exploring the complexities of transcultural rewriting, and advances a more nuanced treatment of commonly employed categories in translation studies like 'domesticating', 'foreignizing', and 'foreignness'. In particular, I develop two analytical concepts to examine *Cathay*: firstly, transcultural imitation, which describes the sources and techniques with which Pound signals a certain form of 'Chineseness' and mediates the experience of the foreign; and secondly, the palimpsest of translation, which delineates the multilayered richness and prismatic pluralities of *Cathay* by unpacking the diverse sets of intertexts out of which it is woven. Through the methods of transcultural imitation and the combination and interplay of these intertexts in the *Cathay* palimpsest, Pound reconstitutes ideas of the foreign about China, creating a translucent foreignness and endowing Chinese poetry with new transcultural significance.

Ezra Pound's *Cathay* (1915), an anthology of indirect retranslations of classical Chinese poetry reworked from the notebooks of Ernest Fenollosa, seems to have a certain Janus-like quality. Its two faces consist of characteristics from the source culture and the target culture, the old and the new, respectively: classical Chinese poetry in modernist English verse. Celebrated as a masterpiece of modernism, it is marked by the distinctive features of the 'New Poetry'. Commentators have produced ample textual analysis of how *Cathay* exemplifies Pound's poetics – the '*vers-libre* principle', the 'Imagist principle, that a poem

may build its effects out of things it sets before the mind's eye', the Vorticist development of it, and the 'lyrical principle'.<sup>1</sup>

While embodying the artistic method and vision of Pound the poet-translator, *Cathay* also looks Chinese, and one of the best-known remarks on it is that of T. S. Eliot: 'As for *Cathay*, it must be pointed out that Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time.'<sup>2</sup> *Cathay* conspicuously signals its 'Chineseness', indicating on the title page its status as 'translations' derived from 'authentic' sources – 'Cathay: Translations by Ezra Pound. For the Most Part from the Chinese of Rihaku, from the Notes of the Late Ernest Fenollosa, and the Decipherings of the Professors Mori and Ariga.' Through the channels of the little magazines Pound made it known that he was 'now in charge of the late Ernest Fenollosa's papers dealing with Chinese lyric poetry and the Japanese stage' and had access to a storehouse of philological information.<sup>3</sup> In other words, while absorbing the Chinese poems into his poetic agenda, Pound was also flagging their 'Chineseness'.

The Fenollosa notebooks, which Pound acquired in December 1913, contain glosses, notes, and translations of classical Chinese poems that Fenollosa prepared with his Japanese tutors. They are held at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven, CT, among the Ezra Pound papers (YCAL MSS 43). The so-called 'unreliability' of Pound's translations in *Cathay* is the combined result of the material condition of the Fenollosa notebooks and Pound's guesses, misreadings, and alterations of the materials he found in these notebooks.

That these notes are disorganized, and in some way or ways defective, is a still prevalent misconception, and it has given rise to two diametrically opposed approaches to studying Pound's translation. Sinologists, on the one hand, inveigh against Pound's 'misuse' of Fenollosa's notes as adding layers of compounded ignorance and error. Advocates of Pound, on the other hand, either argue that since the outcome was good

poetry these philological concerns are beside the point, or turn the supposed defects of the notes themselves into an argument for Pound's 'poetic alchemy': with 'a kind of clairvoyance', Pound was able to penetrate the 'fog' of these obfuscating cribs, intuit 'the central consciousness of the original author', and even at times surpass the Chinese originals in poetic quality.<sup>4</sup> The first approach, philologically oriented (or what might be called equivalence-based) as it is, seems outmoded in view of recent developments in Translation Studies. The second, while valorizing the creative aspects of translation, subsumes all the intricacies of transcultural rewriting under the myth of individual genius. It also falls prey to the fallacy of positing an 'essence' of Chinese poetry that transcends history and culture, eluding all but the rare intuitive power of the poet-seer. These contrasting approaches have contributed to opposing positions in the critical discourses on *Cathay*, which has become 'an ethico-political litmus test among scholars of China and world literature'. Lucas Klein goes on: 'Either we are full of glee at the growth of cultural diversity and hybridity, or else indignant against the cultural imperialism at work (sometimes both).'<sup>5</sup>

The publication in 2019 of Timothy Billings' critical edition of *Cathay* was a landmark in the animated field of research generated by this slim volume of 'translations'. Billings' meticulous editing reproduces the details of the Fenollosa notes in all their amplitude and variety, alongside Billings' erudite annotations. It provides much-needed correctives to transcription errors and consequent imperfect understanding of the Fenollosa notes: as Billings remarks, 'none of Fenollosa's previous transcribers ever fully learned how to read his handwriting'.<sup>6</sup> And it reveals hitherto untrodden paths for avoiding the cul-de-sacs of previous approaches. Haun Saussy points out that 'the few specialists who have tried to reconstruct [Pound's] compositional process have sometimes attempted to derive a poem from the wrong set of notes. The gaps between Fenollosa's notes and Pound's final version then leave the critic free to extol Pound's

inexplicable intuition.<sup>7</sup> Crucially, this critical edition facilitates comparative reading between Pound's translation and his mediating text, which offers an in-depth view of the poet-translator at work, enabling scholars to demystify Pound's translatorial 'clairvoyance' and restore *Cathay* to 'an archive of sequential conversations' in 'a chain of translation ... practices'.<sup>8</sup>

Drawing on the materials and insights afforded by this edition, the present article aims to bring various existing strands of analysis on *Cathay* into fruitful conversation. It will explore alternatives to source-oriented critiques of misinterpretation, or formalist readings that disregard the problematics of representation. It proposes a more capacious and versatile framework for examining the complexities of transcultural rewriting, aiming to advance a more nuanced treatment of such commonly employed categories in Translation Studies as 'domesticating', 'foreignizing', and 'foreignness'. The two ensuing sections develop two analytical concepts: first, transcultural imitation, which probes into the sources and techniques with which Pound signals a certain form of 'Chineseness' and mediates the experience of the foreign; second, the palimpsest of translation, which delineates the multilayered richness and prismatic plurality of *Cathay* by unpacking the composition and interplay of diverse intertexts out of which it is woven.

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Eliot accompanied the above-quoted remark on Pound as 'the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time' with the obliquely dismissive comment that 'people of to-day who like Chinese poetry are really no more liking Chinese poetry than the people who like Willow pottery and Chinesische-Turms in Munich and Kew like Chinese Art'.<sup>9</sup> Here we discern some ripples of ambivalence;<sup>10</sup> whether Eliot was implying that *Cathay* is a kind of literary chinoiserie is uncertain, but weighing the rest of his comments it becomes clear that he was making a distinction between two conceptual entities: 'Chinese poetry ...

as we know it to-day', which is 'something invented by Ezra Pound', and 'Chinese poetry-in-itself', 'which is unknowable'.<sup>11</sup>

Eliot's remark finds a distant echo in George Steiner, who notes that Pound's invention of Chinese poetry is 'part of a more general phenomenon of hermeneutic trust': 'the China of Pound's poems' confirms 'powerful pictorial and tonal anticipations', and 'corroborate[s] what is fundamentally a Western "invention of China"'. The efficacy of Pound's invention rests not on in-depth, detailed cultural knowledge, but rather on the absence of such knowledge and the presence in its stead of generalized characteristics and a different, non-positivist, 'poetic' form of knowledge that constitutes the vision of Cathay shared by Pound and his readers. These generalized cultural characteristics are the familiar fragments of China – '*chinoiserie* in European art, furniture and letters'; they are, as George Steiner puts it, the 'product of cumulative impressions stylized and selected' and taken to be the 'constants – of Chinese landscape, attitude, and emotional register' in the 'Western eye'. That Pound can 'imitate and persuade with utmost economy' is 'not because he or his reader knows so much but because both concur in knowing so little'.<sup>12</sup>

The very act of naming the collection 'Cathay' can be read as a gesture acknowledging the long-standing tradition of literary *chinoiserie* and an invitation to the reader to partake, in the spirit of 'hermeneutic trust', in the China of imagination and memory, or what Eliot called China 'as we know it'. The evocation of familiar motifs and themes associated with China, in turn, created an illusion of authenticity for those who subscribed to Pound's Cathayan vision. The mechanisms for creating such effects of 'Chineseness', as I hope to demonstrate, can be unpacked through the idea of transcultural imitation.

The primary components with which transcultural imitation signals Chineseness are generalized motifs, themes, formal features, and other recurrent discursive elements in Western discourses on China. In his elaborate analysis of various 'types of transtextual

relationships’, Gérard Genette notes that imitations are done ‘indirectly’ and based on the ‘idiolect’ of the ‘hypotext’ – ‘to imitate is to generalize’, which involves identifying the hypotext’s ‘specific stylistic and thematic features’ and treating it ‘as a model, as a genre’.<sup>13</sup>

The efficacy of these components of transcultural imitation can be further illustrated with what Elizabeth Chang, in her study of chinoiserie as an aesthetic, calls the logic of ‘the familiar exotic’, which conveys a ‘paradoxical sense of everyday foreignness’ and ‘cultural and aesthetic difference that is amplified, not diffused, by increased circulation and reproduction’.<sup>14</sup> Chinoiserie relies on elements that are commonly recognized as ‘Chinese’ to mark its status, and the simulacrum of foreignness it presents is thus a conventionalized form of difference or a domesticated version of the foreign, made familiar to the local audience through circulation and repetition.

