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“TINKLE, TINKLE, TWO TONGUES”: SOUND,
SIGN, CANTO XCIX

Michael Kindellan

PREAMBLE

Much of the early groundwork for a fuller commentary on this canto has been laid by David Gordon, Carroll F. Terrell, Ben D. Kimpel, T. C. Eaves and Thomas Grieve, with lesser but still very useful contributions by James Wilhelm and Massimo Bacigalupo. More recent work by Chinese scholars Chao-ming Chou, Feng Lan, Haoming Liu, Zhaoming Qian and Rong Ou has given the existing commentary much needed balance. Whether or not a complete gloss of Canto XCIX—the longest canto in *Thrones*—is possible, let alone either useful or desirable, remains an interesting question I cannot hope to resolve, not least because it seems likely the proper appraisal of Pound’s maverick sinology requires someone with enough linguistic expertise to assess its successes and failures. Of course it mattered a great deal to Pound that his poetry should not answer to the opinions of “experts” or meet any standard of correctness (orthographic or factual) some pedantic busybody might try to impose. As he wrote to Laughlin in 1950:

NO need to CORRECT Chinese Cantos/ they are NOT
philology, all them funny spellings indicate TRADITION,
how the snooze
got to Your-up
some by latin, some by portagoose, some by frawg/ .¹

¹ Ezra Pound, *Ezra Pound and James Laughlin: The Selected Letters*, ed. David M. Gordon (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 202. This letter is in fact written in response to Laughlin’s suggestion that Pound let him (Laughlin) recruit the services of Achilles Fang in preparing an authorised corrected edition of *The Cantos*, an edition which has failed to materialise in the intervening 64 years.

Pound's philological poetics, insofar as he might practice these at all, were conjectural and speculative rather than rigorous and disciplined. While I have tried in my commentary below to be neither polemical nor argumentative, in shying away from attempting even a notionally comprehensive breakdown of every quotation, allusion, citation and reiteration (which is, I think, decidedly counter to the kind of the reading Pound hoped for or that his verse properly requires),² I had perforce to adopt a rationale to guide my decisions about what to discuss and what to ignore. What follows is a species of commentary upon—at least in part—the nature of Pound's commentary upon commentaries.

SHENG U, THE EDICT

This canto, unusually amongst the other cantos of *Thrones*, relies heavily upon a single intertextual source—namely F. W. Baller's edition of *The Sacred Edict*. Canto XCIX is more or less tantamount to the poet's *scholia* thereupon, albeit *scholia* that disfigures in potentially troublesome ways the relationship between commentary and its object. In its original form, Baller says in the preface, “the Sacred Edict consisted merely in the sixteen maxims of the Emperor K'ang-hsi, each containing seven words, and written in the highest literary style”. These terse, formal maxims were issued in 1670 as hortatory proclamations and posted in prominent positions in courts throughout the empire. In 1724, Iong-cheng, K'ang-hsi's son and successor, had the edicts reissued, “superadding a series of expositions of his father's texts, written in a simple literary style” or *Uen-li*.³ Totalling 10,000 characters, the *Uen-li* “amplifications” are

² I agree with Christine Froula: “However fundamental our scholarly tracing of sources and their interrelations is to study of *The Cantos*, it is not in itself the act of reading Pound designed, and it is finally only groundwork and prelude to the actual challenge his poem including history presents”. *To Write Paradise: Style and Error in Pound's Cantos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 165.

³ F. W. Baller, ed. and trans., *The Sacred Edict*, Revised 2nd Edition (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1907; Pound used an edition reprinted in 1924), iii. As Haoming Liu and Rong Ou both point out, this term—*Uen-li* in Baller, *wenli* in *pinyin*—for literary Chinese was common amongst Western missionaries in the 19th and early 20th century but is no longer current today (*wenyan* 文 言 is now considered correct). See Haoming Liu, “Pharmaka and Volgar' Eloquio: Speech and Ideogrammic Writing in Ezra Pound's Canto xcviij”, *Asia Major* 22, no. 2 (2009): 180; and Rong Ou,

nowhere near as highfalutin or concise as the maxims themselves; but according to William Milne, a translator and former student of Robert Morrison's, nevertheless they are written in a style still "above the capacities of most of those who have had but a common education".⁴ Consequently, the Salt Commissioner of Shensi, whose name Baller transliterates as one Uang-iu-p'uh—mentioned at line 73 *et sequitur* in Canto XCVIII—wrote a "paraphrase" of the foregoing in a still more simplified style, rendering the royal injunctions "easy, and the style acceptable to the people", or as Pound also puts it in Canto XCVIII, "in volgar' eloquio taking the sense down to the people" (XCVIII/708). Baller's translation—not to mention Pound's canto—represents a further stage in the ongoing and ever-widening dissemination of K'ang-hsi's maxims.⁵ As Bacigalupo put it succinctly, until Pound's "idiosyncratic gloss to a document of law", Baller's *Sacred Edict* was the "final link in a chain of transmission".⁶