The material culture of chinoiserie, together with other discourses engendered by contacts with China, nourished various forms of writerly engagements, notably the copious and variegated tradition of literary chinoiserie. Around the time when *Cathay* was coming into being, the modernist little magazines published quite a few chinoiserie poems, including those composed by Pound, and Allen Upward’s series, ‘Scented Leaves from a Chinese Jar’.<sup>15</sup> As Upward recounted, this series was ‘discovered’ by Pound – ‘Thereupon Ezra Pound the generous rose up and called me an | Imagist’, and nine pieces were included in the 1914 Imagist anthology, *Des Imagistes*. Chinoiserie compositions form part of the discursive milieu of *Cathay*, and for transcreators like Pound, the boundary between such compositional practices and other transtextual modes like adaptation, imitation, and (pseudo)translation is porous. The making of a piece like Pound’s ‘Ts’ai Chi’h’, with its commingling of (pseudo)originals and fusion of transtextual techniques, has baffled commentators.<sup>16</sup> Pound himself mistook Upward’s ‘Scented Leaves’ for ‘paraphrases from the Chinese’ based on genuine Chinese originals,

as did the editors of *Poetry*. Upward later undeceived him, saying that he ‘made it up out of his head, using a certain amount of Chinese reminiscence’.<sup>17</sup>

The chinoiserie script, marked by ‘semiotic fluidity and transformative potency’,<sup>18</sup> affords a rich repository not only of motifs, characters, themes, and compositional devices that signal the imaginary topos of ‘China’, but also strategies of transcultural rewriting. The ‘familiar exotics’ of the China topos are free-floating Chinese signs, dislodged from their original milieu and transplanted to another semiotic matrix, open to recycling and reconfiguration, and amenable to multiple significations and diverse cultural usages. This release of cultural signifiers leads to a principle of eclecticism and the predominance of transtextual techniques like juxtaposition, pastiche, bricolage, and collage.

Another notable feature of the technique of transcultural imitation is that its ‘source’ can be elusive and not clearly defined. Transcultural imitation often draws upon a more diffused and amorphous ‘imitated corpus’ (to borrow another term from Genette)<sup>19</sup> which cannot be pinpointed with textual exactitude, as it fuses textual sources like translations and general works on China with the equally important visual and aural media of contact with China’s material culture and Chinese speech, all of these intermingling with free-ranging ideas and motifs in larger discourses on ‘the Orient’.

The material culture of chinoiserie and the writerly engagement of literary chinoiserie are two characteristic forms of transcultural imitation. *Cathay*, as I hope to show, while having affinities with these other variants, can be distinguished from them in two crucial respects: firstly, the palimpsestic layering of intertexts through which Pound reconstitutes foreignness and inscribes new transcultural significance in Chinese poetry, which will be discussed in the next section; secondly, Pound’s use of the Fenollosa notebooks, to which we will now turn.

We may speak of two kinds of sources in *Cathay*: the broader, more fluid and variegated discursive repository of Western discourses on China, and the Fenollosa notebooks, which form the tangible mediating text of Pound's indirect translation, and from which Pound's textual moves can be reconstructed. Comparative reading between Pound's translations and the Fenollosa notes not only yields insights into Pound's techniques of translating and anthologizing; it also triangulates the analysis with an additional dimension of language, discursive context, and cultural tradition.

The Chinese poetry notebooks of Fenollosa include notes for 150 or so Chinese poems, supplied with glosses prepared by Fenollosa and his Japanese tutors. From these Pound selected 14 pieces for *Cathay*. A further 4 were included for the 'Cathay' section in Pound's *Lustra* (1916). Like the translations of Herbert Giles that were recast in Pound's *Des Imagistes* pieces,<sup>20</sup> the Fenollosa notes act as textual intermediaries, and they similarly offer an assemblage of Chinese fragments – now in the more disjointed form of transcriptions and glosses that require deciphering.

Through Pound's extensive work of selecting, rearranging, and reassembling the aggregate of fragments presented in the Fenollosa notes, a surplus of chinoiserie objects, motifs, and scenes emerges. This feature was observed by Pound's readers back then. The reviewer for *The Bookman*, for example, remarked that *Cathay* 'provides a procession of bright images and sweet words': 'Peach boughs, apricot boughs, dragons, dancing girls, yellow dogs, blue jade, green eyebrows are here – all the motives and all the highly-wrought beauty of a wise and ancient Oriental art.'<sup>21</sup> Or there is the persistent 'blueness' of the grass, trees, and mountains: 'BLUE, blue is the grass about the river'; 'the joy of blue islands'; 'South of the pond the willow-tips are half-blue and bluer'; 'BLUE mountains to the north of the walls'.<sup>22</sup> Many lines present collages of Chinese things and colours: 'I looked at the dragon-pond, with its willow-coloured water'; 'Red jade cups,



food well set on a blue jewelled table, | And I was drunk, and had no thought of  
returning'. And:

a valley of the thousand bright flowers ...

And into ten thousand valleys full of voices and pine-winds.

And with silver harness and reins of gold,

Out come the East of Kan foreman and his company.<sup>23</sup>

The familiar theme of the lovelorn Chinese lady/deserted wife is revisited in three of the frequently cited pieces in *Cathay*: 'The Beautiful Toilet', 'The River-Merchant's Wife: a Letter', and 'The Jewel Stairs' Grievance'. The idea of Cathay as a land of plenty is evoked in opulent displays of chinoiserie spectacles, like this parade of imperial splendour:

Over a thousand gates, over a thousand doors are the sounds of spring singing,

And the Emperor is at Ko.

Five clouds hang aloft, bright on the purple sky,

The imperial guards come forth from the golden house with their armour a-  
gleaming.

The emperor in his jewelled car goes out to inspect his flowers,

He goes out to Hori, to look at the wing-flapping storks,

He returns by way of Sei rock, to hear the new nightingales,

For the gardens at Jo-run are full of new nightingales<sup>24</sup>

And these depictions of hedonistic revelries:

To the dynastic temple, with water about it clear as blue jade,  
With boats floating, and the sound of mouth-organs and drums,  
With ripples like dragon-scales, going grass green on the water,  
Pleasure lasting, with courtezans, going and coming without hindrance,  
With the willow flakes falling like snow,  
And the vermilioned girls getting drunk about sunset,  
And the water a hundred feet deep reflecting green eyebrows  
– Eyebrows painted green are a fine sight in young moonlight,  
Gracefully painted –  
And the girls singing back at each other,  
Dancing in transparent brocade,  
And the wind lifting the song, and interrupting it,  
Tossing it up under the clouds.<sup>25</sup>

In the above-quoted lines can be observed quite a number of transliterations. Indeed, some lines in *Cathay* seem to offer little more than strings of foreign ciphers: ‘To So-Kin of Rakuyo, ancient friend, Chancellor of Gen’, or ‘Tried Layu’s luck, offered the Choyo song’, or ‘Ko-Jin goes west from Ko-kaku-ro’.<sup>26</sup> The transliterations are extracted from the Fenollosa notes, which contain Sino-Japanese romanizations of each Chinese character. Pound occasionally misreads the not always fully legible hand of Fenollosa,<sup>27</sup> and he selects, breaks apart, and recombines these phonetic transcriptions to produce new versions of the proper names in his translation. In the absence of explanatory footnotes, it can hardly be said that the abundance of transliterations in *Cathay* serves as a vehicle for cultural knowledge (in a positivistic sense); they are more like decorative details void of specific cultural reference, lending an air of foreignness, and included for their exotic look and sonic effect. It is, Bush argues, Pound’s ‘gambit’ that one does not

need to know the actual referents of these transliterated terms to understand or appreciate the poems, given that 'Pound himself often had little idea'.<sup>28</sup> This is a textual instance of 'racial lumping', where Japanese transliterations pass as Chinese proper names.<sup>29</sup>

Pound's reworking of the Fenollosa notes thus manifests transcultural imitation in its use of these familiar exotics of Western discourses on China, inscribing a double layering of hypotexts in *Cathay*, interweaving his primary mediating text (the Fenollosa notes) and the broader discursive repository of the China topos. It might be said that all translations are doubly informed in this way, by the immediate source text(s) and the larger discursive context. But such double layering is greatly accentuated in a translation like *Cathay*, as Pound's method, in contrast with that of a philologically oriented translator, is not bound by a principle of fidelity, but draws freely from diverse sources and traverses the porous borderlands of translation, rewriting, and original composition.

Furthermore, in terms of transtextual techniques, *Cathay* exemplifies transcultural imitation in the technique of eclecticism and free combination with which Pound recasts his sources. Here the format of the Fenollosa notebooks is essential: they contain transcriptions of Sino-Japanese pronunciation for each Chinese character in the poem,<sup>30</sup> glosses on the individual characters and compounds (often providing the multiple, alternative senses of those characters), explanatory translations that give the meaning of the whole line when read contextually, and additional notes on the genre, style, theme, historical and biographical background of the poem in question. These notebooks thus offer a progressive range of cultural knowledge, starting from the most rudimentary philological components and leading on to contextual readings and literary appreciation. Contrary to common complaints about their being 'disorganized, error-ridden, and illegible', the Fenollosa notebooks contain 'an impressive breadth and depth of accurate sinological learning in a consistently organized format'.<sup>31</sup>

Apart from making extensive use of the phonetic transcriptions, Pound also works back and forth between the glosses for individual characters and the explanatory translations of the complete lines. That Fenollosa's notes are presented in this multilayered format is a result of the special tutorial practice adopted by his Japanese tutors Mori Kainan 森槐南 and Ariga Nagao 有賀長雄, which is derived from the traditional Japanese method of reading classical Chinese, *kundoku* 訓読, or 'gloss-reading'. Billings has reconstructed the actual procedures of these tutorial sessions that gave rise to the particular layout of the notes. He considers it his 'most surprising' discovery within the preparation of his critical edition, with 'immense' implications.<sup>32</sup> These procedures not only offer important clues to Pound's methods; they also reveal the composite feature of the Fenollosa notes as a form of multimodal translation. Let us take a few moments to follow these procedures step by step.

We have three scholars sitting down to read classical Chinese poetry together. Fenollosa is the note-taking student. Mori is the specialist in Chinese poetry, who produced a major annotated edition of Tang poetry and whose own compositions in *kanshi* (poetry in classical Chinese 漢詩) were highly celebrated. Ariga, the European-educated professor of international law, 'a sort of Meiji Era Renaissance Man' with a long-term interest in literature, acts as interpreter for Fenollosa and Mori. These tutorial sessions thus involve a kind of consecutive interpreting, Fenollosa taking dictation on the fly while Ariga interprets for Mori, and what get transcribed in the notes are actually Ariga's translations, via consecutive interpreting, of what Mori said. Pound's *Cathay* poems are therefore 'textual collaborations not only with the original author (as we might say of any translation), but also with Fenollosa, Mori, and even Ariga'.<sup>33</sup>

According to Billings' reconstruction, these collaborative exercises are conducted in the following steps:

Step one: read out one line at a time using the Sino-Japanese pronunciations (*on'yomi*) for each character. Step two: succinctly gloss each of those characters, with one word if possible, but more if the meanings are multiple, indicating proper names and compounds as necessary. Step three: parse each line into intelligible Japanese paraphrases ... The purpose of the glosses was to lay down rough equivalents for the characters with little concern for their context. The purpose of the paraphrases, however, was to explain the meaning of the poem line-by-line by parsing the syntax fully and precisely with a nuanced sense of the whole and the interrelation of its parts ... Invariably, where contradictions do occur, Mori's paraphrases 'correct' the earlier glosses and Fenollosa's many insertions and strikethroughs in the glosses sometimes correspond to the new dictions of the paraphrases or eliminate alternatives nullified by the paraphrases.

(Billings, pp. 20-1)

To what extent (or whether at all) Pound understood the relationship between these various strata of the notes and the underlying *kundoku* method is uncertain, but his particular manner of comparing them and opting for the character glosses instead of the explanatory translations or 'paraphrases' of the lines contributes to another feature of *Cathay*: the sporadic appearance of unidiomatic expressions which read like translationese, as if made in an attempt to reproduce features of the source text via a conspicuously literal approach to translation.

‘The River-Merchant’s Wife: a Letter’ contains several examples of such ‘concocted calques’ – the ‘deliberately unidiomatic phrases with no direct relation to the source text that create the illusion of “faithful” translation’, or expressions rendered ‘as if it were an exotically literal translation’:<sup>34</sup>

WHILE my hair was still cut straight across my forehead

I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.

You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,

You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.

And we went on living in the village of Chokan:

Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.

I never laughed, being bashful.

Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.

Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.<sup>35</sup>

The unidiomatic ‘my hair was still cut straight across my forehead’, ‘pulling flowers’ (instead of ‘picking’, which is the meaning of the conventional poetic idiom 折花), ‘playing horse’, and ‘I married My Lord you’ are Pound’s concocted calques; the latter two borrow the glosses of individual characters – ‘horse’ 馬 and ‘My Lord’ 君 – which are subsumed under compounds when the lines are read as a whole, and unlike what Pound presents here do not carry meanings of their own. The result is the invention of some ‘uniquely Anglo-Sino-Japanese line[s]’.<sup>36</sup>

Pound's translations are sprinkled with these specimens of foreign accents and colours. He sometimes fabricates such effects by importing ingredients directly from the character glosses and ignoring the explanatory translation of the line in the Fenollosa notes. Thus we have 'The sea's colour moves at the dawn' (雞鳴海色動), which Fenollosa's tutors translate as 'In early dawn the color of the sky moves'.<sup>37</sup> Or 'With ripples like dragon-scales, going grass green on the water' (微波龍鱗莎草綠), where Pound cuts off 'grass green' 草綠 directly from the character glosses, though the translation offered by Fenollosa's tutors indicates that 莎草 forms a unit.<sup>38</sup> He also selects elements from different layers of the notes and reassembles them into new compounds: 'The smoke-flowers are blurred over the river' (煙花三月下揚州). Here the overly literal 'smoke-flowers' is extracted from the character glosses, the idea of blurring comes from the explanatory translation, and the river setting from the explanatory translation and the overall commentary. Or he adopts a hybrid approach that combines foreignizing and domesticating techniques: 'At morning there are flowers to cut the heart' (朝為斷腸花). The character glosses offer 'cut intestine flowers', and Pound opts for the more conventional equivalent 'heart', while retaining the 'cut'.<sup>39</sup>

Pound's method of imitating Chinese speech and syntax is varied and irregular, and it bespeaks a poetics of eclectic exoticism, rather than an abiding concern for replicating the linguistic features of the source text. Literal translation has long been adopted in sinological circles for purposes of pedagogy and philological explication. Early nineteenth-century British sinologists like John Francis Davis used literal methods of translation for publications in the professional society journals, while opting for a more domesticating approach when translating for the general reader.<sup>40</sup> Such literal translations

intended for the serious professional reader were adapted for more playful purposes – parodies of pidgin English and stereotypical traits of Chinese speech, the unintelligible Chinese names in chinoiserie theatre.<sup>41</sup> These features of unidiomatic expression thus become a cultural shorthand for ‘how the Chinese speak’, forming another set of ‘Chinese characteristics’. Pound ‘allows his English to be reordered or even *dis*ordered ... by his sense of the cultural and linguistic otherness’, and he creates some sort of ‘Chinese effect’ by pressuring English diction and usage into ‘noticeably unidiomatic construction’.<sup>42</sup> This simulation of literalness through transliterations and ‘concocted calques’ can be seen as a mode of translating through ‘cross-identity performance’, which illustrates another aspect of his transcultural imitative technique.

The last feature of the *Cathay* poems we will discuss is also singled out by Pound’s historical readers as characteristically ‘Chinese’. Reviewing *Cathay* for the *Times Literary Supplement*, the essayist and critic Arthur Clutton-Brock wrote that the effect produced by Pound seems ‘very Chinese’:

We do not know from the title of this little book ... whether Mr. Pound has translated these poems direct from the Chinese or has only used other translations. ... The result, however produced, is well worth having, and it seems to us very Chinese. One always notices about Chinese poems, whoever translates them, that they are like Chinese pictures in one respect. There are gaps such as European painters and poets do not dare to leave, and yet the mind passes over these gaps easily enough. In a picture it consents to the gap between foreground and background, filled perhaps with mist or with nothing, in a poem to a transition from one thought to another which leaves the reader to supply all the links between. Mr. Pound insists upon the distance of these transitions, and we



should like to know whether his language makes them more abrupt than they are in the original.<sup>43</sup>

As an illustration, Clutton-Brock quoted the following lines:

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.<sup>44</sup>

- which are translated from these lines: 昔別雁門關, 今戍龍庭前. 驚沙亂海日, 飛雪

迷胡天.<sup>45</sup> What happens here bears close examination. The Fenollosa notes provide the

following paraphrases of the respective Chinese lines on the verso page: ‘Yesterday one has left the wild geese Fortress.’ ‘Today one has already come so far as the Dragon/Yard desert’s front.’ ‘Sands surprised by wind cover in their turmoil | the {desert sea} sun.’

‘“The flying snow lets go astray the Manchurian/heaven –” one loses sight of the sky.’