Baller's edition of *The Sacred Edict* was designed to serve a specific purpose: to help Christian missionaries "acquire a good knowledge of colloquial" Chinese: in his edition of *The Sacred Edict*, "the Student will find a thesaurus of everyday words, phrases, and idioms" necessary to being "well understood [sic] by the common people".⁷ Consequently, Baller prints the text of the maxims and the *Uen-li* text of Iong-cheng together with his (Iong-cheng's) original preface at the back of the book, but does not translate them because "to have translated them would have been foreign to the object in view". As Terrell puts it in the headnote to his glossary of this canto:

"The King's Job, Vast as Swan-Flight': More on *The Sacred Edict* in Canto 98 & 99", *The Cambridge Journal of China Studies* 9, no. 2 (2014): 65. Unlike these scholars, who use *pinyin* in their discussions, I continue to use Pound's romanizations as in *Mathews* and Baller's transliterations throughout this commentary in order to remain not only consistent with *Mathews* and Baller, but also because "correcting" Pound's sinology can both obscure its idiosyncrasies and gives it a rigour it properly lacks.

⁴ William Milne, "The Translator's Preface", *The Sacred Edict* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1870), iv.

⁵ As Haoming Liu and others show, these maxims are not themselves exactly original, but elaborations on earlier-issued maxims, et cetera. Liu, "Pharmaka and Volgar' Eloquio: Speech and Ideogrammic Writing in Ezra Pound's Canto xcvi", 180; note 2.

⁶ Massimo Bacigalupo, *The Formed Trace: The Later Poetry of Ezra Pound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 372.

⁷ Baller, *The Sacred Edict*, iii.

“For most of Canto 98, Pound used the language of the salt commissioner. For most of Canto 99, he goes to the Wen-li (Literary Text) of Yung Chêng, analyzes all the components of the characters, and gives the results in his own idiomatic or colloquial English”.⁸ Terrell’s supposition is corroborated by Kimpel and Eaves—“the fact that Pound often used Yong Ching’s version shows what progress he had made in reading Chinese”⁹—both of whom follow Gordon’s lead.¹⁰ Bacigalupo, on the other hand, contends that because he was “unable to read the untranslated Uen-li text, Pound concentrates, with the aid of Baller’s version, on Wang’s colloquial rendering”.¹¹ The point here is not to gauge Pound’s proficiency in Chinese (which, based on letters to numerous Chinese correspondents, seems even at so late a stage as the composition of this canto between February and April 1957 to be fairly rudimentary if always ingenious).¹² I mean merely to draw attention to the fact that such differing opinions point to the vague nature of Pound’s textual references—an ambiguity that induces confusion about what Pound’s source text even is. Such bewilderment might be further exacerbated by the fact that Uang-ü-p’uh may not in fact have written the

⁸ Carroll F. Terrell, *A Companion to The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 637.

⁹ Ben D. Kimpel and T. C. Duncan Eaves, “Pound’s ‘Ideogrammic Method’ as Illustrated in Canto XCIX”, *American Literature* 51, no. 2 (May 1979): 210.

¹⁰ David M. Gordon, “Thought Built on Sagetrieb”, *Paideuma* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1974): 169-90.

¹¹ Bacigalupo, *Forméd Trace*, 372.

¹² Pound told David Wang in 18 February 1957 letter that he still found the *Wen-li* difficult: “some Yong Ching very damnambiguous/ Salt commissioner much needed”. *Ezra Pound’s Chinese Friends*, ed. Zhaoming Qian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 183. Hereafter *EPCF*. A letter from Willis Hawley to Pound on 9 April 1957, in response to a query about this very text, reads: “Now you’re getting over my depth! I have never studied the Wen Li form of Chinese litt. 1 lifetime ain’t enough for that stuff! Better stop at Page 181”. *Ezra Pound Papers* (hereafter *EPP*), Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, YCAL MSS 43, Box 21, Folder 949. “Page 181” marks the boundary between Baller’s translation of text attributed to the Salt Commissioner and Iong-cheng’s *Wen-li*. The fact is, Pound is commenting on *both* texts, relying on Baller’s translations to find his way into the *Wen-li*. Or, as Thomas Grieve put it succinctly: “when it comes to Chinese,” Pound was always “translating translations”. See his introduction to “Ezra Pound / Willis Hawley Correspondence”, *Line 1* (Spring 1983): 6.

“paraphrase” in the “vulgar’ eloquio” Pound made so much of in Canto XCVIII, Canto XCIX and in letters.¹³ In one sense, this should hardly change things for Pound, who said as early as “A Retrospect” that it “is tremendously important that great poetry be written, it makes no jot of difference who writes it”.¹⁴ At the same time, it shows how anti-philological this seemingly philological canto text really is.

Though Pound might have been unconcerned by such a misattribution of authorship (had he known about it), he certainly could not have been oblivious to the ambiguities and problems of the actual source-texts at hand, by which I mean both Baller’s *Sacred Edict* and R. H. Mathews’s eponymous *Chinese-English Dictionary*. For example, Achilles Fang wrote to Pound on 7 March 1952 condemning *Mathews* as “scandalous” and Mathews himself as “downright stupid” about certain key concepts (such as the four TUAN Pound used frequently as leitmotif); Fang concedes, however, that because *Mathews* is based on Baller’s *Analytical Chinese-English Dictionary*,¹⁵ its author cannot be held responsible for all its stupidities.¹⁶ So too did Willis Hawley, Pound’s other most important correspondent regarding all things Chinese, warn him against *Mathews*: “I much prefer Commercial Press ‘New C-E Dict’ because of arrangements by radicals and its 10,000 characters. Mat[hews] rates 3rd or 4th around here”.¹⁷ Pound’s ignoring such advice surely has implications for anyone taking seriously his impassioned pleas for an ethics of linguistic precision, so central to his proselytising in these cantos, manifest even in its most basic form

¹³ Ou, “‘The King’s Job, Vast as Swan-Flight’: More on *The Sacred Edict* in Canto 98 & 99”, 66. Ou’s article traces the complex history of these texts’ transmission.