Pound added a brief note to explain that the first two lines indicate ‘we have been warring from one end of the empire to the other, now east, now west, on each border’.<sup>46</sup>

The rather striking ‘Surprised. Desert turmoil. Sea sun’ (驚沙亂海日) and ‘barbarian

heaven’ (胡天) are again the result of Pound’s bypassing the explanatory translation in

the Fenollosa notes and borrowing directly from the character glosses instead. The line

‘Surprised. Desert turmoil. Sea sun’ is an exact replication of the character glosses, and it restructures the original syntactic pattern (subject-verb-object, with units of two-one-two characters) into a three-unit parataxis of one-two-two characters. A similar example is the

line ‘Desolate castle, the sky, the wide desert’ (荒城空大漠), where Pound again borrowed the gloss ‘sky’ from the character glosses (instead of the adjectives ‘vacant’ or ‘vast’ offered elsewhere in the notes) and thereby transformed the original line into a three-unit parataxis of images.<sup>47</sup>

In such instances Pound’s use of the free-standing components of character glosses evinces yet another imitative technique: the imitation of the form of Chinese poetry by replicating the sequence of presentation given by the individual Chinese characters. The result, as shown in the above-quoted examples, is the paratactic juxtaposition of imagery, which recalls the haiku-inspired method of ‘super-position’ Pound employed in his Imagist reworkings of Giles’ translations in *Des Imagistes*.<sup>48</sup> This compositional method thus hinges on the haiku-Imagist intertext, and it ties in closely with Pound’s ‘mutually reinforcing creation of Chinese-poetry-as-imagism and imagism-as-Chinese-poetry’.<sup>49</sup>

This range of transcultural imitative techniques in *Cathay* does not entail a consistent principle of ‘literal’ or ‘foreignizing’ translation; Pound’s use of transliteration, (concocted) calques, and paratactic structures is sporadic, and he does not adhere to the prosodic patterns and the pervading parallelism and couplet structure of the Chinese poems (which we would commonly associate with Chinese poetry). *Cathay* exhibits a bricolage of transtextual features that defies simple either-or categorizations like ‘domestication’ or ‘foreignization’. Pound translates ‘via a kind of cultural shorthand’,<sup>50</sup> adding foreignizing touches to the translation by mobilizing common motifs and themes in the China topos, and, by virtue of this transcultural imitative feature, evokes the realm of the familiar exotic and simulates the authenticity effect described by Eliot and Steiner.

The richly layered multitudinous details contained in the Fenollosa notebooks afford fertile grounds for this eclecticism. Pound’s frequent recourse to the more free-

standing character glosses instead of the explanatory translations that offer a more circumscribed, contextualized reading of the whole line is in keeping with this eclectic method. He treats the Fenollosa notes as aggregates of fragments free for selection and reconfiguration into new combinations, now plucking a phonetic transcription as decorative motif, now mimicking the Chinese voice with unidiomatic literalness in acts of cross-identity performance, now presenting a parataxis of imagery in imitation of the Chinese compositional method of super-position.

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In the previous section I have discussed how *Cathay* engages two layers of sources: the Fenollosa notebooks, the tangible mediating text of Pound's indirect translation, and the more diffused and nebulous corpus of transcultural imitation, composed of the repertoire of images, motifs, themes, and ideas from Western discourses on China. This double layering of sources renders *Cathay* richly textured and *palimpsestic*. This palimpsestic feature becomes more pronounced when we consider the nature of the Fenollosa notebooks. Generated through the hybrid practice of reading-glossing-translating classical Chinese (*kundoku*), and compiled over a series of tutorials in which Fenollosa and his tutors engaged in collaborative reading and interpreting, these notebooks contain multiple forms and layers of cultural knowledge, and are themselves multimodal and palimpsestic. Indeed, Billings' work in compiling the critical edition of *Cathay* is akin to that of a palaeographer, distinguishing the traces of various hands, and the layer upon layer of inscriptions. The transcultural imitative techniques with which Pound reworked his materials, characterized by eclecticism and free combination, further add to the palimpsestic richness of *Cathay*.

I propose to examine Pound's method as exemplary of what might be called palimpsestic translation. This idea draws upon theories of intertextuality. It is based on

the premise that texts are not isolated entities but are situated within intricate networks of relations with other texts; that ‘any text is an intertext’, embedded in ‘a permutation of texts’ and constructed as ‘a mosaic of quotations’ through ‘the absorption and transformation’ of other texts.<sup>51</sup> It examines the textual surface not as a stable, enclosed space, but as an open, dynamic process of ‘dialogism’, where meaning is generated through the interplay of heterogeneous voices, cultural forms, and discourses. Translation, with its referencing of the languages and cultures of the ‘other’, represents a particularly interesting intertextual genre; it is, to use Genette’s term, an exemplar of the ‘hypertext’, being explicitly grafted onto some prior sources.<sup>52</sup>

In line with Matthew Reynolds’ theorization of the ‘prismatic approach’ to translation,<sup>53</sup> the palimpsestic approach supplements and counterbalances the conventional ‘channel view’, which considers translation as the carrying across of semantic content. A palimpsestic understanding of translation participates in the ‘enlargement of the concept of translation’ and the ‘paradigm of change’ in Translation Studies, unbinding translation from equivalence-based frameworks that reduce it to the unidirectional transfer from source to target.<sup>54</sup>

The palimpsestic approach opens up the categories of both the source and the target, pluralizing them as continuums of variations, at times fragmentary, at times fluid, and always composite. A palimpsestic translation is animated by such plurality and movement between porous boundaries. Unimpeded by the fidelity principle of bounded originals and correct verbal meaning, it brings diverse sources into creative play, weaving them into a richly layered translational text. Reading translations as palimpsests therefore involves unpacking such multilayered compilations of sources and examining how they amalgamate into a newly overwritten surface. It contributes to a kind of deep contextualization of translation, scrutinizing the surface for traces of inscriptions,

erasures, (re)readings, and (re)writings, mining the historical context for discursive affiliations.

*Cathay* is an exemplar of what Steven Yao calls ‘modernist translation’, which blurs the line between translation and original composition, modifying the ‘conceptual dimension’ of translation itself, and transforming it into ‘an integral part of the modernist program of cultural renewal’.<sup>55</sup> For its practitioners, modernist translation is a heuristic medium for thinking through larger cultural questions concerning language, history, identity, and aesthetic form. Modernist translation reveals the multifaceted nature of a translation’s ‘source’, and the manifold relationships between source and translation.<sup>56</sup> This reconfiguration of the parameters and modus operandi of translation problematizes normative concepts like faithfulness, stable semantic meaning, and linear transfer, demanding analytic frameworks that transcend binary distinctions. The palimpsestic approach developed in the present discussion aims to be equal to such concept-bending energies and to unravel such complexity by examining the strata of historical inscriptions in the making of *Cathay*.

The previous section on *Cathay* as transcultural imitation treated two of the intertexts or discursive formations out of which the *Cathay* palimpsest is woven: the Fenollosa notebooks and the discursive archive of Western conceptions of China. These two sources broadly pertain to the foreign text/culture, and they might be called the ‘foreign intertexts’, or, more specifically in this case, the ‘sinographic intertexts’, as they mediate and construct knowledge about China.<sup>57</sup> The other important set of intertexts or discursive formations of the *Cathay* palimpsest will be the focus of this section. They are more closely entwined with the target language/culture and might thus be called the ‘target intertexts’. The target intertexts to be discussed here can again be roughly divided into two sub-categories: those that relate to the literary and cultural resources the translator brings to bear in cross-cultural meaning-making and representation, and those

pertaining to how translation, in general terms and in relation to particular texts/cultures, is conceived and practiced in the target culture of the time, involving the wide array of methods, principles, and philosophies of translation in the field. It needs to be noted that these divisions between ‘foreign/source culture’ and ‘target culture’ are made for the sake of clarity of presentation, without compartmentalizing them into segregated domains. They are in reciprocal contact, and the last (sub-)category, related to the field of translation, is particularly intersectional. In what follows, I try to delineate how Pound reconstitutes ideas of foreignness about China and endows Chinese poetry with new transcultural significance through the combination and interplay of these intertexts.

The first strand of target intertexts we will examine is the amalgam of Imagist, Vorticist, and *vers libre* principles that inform Pound’s ‘remaking’ of the Chinese poems.<sup>58</sup> The Imagist-Vorticist-free verse medium championed by Pound and others represents an emergent cultural form, and it occupies a heterodox position in the literary field, to use Pierre Bourdieu’s term, *vis-à-vis* traditional verse forms. The use of this set of translational intertexts thereby endows Chinese poetry with significations of the new, the modern, and the regenerative, forging a vital discursive link between classical Chinese poetry and literary modernism. The compositional features of classical Chinese poetry, marked by syntactic condensation and poetically charged verbal economy, act as an affinitive medium for embodying the Poundian method of Imagist/Vorticist ‘intensity’, which pares off rhetorical padding and requires the reader to decode the emotional syntax of the poem by drawing inferences from the ‘vortex or cluster of fused ideas’.<sup>59</sup> This point is echoed in the above-quoted remark from Clutton-Brock’s review that the *Cathay* poems ‘[consent] to the gap’ in the ‘transition from one thought to another which leaves the reader to supply all the links between’; it is illustrated by Pound’s haiku-inspired method of ‘super-position’, which gives us ‘In a Station of the Metro’, and in Pound’s

famous analysis of ‘The Jewel Stairs’ Grievance’, comparing its laconic composition to a ‘mathematical process of reduction’, its crystalline form delicately poised on the blending of external phenomena and emotional undertones.<sup>60</sup> Integrated within the *Cathay* palimpsest, the newness of modernist verse ‘doubles’ as the foreignness of classical Chinese poetry, while the particularity of the latter reinforces the novelty of the former, the two forming a symbiotic relationship.

Furthermore, this new poetic medium, in reaction against the (putative) restrictions, conventionality, and ‘perdamnable rhetoric’ of established practices, valorizes a poetics of immediacy and precision, of movement and energy.<sup>61</sup> This quality, in tandem with Pound’s transcultural imitative techniques that detour the opaque, inscrutable foreign by recourse to the familiar exotic, renders the foreignness of Chinese poetry immediate and transpicuous. The interplay between avant-garde verse forms and Pound’s techniques of transcultural imitation thus creates a certain distance and strangeness while at the same time closing the gap by merging these shimmers of foreignness into the modernist free verse background. The result is the invention of ‘a language and a tone that walks the tightrope between supple familiarity and ... uncanny alterity’, leading the *Cathay* poems to ‘alternate between the foreign and the familiar’ and contributing to ‘the disquieting intimacy of their emotional appeal’.<sup>62</sup> The eminent antiquity of classical Chinese poetry, in turn, bestows a kind of cultural legitimacy and historical permanence on the Poundian project of ‘making it new’, ‘grounding it in the putative bedrock of a long-standing foreign literary tradition’ and distinguishing it from other contemporary avant-garde movements like Futurism.<sup>63</sup>

Steven Yao argues that *Cathay* is fundamental to the formation of ‘the poetics of Chineseness’, whereby ‘expressly modernist diction and technique in English seem entirely adequate and transparent vehicles for the conveyance of (even medieval) Chinese cultural and linguistic particularity’, especially in the ‘depiction of individual Chinese

subjectivity'.<sup>64</sup> *Cathay* belongs to the period in which Pound's literary personality 'largely consisted of parodies, personae, archaism, imitation, and other in-between modes'; the 'technique of *personae*, which enables the modern poet to speak with the voices of other ages or other personalities', and 'the artistic use of various imitated or "period" styles' are among the signatures of Pound's poetry.<sup>65</sup> The affective particularities of various *personae* in *Cathay* – the bowmen of Shu, the frontier guard, the river-merchant's wife, the court lady in 'The Jewel Stairs' Grievance', and so on – testify to Pound's facility in cross-identity performance, an example of what T. S. Eliot called 'expressing [him]self through historical masks'.<sup>66</sup>

The thematic concerns of *Cathay* are in step with this affective immediacy of foreign subjectivities. Scholars have uncovered parallels between the recurrent themes of 'isolation, loneliness, disappointment, loss, and other such affective states of distress' in *Cathay* and Pound's own struggles as an aspiring young poet.<sup>67</sup> Another pattern that emerged from the process of selecting texts is the predominant war theme, which had a powerful resonance for readers of *Cathay* in 1915. *Cathay* presents 'a completely different example of (anti-) war poetry' to the 'British establishment's version of patriotic war poetry'.<sup>68</sup> Pound wrote that the war poems in *Cathay* 'have no mellifluous circumlocution, no sentimentalizing of men who have never seen a battlefield and who wouldn't fight if they had to. You have war, campaigning as it has always been, tragedy, hardship, no illusions.'<sup>69</sup> As Hugh Kenner poignantly puts it, *Cathay* is 'among the most durable of all poetic responses to World War I'; it 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.<sup>70</sup>

Having read the typescripts of several *Cathay* poems, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska wrote from the Marne to Pound: 'Indeed I use [the poems] to put courage in my fellows. I speak now of the "Bowmen" and the "North Gate" which are so appropriate to our case ... the poems depict our situation in a wonderful way.'<sup>71</sup>

Examining this imbrication of sinographic and target intertexts in *Cathay* offers fresh insights into T. S. Eliot's frequently quoted description of Pound's translations:

I suspect that every age has had, and will have, the same illusion concerning translations, an illusion which is not altogether an illusion either. When a foreign poet is successfully done into the idiom of our own language and our own time, we believe that he has been 'translated'; we believe that through this translation we really at last get the original. The Elizabethans must have thought that they *got* Homer through Chapman, Plutarch through North. Not being Elizabethans, we have not that illusion; we see that Chapman is more Chapman than Homer, and North more North than Plutarch, both localized three hundred years ago ... [Pound's] translations seem to be – and that is the test of excellence – translucencies: we *think* we are closer to the Chinese than when we read, for instance, Legge. I doubt this: I predict that in three hundred years Pound's *Cathay* will be a 'Windsor Translation' as Chapman and North are now 'Tudor Translations': it will be called (and justly) a 'magnificent specimen of XXth Century poetry' rather than a 'translation'. Each generation must translate for itself.<sup>72</sup>

With the techniques of transcultural imitation and the double layering of sinographic sources that integrates the Fenollosa notes and other discursive components of the China topos, Pound signals a form of foreignness which is not inscrutably opaque or obscured by scholarly envelopments, but rendered legible in the reader's transcultural imaginary. By virtue of this transcultural imitative feature, *Cathay* evinces the somewhat paradoxical quality of embodying a foreignness that is intelligible and resonant, while maintaining an appealing sense of aesthetic difference and surprise. Furthermore, this particular form of foreignness meshes with poetic elements that Pound brings into play in the translating language – the free verse medium of immediacy and precision, the *personae* technique that enables a kind of emotional clairvoyance, and the war theme that resonated with readers of the time, presenting 'a vision of Chinese as disarmingly direct, even simple, something close to a universal language of common nouns and common feelings'.<sup>73</sup> This synthesis of intertextual strands in the *Cathay* palimpsest creates 'an illusion which is not altogether an illusion', a translucent foreignness 'successfully done into the idiom of our own language and our own time'. Yet because of this very rootedness in the linguistic and cultural matrix of the time, such 'translucency' is historically circumscribed, and it will be dimmed with the evolution of language, ethos, and literary canons. Eliot's remark about Pound being 'the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time' also places the emphasis on 'our time', for 'each generation must translate for itself', and 'when, one day, we read Pound's poems the way we read Giles's, we will be in another era'.<sup>74</sup>

The alchemical efficacy of *Cathay's* translucent foreignness lies in this palimpsestic weave of sinographic and target intertexts, which generates a synergy between the foreign and the familiar, the old and the new. Rendering the affective particularities of foreign subjects linguistically and culturally legible, contemporizing

modernist poetics with the old poetry of China, voicing the turmoil of modernity through ancient sorrow – these are the hallmarks of Pound’s translation.

One set of target intertexts, emanating from the literary and cultural resources that Pound mobilizes in cross-cultural hermeneutics and representation, has now been discussed. I will proceed to address one further set of target intertexts or discursive formations that constitutes the *Cathay* palimpsest. This set is specifically associated with the norms and transformations of the field of translation in which *Cathay* is situated, brought about by the competing methods and divergent philosophies of translation and the dynamic ensemble of translators with different approaches, abilities, and visions. It is integral to the formation of ‘translation knowledge’: ‘knowledge with regard to translation, i.e. about or on translation, to some extent also of translation, when it relates to issues such as the know-how to translate, the awareness or understanding of translation taking place, of the potential of translation, etc’.<sup>75</sup> It also advances a certain discursive position towards the source text/culture, and envisions what translation can do in the wider socio-cultural field.