¹⁴ Ezra Pound “A Retrospect”, *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), 10.

¹⁵ R. H. Mathews, *Mathews’ Chinese-English Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1943); F. W. Baller, *An Analytical Chinese-English Dictionary* (Shanghai: China Inland Mission, 1900).

¹⁶ Achilles Fang, 7 March 1952 Letter to Ezra Pound, *EPCF*, 81.

¹⁷ Willis Hawley, 24 April 1957 Letter to Ezra Pound, *EPP*, Box 21, Folder 949. Hawley, a fervent collector of Chinese dictionaries, explains to Pound in this letter how “Mathews” isn’t properly himself the author of this dictionary: “Mat merely revised Inland Mission Dictionary along with whole staff of experts under Gov’t subsidy in war-time [...] He is already getting credit for whole job, of which not 5% was result of his effort”.

as “get a dictionary / and learn the meaning of words” (XCVIII/709) (itself a piece of hearsay). “Proselytising” might be the *mot juste* here insofar as the chain of transmission and renewal (a.k.a. *sagetrieb*)¹⁸ so important to Pound’s thinking in this canto specifically—i.e., Kang-hsi to Iong-cheng to Uang-iu-p’uh—and more generally to his entire post-Fenollosan engagement with Chinese literature, is mediated by texts written, translated or edited by Christian *missionaries*.¹⁹ Indeed, it is part of Fang’s excoriation of *Mathews* that misunderstandings accrue and propagate *because* of the theological biases of its compilers.²⁰

In the “Servizio di comunicazioni” appended to *Canto 98*,²¹ Pound writes that “Canto 98 will be deemed ‘more poetic’ [than Canto XCIX], but both—at least in the author’s intention—indicate that the poem has structure”. In other words, he meant Canto XCIX to be a kind of culminating, final record of his engagement with Confucianism as it occurred throughout (albeit sporadically, periodically) *The Cantos*. Pound continues: “That is, that the ten cantos of the emperors of Cathay, of the middle Kingdom, 52-61, developing the theme of 13 (Confucian spirit), lead to 98-99, which are a summary of Confucian ethics, as put into action and practice by the splendid administration of the Manchu, as State teaching. *Si monumentum requiris*. I cannot simplify it further”.²² How Pound’s canto possibly might be said to simplify Baller’s text is the subject of the commentary and discussion that follows.

¹⁸ C.f., David Gordon, “Thought Built on Sagetrieb”, 171.

¹⁹ Joseph-Anne-Marie de Mailla (*Histoire Générale de la Chine*), Séraphin Couvreur (*Chou-king*), Robert Morrison (*Dictionary of the Chinese Language*), F. W. Baller (*Sacred Edict*) and R. H. Mathews (*Chinese-English Dictionary*) were all missionary scholars. The exception to the rule is of course Joseph Rock, but he exhibits an unqualified intrepidity that no doubt appealed in complementary ways to Pound’s own enterprising spirit of untrained and intuitional scholarly self-reliance.

²⁰ “I am sure old Baller or stupid Mathews was misled by ‘principle’, thinking that principle is the thing itself. So does the mind (if we may credit it to Xtians) of missionaries work”. 7 March 1952 Letter to Ezra Pound, *EPCF*, 81. Hawley makes a related claim when he writes in the 24 April 1957 letter just quoted: “Mat[hews] did job for the glory of the Church”.

²¹ Ezra Pound, “Servizio di comunicazioni”, *Canto 98* (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1958), 7-9.

²² The note is written in Italian. I quote here from Bacigalupo’s translation in *Forméd Trace*, 372; note 2.

REITERATION

Pound wrote to his daughter Mary de Rachewiltz on 1 September 1950 that a “copy of Sacred Edict came this a.m. so I have (I suppose) some suitable & highly moral literature”.²³ On 23 September he reported to Olga Rudge: “OBvious fr/ a.m. with the Sacred Edict that the stupidities of Eng. syntax are not to be born. vid. Cantos 59/ 60 Kang Hi wot wrote it. AND that the bloke who translated it lost a lot of fun. but has useful notes”.²⁴ He wrote again to Rudge in November: “there ain’t no peace n’ quiet except in the Sacred Edict”.²⁵ While the Confucian mandates expressed in the maxims are clearly of importance to Pound, by 1955 he had come to see the *commentary*—specifically the Salt Commissioner’s (or, whoever’s)—as the most important element of the work: “it is not the bare 16 points of the Edict, or the Yong Tching but Wang’s expositions that gets up to Khati/ ‘the flaming light in the heart is one’s heaven’”.²⁶ His later reflections are nevertheless consistent with his first: whether it be Baller’s notes or his translations of *Uang-iu-p’uh*’s own commentaries, the *Edict*’s paratexts first and foremost piqued his interest. Not the text of the maxims themselves, but those subsequent to and concerned with them were of more importance. Canto XCIX begins with ideogrammic writing about the *transmission* of the *Edict*’s commentaries:

Till the blue grass turn yellow
 and the yellow leaves float in air
 And Iong Cheng (Canto 61)
 of the line of Kang Hi
 by the silk cords of the sunlight
 non disunia,
 2nd year
 2nd month
 2nd day
 SHENG U, the Edict

²³ *EPP*, Box 62, Folder 2725.