On the cover of *Cathay*, Pound reproduced from the Fenollosa notebooks the character *yao* 耀, which contains the ‘light’ (光) radical. When working on the *Cathay* poems, Pound was yet to discover how to discern constituent elements of Chinese characters – Fenollosa’s essay on the Chinese written character still awaited him – but there is an interesting link between the light metaphor inscribed in the character *yao* 耀 and Pound’s idea of ‘luminous detail’ in translation, which he developed around the same time. A somewhat unconventional feature of *Cathay* as an anthology of poetry translation is that amongst the Chinese poems, Pound inserted his translation from Old English – *The Seafarer*, ‘that Anglo-Saxon misfit sitting alone with his pint of mead in the

hot and noisy wine bar of *Cathay*', as Billings wittily calls it.<sup>76</sup> *The Seafarer* is the precursor to Pound's series of essays of 1911-12 entitled 'I Gather the Limbs of Osiris',<sup>77</sup> a series interspersed with translations from Arnaut Daniel and Guido Cavalcanti. With this form of criticism-cum-translation, Pound sets out to demonstrate a 'New Method in Scholarship' for translation:

I do not imagine that I am speaking of a method by me discovered. I mean, merely, a method not of common practice, a method not yet clearly or consciously formulated, a method which has been intermittently used by all good scholars since the beginning of scholarship, the method of Luminous Detail, a method most vigorously hostile to the prevailing mode of to-day – that is, the method of multitudinous detail, and to the method of yesterday, the method of sentiment and generalisation. The latter is too inexact and the former too cumbersome to be of much use to the normal man wishing to live mentally active ... The artist seeks out the luminous detail and presents it. He does not comment.<sup>78</sup>

Pound's translation practices encompassed a wide range of traditions and languages; some of them were vehemently criticized for their philological defects. *The Seafarer*, which Pound called 'as nearly literal ... as any translation can be', had been the subject of controversy since it first appeared in *The New Age* in 1911;<sup>79</sup> *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, completed in 1917 and published in 1919, drew the ire of Latinists because of its 'sheer magnificence of blundering' (to quote Professor William Hale), which 'many schoolboys might well be ashamed of'.<sup>80</sup> One may wonder why Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, a 'creative translation' arguably related to the long tradition of literary imitation, in which deviations from literal meanings are introduced and the rendition of

‘spirit’ is prioritized, could have caused such animus.<sup>81</sup> Eliot, who decided to omit this piece from the 1928 edition of Pound’s *Selected Poems*, attributed its controversial reception to the division of readers and their conflicting views on translation: the ‘uninstructed reader’ who is ‘not a classical scholar ... will make nothing of it’, while ‘a classical scholar ... will wonder why this does not conform to his notions of what translation should be’. It is only to ‘the accomplished student of Pound’s poetry’ that *Propertius* is intelligible as a peculiar form of ‘translation’, ‘a *persona*’.<sup>82</sup>

The translation controversy surrounding Pound’s *Propertius* is symptomatic of the structural change brought about by ‘increasing institutional professionalization and specialization’ and the formation of a ‘community of competence’ in classical studies.<sup>83</sup> Pound’s pretensions to scholarly competence (and hence ‘incursion’ into academic turf) were condemned by classical scholars as diletantism. Logan Pearsall Smith claimed that regarding Pound’s scholarship, ‘the opinion of scholars is unanimous’: Pound ‘has published translations from, or paraphrases of, Latin, Provençal, Chinese, and Japanese poems; but specialists in these subjects are apt, I have noted, to laugh when his name is mentioned. Latin scholars, in especial, have administered such remorseless castigations.’<sup>84</sup>

The contention sparked by Pound’s translation is an indicator of the various strata of the translation field which are formed via intersections with other cultural fields, notably the professional sphere of scholars, specialists, and networks of academic institutions, and the literary sphere of avant-garde poetry, where poet-translators like Pound employed translation as a vital vehicle for rejuvenating modern poetry. These competing positions give rise to divergent translation practices and contesting discourses about what makes a ‘good’ translation and how one should be made.

When Pound wrote that ‘the method of Luminous Detail’ is ‘a method most vigorously hostile to the prevailing mode of to-day – that is, the method of multitudinous detail’, he was waging a campaign against ‘academic misinterpretations’:

‘no amount of scholarship will help a man to write poetry, it may even be regarded as a great burden and hindrance’.<sup>85</sup> Pound sought to develop a mode of translation other than the philologically oriented, the very nature of which was, in Pound’s eyes, ‘mummification, the hypostatizing of the texts as critical objects distinct from their possibilities as cultural agents ... the translation of texts into the abstract state and grammar’.<sup>86</sup> Richard Aldington and H.D.’s series of translations from Greek and Latin authors, launched in 1915 and called ‘The Poets’ Translation Series’, was animated by the same spirit.<sup>87</sup>

Poet-translators like Pound thus define their own approach via discursive positioning against scholar-translators, and mark their distinction through terms antithetical to the scholarly principles of linguistic accuracy and faithfulness. Their approach to translation bypasses philological accuracy and valorizes a form of knowledge and experience mediated through the aesthetic. That is, they relocate the ground of translation from philological veracity to aesthetic sensibility. The removal of scholarly trappings (‘the method of multitudinous detail’) becomes the enabling condition for poetic insight, which is claimed as the special preserve of the poet-translator. Ideas about the value of ‘the poet’s versions’ can be traced back to early modern discourses on imitation; with regard to translating Chinese poetry, they are manifested in Judith Gautier’s *Le livre de jade*, whose connection with *Cathay* is pertinent,<sup>88</sup> and in the indirect retranslations of Edwardian poet-translators like Launcelot Cranmer-Byng and Clifford Bax. The discursive formation of the aesthetic approach to translating Chinese poetry, with its lineage of practitioners and texts, forms another layer of the *Cathay* palimpsest.

Instead of adhering to linguistic correctness and semantic equivalence as the parameters of translation, then, Pound translates by way of luminous details: the ‘primary pigment’ that equates the painter’s arrangement of colours and the poet’s

presentation of emotions; the ‘Image’ that ‘presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time’; ‘a radiant node ... a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which ideas are constantly rushing’; the elements of ‘phanopœia’ (‘a casting of images upon the visual imagination’), which holds the highest degree of translatability for Pound;<sup>89</sup> and, as Pound was to discover via Fenollosa’s notes, the ‘ideogram’ and the ‘ideogrammic method’, exemplified in Pound’s translations of the Confucian classics and in *The Cantos*.

Translating/recreating in concord with these luminous details relies upon the use of collage, montage, superposition, parataxis, and other compositional methods inspired by abstract art, the new media, and the turn-of-the-century invention of Far Eastern aesthetics.<sup>90</sup> These new modes of composition embody an aesthetics of fragmentation and discontinuity, miming the experience of modernity: the speed and confusion of technological progress, the advances of modern sciences which alter the very dimensions of space and time, subject and object, the disintegration of traditional belief systems and social edifice, the disruption of positivist scientism by the relativist flux unveiled by Bergson, Freud, and Nietzsche, the horrors of war, and the urban wasteland. The Chinese materials that act as Pound’s mediating texts – the Fenollosa notebooks, the translations of James Legge, and Joseph Rock’s ethnographic writings on Southwest China,<sup>91</sup> among others – have a certain malleability and lend themselves to such fragmenting treatment, and we find Pound at work sifting, selecting, grafting, and amalgamating disparate fragments and experiences.

The transmedial and transcultural explorations of literary modernism, impelled by the crisis of language and representation, endeavour to transcend the inadequacies of traditional representational aesthetics, whose methods of linear narrative, unitary perspective, and documentary exactitude are grounded in a belief in the fundamental mimetic correspondence between art and external reality. In his influential *The Flight of*

*the Dragon* (1911), Laurence Binyon observed that ‘much of the unsatisfactoriness in European theories of art comes from the rooted idea that art is, in some sense or another, an imitation of nature’. Chinese art, he goes on, offers a potent antidote to this ‘idea of representation’ which reduces art to ‘an adjunct to existence, a reduplication of the actual’. In the ‘strong synthetic power’ of Chinese art ‘we see that accurate seizure of structure and a deep correspondence with reality’. Binyon’s idea of the ‘rhythmic vitality’ of Chinese art, developed from his reading of Giles’ *An Introduction to the History of Chinese Pictorial Art* (1905), was crucial in Pound’s formulation of Vorticism.<sup>92</sup> In the aesthetic alterity of Far Eastern art and poetry, the modernists found a kind of archetype or *Ur*-model, honed to perfection and boasting illustrious successions of great masters, for their own experiments in non-representationalism.

In this light, ‘the method of Luminous Detail’ can be understood as translation in the non-representational mode, analogous to the formal experiments of literary modernism which, keenly alive to the fragmented and fluctuating consciousness of the modern mind, seek a different form of correspondence via the rhythm of structure and texture. Pound’s emphasis on the visual medium as the poetic kernel aims to forge a new category of language in which ‘the image is itself the speech’ and ‘the word beyond formulated language’.<sup>93</sup> His fascination with the alterity of the Chinese written character is likewise driven by the search for ‘a specific way of thinking about reality, relation, and symbolization’, which holds the potential of curing ‘the anemia of modern speech’ by bringing poetic language ‘closer to the concreteness of natural processes’ and using ‘words whose vital suggestion shall interplay as nature interplays’.<sup>94</sup> Adopting ‘the method of Luminous Detail’, following the ‘logic of imagination’ and the movement of the image as alternative routes for arriving at poetic insights, and finding in foreign traditions ‘some leaven’ for uniting ‘art again to its sustenance, life’, Pound enacts a



different philosophy of translation and a new mimesis that ‘do not seek to imitate form, but to create form’.<sup>95</sup>

The *Cathay* palimpsest weaves together diverse intertexts: *vers libre* movement, Imagism, Vorticism, the Great War, the discourse on ‘the poet’s version’, early twentieth-century philosophies of language and representation, transmedial experimentalism, the chinoiserie script, japonisme, (French-mediated) reception of East Asian art and poetry, Chinese Learning (*kangaku* 漢學) in Meiji Japan. Together they form the intricate imbrications of accretions, refractions, and creative rewrites of at times tangible, at times hypothetical ‘originals’, adding to the prismatic plurality and palimpsestic richness of *Cathay*. Taking a still broader view of the Poundian project of ‘making it new’, the Chinese tradition converses with other literary traditions – Greek, Latin, Italian, Provençal, Old English, etc. – in Pound’s imaginary museum of global modernism.