²⁴ Olga Rudge Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, YCAL MSS 54, Box 27, Folder 765.

²⁵ Olga Rudge Papers, Box 27, Folder 767.

²⁶ Ezra Pound, 27 September 1955 Letter to Boris de Rachewiltz, Ezra Pound Papers, Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library.

blade of grass. The arrival of spring causing it to germinate, and autumn coming to kill it with frost, are equally the will of heaven”.²⁸

Alternatively, though perhaps no less speculatively, we might heed Ford’s advice recounted by Pound in “Canto XCVIII”, namely to “get a dictionary and learn the meaning of words”. In doing so, we might notice that between the entry in *Mathews* for the ideogram *ching*¹ (M1168) 青, “The colour of nature”, which is a leitmotif of the *Sacred Edict* section of “Canto XCVIII”—one anticipated in some ways by the opening of Canto XC: “From the colour the nature / & by the nature the sign!” (XC/625)—and the ideogram *ching*² (M1170) 情, “The affections, the feelings”,²⁹ we encounter an example of *ching*¹ (M1168) in use, which strikes me as the likely inspiration for these lines: “青黃不接 the green crops of this year will not be ripe before the yellow grain of last year is exhausted—used of bad years or a difficult time to tide over”.³⁰ So what reads like an lyrically imagistic epigraph to an otherwise more straightforwardly propositional canto in fact encodes a piece of practical advice that speaks to an imperial undertaking laid out more discursively in Canto LXI, to which we are directed. The relevant lines from which are probably:

A 100,000 pund capital
 wd/ mean Thirty thousand great measures
 At moderate price we can sell in the spring
 to keep the market price decent
 And still bring in a small revenue
 which should be used for getting more next crop
 AMMASSI or sane collection,
 to have bigger provision next year,

²⁸ Kimpel and Eaves, “Pound’s ‘Ideogrammic Method’ as Illustrated in Canto XCIX”, 224.

²⁹ *Ching*¹ (M1168), a.k.a. radical 174 is actually a component of *ching*² (M1170), which combines it with the 61st radical *hsin*¹ (M2736), “The heart. The moral nature, the mind, the affections. Intention”. Hence line 141 of “Canto XCVIII” (p. 689)—“that his feelings have the colour of nature”—is literal in the sense that the word “feelings” does really have (in it) “the colour of nature”.

³⁰ *Mathews*, 165; example 67. The ideograms appear in *Mathews* as: *ching*¹ (M1168), already defined; *huang*² (M2297), “Yellow”; *pu*⁴⁻⁵ (M5379), “Not; a negative”; *chieh*¹⁻⁵ (M800), “To receive; to welcome; to meet. To take with the hand; to accept”, hence, I suppose for Pound, to harvest.

that is, augment our famine reserve
 and thus to keep the rice fresh in store house.
 IN time of common scarcity; to sell at the just price
 in extraordinary let it be lent to the people
 and in great calamity, give it free

Lieou-yu-y

Approved by the EMPEROR

(LXI/335)

Or, as Pound puts it more succinctly early on in Canto XCIX (a rare instance in which Pound's attempted simplification actually makes something simpler): "Food is the root. / Feed the people" (XCIX/715). Like most of Pound's *Cantos*, any immediate frame of reference is always double, gesturing at once internally, towards earlier treatments, and externally, towards whatever reading material Pound engages presently. An internal reference more proximate than Canto LXI of this canto's opening passage is not far to seek insofar as it recycles, with striking fidelity, these closing lines of Canto XCVIII:

Long Ching, Canto 61

of the light of

顯

hsien

明

ming,

by the silk cords of the sunlight,
 Chords of the sunlight (*Pitagora*)
 non si disuna (xiii)

Splendour

2nd year

2nd month

2nd day as to the *Sheng*

聖

The Edict.

諭

“Each year in the Elder Spring, that is the first month of it,
 The herald shall invite your compliance.
 There are six rites for the festival
 and that all should converge!
 (XCVIII/713)

In attempting to account for the close affinity between these cantos it is perhaps important to recall that they were initially published separately, on different continents, so that the commerce between them might be explained along pragmatic lines: Pound wished only to disseminate his notes on *The Sacred Edict* as widely as possible.³¹ That said, such reiteration should not go unnoticed in cantos ostensibly about textual transmission and the integrity of a message to be conveyed with frequency to the people most needing to hear it. The repetition is probably therefore rhetorical as well as practical. That the repeated lines “2nd year, 2nd month, 2nd day”, are taken from Iong-cheng’s “preface” (Pound had enough Chinese to get that far) means Pound is soliciting our particular attention to the paratextual nature of the preface itself, foregrounding Iong-cheng’s historic re-presentations of the maxims.³²

There are, of course, numerous differences between these passages. In the short space of a single page “Iong Ching” becomes “Iong Cheng”; “disuna” (the word Dante used in the *Paradiso* XIII, line 56) becomes “disunia” (a *hapax legomenon*); and the local herald tasked with inviting compliance in Canto XCVIII will instead “incite” it in Canto XCIX. But by far the most striking disparity between the conclusion to Canto XCVIII and the opening of Canto XCIX is the latter’s omission of ideograms. It is an “omission” rather than a “lack of” because the passage that ends Canto XCVIII and

³¹ “Canto 98”, *L’Illustrazione Italiana* 85, no. 9 (September 1958): 34-9; “Canto 99”, *Virginia Quarterly Review* 34, no. 3 (Summer 1958): 339-54.

³² *Baller, The Sacred Edict*, 183. The ideograms in question are those set apart from the rest of the text, i.e., the nine characters comprising the sixth column from the right. Pound might have felt the actual date of the *Uen-li* less significant than its format, which in Classical Chinese texts are usually keyed not to some abstract origin but to the reign of living monarchs. (There exists, too, an analogy here to the *era fascista*.) During the Washington years Pound was obsessed with the dates of estimable rulers: drafts of *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones* show him constantly making quick calculations of the durations of various reigns. For an example of this in print, see Canto LXXXV, lines 113-15.

which begins Canto XCIX only appears once in manuscript form, meaning the *same* passage has effectively been reused. The lines that introduce Canto XCIX, in other words, *are* those that close Canto XCVIII, except with ideograms rescinded. (Indeed, manuscripts show that Pound might not have originally conceived of these lines as either the end or beginning of the canto he was writing. But the suppression of the Chinese characters for Canto XCIX is clearly intentional).³³ Letters to Charlotte Kohler of *Virginia Quarterly Review*, in whose pages Canto XCIX first appeared, show that Pound made a conscious decision to limit the number of Chinese characters included therein (there are only four in total). Being careful not to burden the long-suffering reader (or new editor) with an overplus of taxing linguistic exotica, Pound could present this canto to Kohler as reasonably approachable. On 19 March 1958 he wrote:

Don't be alarmed by the photo of
ideograms
most of them are for canto 98 / and only four have to be
put
on lead blocks for 99. [...]
There is NOTHING in the chinese words (spelled out in
English
letters) or in the ideograms which is not stated in the
english text.

³³ It looks as though originally Pound may have intended to end “Canto XCVIII” at line 229—“and with the colour of nature”—and to begin the next canto with “+ Iong Cheng (Canto 61) / of the light of 顯 hsien / 明 ming / by the silk cords of the sunlight”, having written “Canto” with a line under it near the top of his page. It was Pound’s practice to indicate new cantos in this way, as sometimes he would finish one and begin another without either stopping writing or beginning on a new page. *EPP*, Box 121, Folder 4974. See *Figure 1*. The first two lines of “Canto XCIX”, however, do not appear in the original mss, which, notwithstanding several significant omissions, is published roughly as Pound wrote it. They are found instead in “Poetry Notebook 97” dated 10 November 1955-4 February 1956 at recto page 33, preceding the composition of “Canto XCIX” by about a year. *EPP*, Box 120, Folder 4965. The drafts of “Canto XCIX” are otherwise contained in two notebooks: “Poetry Notebook 106”, recto pages 10-60, contains the most substantial portion of the draft, along with numerous cancelled lines; “Poetry Notebook 107”, recto pages 1-18, contains the remainder of the canto. *EPP*, Box 121, Folders 4974 and 4975.

They are merely underlinings to emphasize the source of the statements, ideas.³⁴

Pound had insisted upon ideogrammic “underlining” before, once in a headnote to *Cantos LII-LXXI*: “Other foreign words and ideograms both in these two decads and in earlier cantos enforce the text but seldom if ever add anything not stated in english” (256); and again at the end of “Canto LXXXV”: “Meaning of the ideograms is usually given in the English text” (LXXXV/579). Canto XCIX, however, signals a significant development in this paradigm: no longer does Pound represent ideograms graphically (not including the aforementioned four exceptions) but *phonetically*, as romanized transliterations.

SOUNDS CHINESE

Mathews’ Chinese-English Dictionary, Pound’s main lexicographic reference during his Washington years, is organised according to the classification of the Chinese alphabet known then as “Chinese Phonetic Script” (注音字母) as used in the *Dictionary of the Chinese National Language* (obsolete since 1932);³⁵ the romanizations deployed in *Mathews* are based on Wade’s *Syllabary*.³⁶ The point is that Pound’s dictionary, in its organisation and its representations, encouraged him to pay attention to sound. Two undated notebooks contain nothing but phonetically-organised definitions of Chinese, presumed groundwork for the “Preliminary Survey” of Chinese sounds based on O. Z. Tsang’s *Complete Chinese-English Dictionary* in which he (Pound) postulated such tendencies as: “ü” sounds pertain to “gradual action”; “y” sounds pertain to branching or united energy; “j” sounds pertain to “hard and soft”; etc.³⁷ This phonetic

³⁴ *EPP*, Box 54, Folder 2461.