This palimpsestic reading unfolds a view of Pound’s translation as a dynamic site of intersecting routes where global currents converge. It is in the radiant nodes formed by these confluences that we find the new transcultural significance of classical Chinese poetry. Moving beyond a binary transfer model and probing into such an innovative, liminal exemplar as *Cathay*, the palimpsestic approach explores the liminal spaces of translation and enriches our understanding of what translation can mean and do.

Pound memorably pronounced that ‘English literature lives on translation, it is fed by translation; every new exuberance, every new heave is stimulated by translation, every allegedly great age is an age of translations’.<sup>96</sup> The translational poetics of *Cathay* is one manifestation of the cosmopolitan endeavour to reposition the self and the other and re-imagine the geo-poetics of world literary traditions. Finding the originary locale for the New Poetry of ‘our time’ in old Cathay, Pound invents a transhistorical and transcultural

genealogy for literary modernism: ‘it is possible that this century may find a new Greece in China’.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley, CA, 1971), p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Introduction’, in Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems*, edited by T. S. Eliot (London, 1928), pp. 7-21 (p. 14).

<sup>3</sup> ‘Preliminary Announcement of the College of Arts – Letters – Comparative Poetry’, *The Egoist*, 1.21, 2 November 1914, p. 413.

<sup>4</sup> Yip Wai-lim, *Ezra Pound’s ‘Cathay’* (Princeton, NJ, 1969), p. 88; Steven Yao, *Translation and the Languages of Modernism: Gender, Politics, Language* (New York, 2002), pp. 13-14; Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas, ‘Ezra Pound and Chinese Poetry’, in *The New Ezra Pound Studies*, edited by Mark Byron (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 157-78 (p. 159).

<sup>5</sup> Lucas Klein, *The Organization of Distance: Poetry, Translation, Chineseness* (Leiden, 2018), p. 113.

<sup>6</sup> *Cathay: A Critical Edition*, by Timothy Billings (New York, 2019; hereafter ‘Billings’), p. 74.

<sup>7</sup> Haun Saussy, ‘Foreword: The Archive of Cathay’, in Billings, pp. xi-xvii (p. xiii).

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<sup>8</sup> Saussy, p. xi; Christopher Bush, 'Introduction: "From the Decipherings"', in Billings, pp. 1-14 (p. 11).

<sup>9</sup> Eliot, 'Introduction', p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> I thank one of this journal's anonymous readers for this discerning and felicitous expression.

<sup>11</sup> Eliot, 'Introduction', p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, third edn (Oxford, 1998), p. 378.

<sup>13</sup> Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, translated by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln, NE, 1997), pp. 83-5, 5-7. Here, while drawing insights from Genette's discussion, I am not strictly following his classification. 'Imitation' as a hypertextual genre has a narrower application in Genette's taxonomy – see his maps of the 'territory of hypertextual practices', pp. 24-30.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford, CA, 2010), p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Pound's 'Epitaphs' (*Blast*, 1, June 1914, 48); 'Ancient Wisdom, rather cosmic' (*Blast*, 2, July 1915, 22). Upward's series appeared in *Poetry* (2.6, 1 September 1913, 191-9) and *The New Freewoman* (1.9, 15 October 1913, 172-3).

<sup>16</sup> Achilles Fang, 'Fenollosa and Pound', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 20.1-2 (1957), 213-38 (p. 236); Qian Zhaoming, *Orientalism and Modernism: The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams* (Durham, NC, 1995), pp. 46-7; Billings, pp. 304-8.

<sup>17</sup> Upward, 'The Discarded Imagist', *The Egoist*, 2.6, 1 June 1915, 98; Pound, letter to Harriet Monroe, 23 September 1913, quoted from *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, edited by D. D. Paige (New York, 1971), pp. 22-3.

<sup>18</sup> David Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Genette, p. 83.

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<sup>20</sup> Herbert Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature* (London, 1901); *Des Imagistes* (New York, 1914), pp. 43-6.

<sup>21</sup> E. S., 'Poems in Translation', *The Bookman*, July 1915, p. 112.

<sup>22</sup> Pound, *Cathay* (London, 1915), pp. 7, 8, 9, 28; Billings, p. 95.

<sup>23</sup> Pound, *Cathay*, pp. 9, 20, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Pound, *Cathay*, 'The River Song', pp. 9-10.

<sup>25</sup> Pound, *Cathay*, 'Exile's Letter', pp. 20-1.

<sup>26</sup> Pound, *Cathay*, pp. 18, 21, 28. The corresponding Chinese lines are 憶昔洛陽董糟丘,  
西遊因獻長楊賦, 故人西辭黃鶴樓.

<sup>27</sup> Billings points out that Pound might not have taken the time to learn Fenollosa's hand, and few scholars who later commented on *Cathay* have bothered to do so (pp. 22-3).

<sup>28</sup> Bush, 'Introduction' (n. 8), p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (Philadelphia, PA, 1992), pp. 6-7.

<sup>30</sup> The majority of the Fenollosa notes on Chinese poetry do not contain the actual Chinese characters, but only Sino-Japanese romanizations for each character. It is a common misconception that Pound had before him the texts in Chinese. See Billings, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> Billings, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> Billings, pp. 19-20; Bush, pp. 9-10.

<sup>33</sup> Billings, p. 19; see also Billings, Bush, *et al.*, 'Cathay at 100: A Conversation', *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, 37 (2015), 165-81 (pp. 170-1).

<sup>34</sup> Billings, pp. 22, 127.

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<sup>35</sup> *Cathay*, p. 11. The corresponding Chinese text is from Li Bai 李白: 妾髮初覆額, 折花  
門前劇。郎騎竹馬來, 繞牀弄青梅。同居長千里, 兩小無嫌猜。十四為君婦, 羞顏未  
嘗開。低頭向暗壁, 千喚不一迴。

<sup>36</sup> Billings, p. 127.

<sup>37</sup> Billings, p. 140.

<sup>38</sup> The Fenollosa notes give this translation: ‘The small ripples resembled the scales of  
dragons,/ and the water grass was green’ (Billings, p. 173).

<sup>39</sup> The Fenollosa notes translate these lines as: ‘In the month of March, when flowers (of  
blossoming trees) are smoky (blurry) | he descends (by river) to {wards} Yoshu’; ‘In the  
morning they are unbearably beautiful flowers’ (Billings, pp. 220, 138).

<sup>40</sup> James St. André, ‘The Development of British Sinology and Changes in Translation  
Practice’, *Translation and Interpreting Studies*, 2.2 (2007), 3-42; *Translating China as Cross-  
identity Performance* (Honolulu, HI, 2018), pp. 96-106.

<sup>41</sup> See further James St. André, ‘“Long Time No See, Coolie”: Passing as Chinese  
Through Translation’, in *Charting the Future of Translation History*, edited by Georges Bastin  
and Paul Bandia (Ottawa, 2006), pp. 243-62; *Translating China as Cross-identity Performance*,  
pp. 142-57; Anne Veronica Witchard, *Thomas Burke’s Dark Chinoiserie: Limehouse  
Nights and the Queer Spell of Chinatown* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 23-88.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Kern, *Orientalism, Modernism, and the American Poem* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 186;  
Daniel Katz, *American Modernism’s Expatriate Scene: The Labour of Translation* (Edinburgh,  
2007), pp. 78-80.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Poems from Cathay’, *TLS*, 29 April 1915, p. 144.

<sup>44</sup> *Cathay*, p. 31.

<sup>45</sup> Billings, pp. 244-5

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<sup>46</sup> *Cathay*, p. 31.

<sup>47</sup> *Cathay*, p.16; the explanatory translation in the Fenollosa notes reads: 'I see a ruined fortress in a {vast} blank desert' (Billings, p. 152).

<sup>48</sup> Pound, 'How I Began', *T.P.'s Weekly*, 6 June 1913, p. 707, and 'Vorticism', *Fortnightly Review*, 573, 1 September 1914, pp. 461-71.

<sup>49</sup> Billings, p. 22.

<sup>50</sup> Eric Hayot, 'Critical Dreams: Orientalism, Modernism, and the Meaning of Pound's China', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 45.4 (1999), 511-33 (p. 522).

<sup>51</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Theory of the Text', in *Untying the Text: A Post-structuralist Reader*, edited by Robert Young (London, 1981), pp. 31-47 (p. 39); Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, translated by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York, 1980), pp. 36, 66.

<sup>52</sup> Genette (n. 13), p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Matthew Reynolds, 'Introduction', in *Prismatic Translation*, edited by Matthew Reynolds (Cambridge, 2019), pp. 1-18.