³⁵ *Mathews*, vi.

³⁶ Throughout this commentary, as will now be apparent, I not only follow *Mathews’* romanizations but, unless otherwise indicated, its definitions as well (despite their sometimes contested validity). While in one sense, persisting with references to *Mathews* in Pound studies seems to me a perfectly practical concession, it also shows how Pound’s scholarly prejudices (some might call them errors) make their own perpetuation a condition of our understanding his intentions and interpreting his work.

³⁷ *EPP*, Box 121, Folder 4972. O. Z. Tsang, *Complete Chinese English Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Shanghai: Republican Press, 1937). These examples are taken directly from the notebook cited here, but Zhaoming Qian’s *Ezra*

rather than visual emphasis—in which Chinese words are “spelled out in English letters”—is a recurrent feature of Pound’s thinking, writing and teaching during the Washington years: “Many thanks [...] 4 the block prints with tone circles = which hellup the iggurunt; I am (after all), working for them as wants ter learn.”³⁸ A passage such as this might seem like a concession to the Anglophone reader—

To discriminate things
 shih²⁻⁵ solid
mu² a pattern
fa¹ laws
kung¹ public
szu¹ private

(XCIX/714)

—not least since Pound also *defines* his terms. But far from concessionary, such passages are, as Grieve puts it, efforts to “goad his readers’ curiosity and industry”.³⁹ Masquerading as some sort of literalism, this represents a disfiguration of the source text, one that makes it, in fact, *harder* for the reader to understand Pound’s text (*and* harder to detect the difficulty). The phonetic transferral of words from Baller’s text into Pound’s own not only decontextualizes them but gives them in a form that impedes recontextualisation. In a bygone world, one before Terrell’s *Companion* and the scholarship upon which it is based, a reader confronted with what Davie famously described as the announced “illegibility” of Canto LXXXV⁴⁰ would have had to learn to look up characters in *Mathews*. One can acquire this ability following some measure of application and patience (and trial and error) without too much trouble. Or again, tracing Pound’s sources in Couvreur based on his in-poem citations of chapter and verse (provided one can draw on at least some knowledge of French or Latin and has access to a copy of the *Chou King*) is relatively straightforward. But reading a text that

Pound’s Chinese Friends reprints the “Survey”, 207-28. See *Figure 2* for a sample page from the aforementioned notebooks. The Beinecke dates these notebooks 1956-1957, but they are probably pre-1951, in January of which Pound sent Fang his “Preliminary Survey”.

³⁸ Pound, “Ezra Pound / Willis Hawley Correspondence”, 10.

³⁹ Grieve, “Ezra Pound / Willis Hawley Correspondence”, 8.

⁴⁰ Donald Davie, *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 205.

presents its ideograms solely as romanized transliterations introduces a new kind of obscurantism, a new obstacle between reader and Pound's source.

Pedagogical goading aside, the sudden change of approach is legible as a technique designed to recreate the experience of *The Sacred Edict's* first audiences, who, unable to understand the maxims on account of their highly compressed literary style, needed to have them explicated in increasingly straighter talk (this would be to cast Pound in the role of Village Explainer as Stein famously called him). As in: "This clean out and that's all.' / Sd/ Chu, the accomplished / re Tao talk / 'e basta'. Thazz all there is to it" (XCIX/720). The move towards greater simplicity—no more Chinese characters, just approximations of what they should sound like when spoken aloud followed or preceded by definitions—is more apparent than real. As Bernhard Karlgren writes in *Sound and Symbol in Chinese*:

the literary language lacks, as we have already said, all those elucidative means created by the colloquial idiom for distinguishing the homophones. There are, of course, in the edict any number of those short words which are entirely unsuggested to the ear because they sound exactly like dozens of others.⁴¹

Karlgren is distinguishing between the compressed literary language and the more loquacious colloquial (loquacious because its denotations are clarified by "elucidative compounds"⁴²). Regardless of whether Pound is referencing the literary *Uen-li* or the more colloquial commentary of the Salt Commissioner, he still does so in a highly paratactic style. The risk inherent in doing so solely in transliteration (the written equivalent of speech) is a confusion that is at best annoying, bathetic at worst.

⁴¹ Bernhard Karlgren, *Sound and Symbol in Chinese* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 38-9. This fact was not lost on Pound. As he wrote to David Wang on 21 March 1957: "wot is the min chih party/ it's [sic] name not in ideogram/ the people's WHAT party, there being 5,000 chihs". *EPCF*, 187. Karlgren was an important influence on Pound; his work certainly encouraged Pound to consider phonetics as well as graphics. The romanization of Chinese in the "Key to Pronunciation" in Pound's 1954 *The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius* adopts and adapts Karlgren's system.

⁴² Karlgren, *Sound and Symbol in Chinese*, 32.

Trying to trace back, for instance, what *Mathews* gives as the definition for *pien'* *hu'* at line 36 of Canto XCIX, one might turn to entries given for characters romanized as *pien* and proceed to try to find a definition of a sinograph in the first tone that roughly corresponds—or which could be laterally related—to “cognome, indirizzo” (this assumes that the foregoing Italian words correspond to the transliterations in the first place). For example: *pien'* (M5225), “A Bamboo sledge”? No. *Pien'* (M5227), “The penis of a horse”? Hopefully not. *Pien'* (M5234), “The bream, the carp”? No. What about *pien'* (M5236), “A stone probe”? There are several other characters belonging to the romanization *pien'*, including “A side, a border”; “a splint basket”; “Determined, in bad sense”; “to run to and fro”; “a leaf of a book”; “a skiff”; and “to walk with a limp”. It turns out that *Mathews* gives an example under *pien'* (M5231) 編, “To plait, to weave. To fabricate” as follows: “編戶 a registered person”, i.e., someone with a name and an address, “a recurrent axiom of Fascist thought which Pound repeats often in his prose: ‘We are tired of a government in which there is no responsible person having a front name, a hind name and an address’”.⁴³ It is at best counterintuitive for a text that demands accountability-through-identity to proceed so unaccountably, but this is precisely what happens because of Pound’s transliterations. The ambiguity is managed, in other words, by severing sound from symbol. Karlgren continues:

So long as one follows the text with the eye, one can easily distinguish by means of the different characters all the *is*, *sīs*, *chīs*, &c., but as soon as one takes the eye from the paper, and relies solely upon the ear, the sentences teem with homophones, and the result is complete incomprehensibility.⁴⁴

In Canto XCIX, Pound has taken our eyes from the paper. In exchange for being able to vocalise his verse, we can’t very easily trace it to source; now we read:

Kuang
Kuang

⁴³ Terrell, *A Companion to The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, 417; note 48.

⁴⁴ Karlgren, *Sound and Symbol in Chinese*, 39.

Ming
Ming

Saith Khaty

tien
t'ang²
hsin¹
li³⁻⁵

(XCIX/722)

Pound has in mind here *kuang*¹ (M3583) 光, “Light; favour; brightness; honour. To illumine. Glossy”; and *ming*² (M4534) 明, “Bright, clear, intelligent. Light, brilliant. To understand. To illustrate. To cleanse”.⁴⁵ The first four lines instantiate in a more literal way the “doubled *kuang*¹ *ming*²” of line 150, but aside from such autarkic self-referentiality, the phonetic representation gives readers precious little to go on, attenuating the data meant to be conveyed. Moreover, the initial draft actually included graphic presentations not of *kuang* or *ming* (we should know what these mean to Pound by now) but of *tien*¹ (M6361) 天, “The material heaven, the firmament. The sky. Heaven. The weather, a day”; *t'ang*² (M6107) 堂, “A hall a reception room; a meeting place”; *hsin*¹ (2735) 心, “The heart. The moral nature, the mind, the affections. Intention”; and *li*³⁻⁴ (M3865) 裏, “Within, inside. A lining”. Such graphic representations have been, here and throughout, omitted in the process of transmission from manuscript to typescript. Terrell glosses this as “Heaven’s temple is in the heart”, but since *tien*¹ *t'ang*² together mean “paradise”, Pound probably intends these transliterations as a repeat of the leitmotif introduced in the first line of Canto XCIII: “A man’s paradise is his good nature’ / sd Kati” (XCIII/643). In one sense, Pound has “translated” this passage for us, in advance: knowing the speaker, we might speculate that the four transliterated sounds “quote” Khaty’s earlier line (readers are tacitly requested to intuit or deduce, not research, meanings).

This way of engaging with Chinese—sonically rather than visually—is remarkably different from what Kimpel and Eaves call

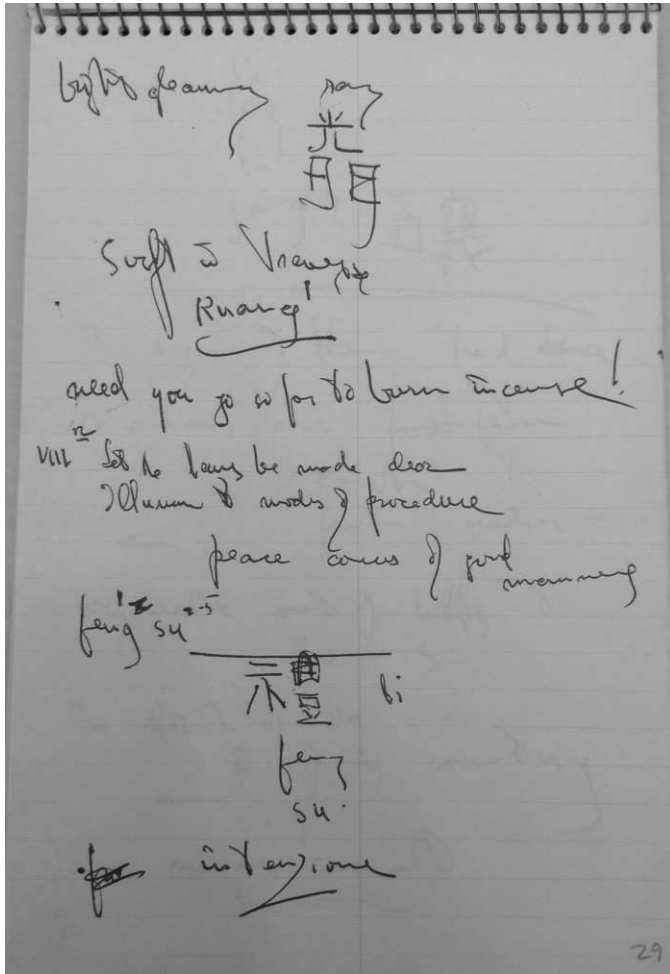
⁴⁵ Not without historical irony, the *Guangming Daily* (光明日報) was a Beijing-based newspaper launched in 1949 by the China Democratic League that, by 1957, the same year Pound wrote these lines, had come under direct control of the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, which used the paper to attack intellectuals. So saith Wikipedia.