<sup>54</sup> Maria Tymoczko, *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* (Manchester, 2007), p. 8; Luc van Doorslaer, 'Bound to Expand: The Paradigm of Change in Translation Studies', in *Moving Boundaries in Translation Studies*, edited by Helle V. Dam, Matilde Nisbeth Brøgger, and Karen Korning Zethsen (New York, 2018), pp. 220-30.

<sup>55</sup> Yao, *Translation and the Languages of Modernism*, 'Translation Studies and Modernism', in *A Handbook of Modernism Studies*, edited by Jean-Michel Rabaté (Hoboken, NJ, 2013), pp. 209-23 (p. 211).

<sup>56</sup> See further Adam Piette, 'Pound's "The Garden" as Modernist Imitation: Samain, Lowell, H.D.', *T&L*, 17.1 (2008), 21-46; Duncan Poupard, 'In Defense of Ezra Pound's "graphological" Translations', *The Translator*, 29.1 (2023), 61-75.

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<sup>57</sup> I develop this idea from the term ‘sinographies’ – ‘particular forms of writing that produce and convey ... the meanings of China’. See Eric Hayot, Haun Saussy, and Steven Yao, *Sinographies: Writing China* (Minneapolis, MN, 2008), p. vii.

<sup>58</sup> For the idea of ‘remaking’ see Michael Alexander, ‘Ezra Pound as Translator’, *T&L*, 6.1 (1997), 23-30.

<sup>59</sup> Pound, ‘Vorticism’; ‘Affirmations, IV. As for Imagisme’, *The New Age*, 16.13, 28 January 1915, 349-50.

<sup>60</sup> Pound, ‘Vorticism’; ‘Chinese Poetry’ (Part I), *To-day*, 3.14, April 1918, pp. 54-7; for further discussion of Pound’s appreciation of this poem and how it exemplifies lyric intensity, see Robert Stark, *Ezra Pound’s Early Verse and Lyric Tradition: A Jargonier’s Apprenticeship* (Edinburgh, 2012), pp. 144-8. Pound’s analysis can be traced to Giles’ (n. 20) remark that ‘a Chinese poem is at best a hard nut to crack’, and ‘suggestion is the end and aim of the artist’ (*History*, pp. 144-5).

<sup>61</sup> Pound, ‘A Retrospect’, in *Literary Essays*, edited by T. S. Eliot (London, 1954), pp. 3-14 (p. 11).

<sup>62</sup> Katz, p. 78; James Dowthwaite, *Ezra Pound and 20th-Century Theories of Language: Faith with the Word* (New York, 2019), p. 87.

<sup>63</sup> Yao, *Translation and the Languages of Modernism*, p. 37; Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven, CT, 1998), pp. 30-1.

<sup>64</sup> Yao, ‘Toward a Prehistory of Asian American Verse: Pound, *Cathay*, and the Poetics of Chineseness’, *Representations*, 99 (2007), 130-58 (pp. 145, 149).

<sup>65</sup> Saussy, p. xii; Ming Xie, ‘Elegy and Personae in Ezra Pound’s *Cathay*’, *ELH*, 60.1 (1993), 261-81; *Ezra Pound and the Appropriation of Chinese Poetry: Cathay, Translation, and Imagism* (New York, 1999).

<sup>66</sup> Eliot, ‘The Method of Mr. Pound’, *Athenaeum*, 24 October 1919, 1065-6 (p. 1065).

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- <sup>67</sup> Quoted from Yao, 'Toward a Prehistory', p. 14. See also for such parallels Ronald Bush, 'Pound and Li Po: What Becomes a Man', in *Ezra Pound Among the Poets*, edited by George Bornstein (Chicago, 1985), pp. 35-62; Anne Chapple, 'Ezra Pound's *Cathay*: Compilation from the Fenollosa Notebooks', *Paideuma*, 17.2-3 (1988), 9-46.
- <sup>68</sup> Billings, Bush, *et al.* (n. 33), p. 169.
- <sup>69</sup> Pound, 'Chinese Poetry' (n. 60), p. 57.
- <sup>70</sup> Kenner (n. 1), p. 202.
- <sup>71</sup> Quoted from Kenner, p. 202. See also Yao on *Cathay* as a meditation on 'women in the war' (*Translation and the Languages of Modernism*, pp. 39-47), and a recent treatment by Christian Bancroft, *Queering Modernist Translation: The Poetics of Race, Gender, and Queerness* (New York, 2020).
- <sup>72</sup> Eliot, 'Introduction' (n. 2), pp. 14-15.
- <sup>73</sup> Bush (n. 8), p. 2.
- <sup>74</sup> Hayot, *Chinese Dreams: Pound, Brecht, Tel Quel* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2003), p. 22.
- <sup>75</sup> Lieven D'hulst and Yves Gambier, *A History of Modern Translation Knowledge: Sources, Concepts, Effects* (Amsterdam, 2018), p. 7.
- <sup>76</sup> Billings, p. 22.
- <sup>77</sup> For further discussions of this series, see James Longenbach, *Modernist Poetics of History: Pound, Eliot, and the Sense of the Past* (Princeton, NJ, 1987), pp. 45-61.
- <sup>78</sup> Pound, 'I Gather the Limbs of Osiris – A Rather Dull Introduction', *The New Age*, 10.6, 7 December 1911, p. 130.
- <sup>79</sup> Pound, 'I Gather the Limbs of Osiris', *The New Age*, 10.5, 30 November 1911, p. 107, and 10.16, 15 February 1912, p. 369.
- <sup>80</sup> William Gardner Hale, 'Pegasus Impounded', *Poetry*, 14.1, April 1919, pp. 52-5; Logan Pearsall Smith, *Milton and His Modern Critics* (London, 1940), p. 13.



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- <sup>81</sup> J. P. Sullivan, *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius: A Study in Creative Translation* (Austin, TX, 1964); see also Steven J. Willett, 'Reassessing Ezra Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius*', *Syllecta Classica*, 16 (2005), 173-220.
- <sup>82</sup> Eliot, 'Introduction', pp. 19-20.
- <sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Judge, 'Make it Pound: Translation, Professionalism and the Right to Propertian Discourse in "Homage to Sextus Propertius"', *Paideuma*, 33.1 (2004), 127-63 (p. 128); Thomas Strychacz, *Modernism, Mass Culture and Professionalism* (Cambridge, 1993).
- <sup>84</sup> Pearsall Smith, p. 12.
- <sup>85</sup> Pound, 'How I Began', p. 707.
- <sup>86</sup> Twitchell-Waas (n. 4), p. 164. See further William Dingee, 'Did their Propertius walk that way? Ezra Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius* as a Complaint against Classical Philology', *Classical Receptions Journal*, 11.1 (2019), 81-99.
- <sup>87</sup> See Richard Aldington, 'The Poets' Translation Series', *The Egoist*, 2.8, 2 August 1915, p. 31.
- <sup>88</sup> Bush, 'Introduction' (n. 8), pp. 5-6; Pauline Yu, '“Your Alabaster in This Porcelain”: Judith Gautier's *Le livre de jade*', *PMLA*, 122.2 (2007), 464-82.
- <sup>89</sup> Pound, 'How I Began' (n. 48), p. 707; 'Vorticism' (n. 48), p. 469; 'How to Read', in *Literary Essays* (n. 60), pp. 15-40 (p. 25).
- <sup>90</sup> See further Andrew Mark Clearfield, *These Fragments I have Shored: Collage and Montage in Early Modernist Poetry* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1984); Marjorie Perloff, *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 33-73.
- <sup>91</sup> For Pound's use of Joseph Rock's writings, see Jeffrey Mather, *Twentieth-Century Literary Encounters in China: Modernism, Travel, and Form* (New York, 2020), pp. 143-63; Duncan Poupard, *Translation/re-Creation: Southwest Chinese Naxi Manuscripts in the West* (Abingdon, 2022), pp. 148-86.

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<sup>92</sup> *The Flight of the Dragon* (London, 1911), pp. 11-14, 19-21. See further Huang Ying Ling Michelle, 'Chinese Artistic Influences on the Vorticists in London', in *British Modernism and Chinoiserie*, edited by Anne Witchard (Edinburgh, 2015), pp. 72-90 (pp. 72-6); Mark Byron, 'Ezra Pound and East Asian Art', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Ezra Pound and the Arts*, edited by Roxana Preda (Edinburgh, 2019), pp. 61-77.

<sup>93</sup> Pound, 'Vorticism' (n. 48), p. 466.

<sup>94</sup> Haun Saussy, 'Fenollosa Compounded: A Discrimination', in *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry: A Critical Edition* (New York, 2008), pp. 1-40 (p. 40); Ernest Fenollosa, 'The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry', in Pound, *Instigations* (New York, 1920), pp. 357-88 (pp. 378, 379, 386).

<sup>95</sup> Eliot, *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order* (London, 1928), p. 136; Pound, 'A Retrospect', p. 11; Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (London, 1920), p. 157.

<sup>96</sup> Pound, 'How to Read', pp. 34-5

<sup>97</sup> Pound, 'The Renaissance: I – The Palette', *Poetry*, 5.5, February 1915, 227-33 (p. 228).