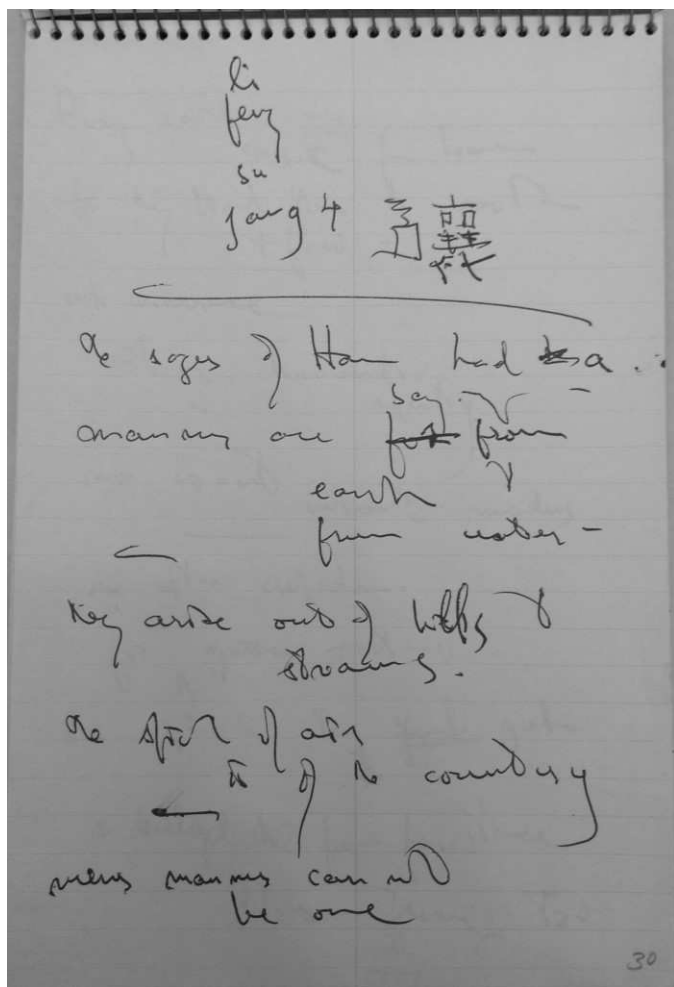
“Peace comes of good manners”, this isn’t really a translation. Nor does Pound’s gloss, actually, result from any kind of analysis of characters, but instead cribs Baller’s translation of the first sentence of Uang’s commentary on the ninth’s maxim, “Elucidate Courteousness, with a view to improving the Manners and Customs”. Baller writes: “The peace of the Empire depends entirely upon the existence of good manners and customs”.⁵⁷ These transliterations are from *Mathews*: *li*³ (M3886), “Good manners”; *fēng*¹ (M1890), “Wind, breath”; *su*²⁻⁵ (M5497), “Vulgar, common. Worldly. Unrefined. Lay, in contrast to clerical”; *jang*⁴ (M3985), “To yield, to resign; to cede. Politely, yielding”. Far from the language of elucidative commentary, these characters are four of the seven characters in the *K’ang-hsi*’s original maxim itself: 明禮讓以厚風俗, a maxim, let us be reminded, deemed by early Chinese commentators too abstruse to be functional. In offering a commentary that reads like an elucidation of transliterations that have been themselves abstracted from both context and graphic representation but which in fact is not an elucidation at all, the poem slips precipitously towards a kind of privation that is also an idiosyncratic *privacy* (indeed, *idios* means own, private; while *idiousthai* means “to make one’s own”). The language of “Canto XCIX” is therefore variously idiomatic. It is at once curiously plain spoken—there is no other canto in *Thrones* comparably so straightforward, a “you-do-this-but-don’t-do-that” poem—and recalcitrant, cryptic about its operations.

The repetition of the transliterations, as well as their reordering (*li*³ *fēng*¹ *su*²⁻⁵ *jang*⁴ are the second, sixth, seventh and third characters in the maxim respectively), are idiomatic, that is to say private, in another (related) sense as well. In 1918 Pound admitted there was justice behind the complaint that he tended to “dump my note-books on the public”,⁵⁸ a tendency that showed no signs of abating during the publication of *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones*. Indeed, notwithstanding some significant excisions (absolutely and importantly including the aforementioned suppression of graphically-represented ideograms), Canto XCIX is published much as Pound first wrote it. This passage is no exception:

⁵⁷ Baller, *The Sacred Edict*, 99.

⁵⁸ Pound, “A Retrospect”, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, 9.





Here, it is hard to tell whether the expansive progression from *fēng¹ su²⁻⁵* to *lǐ³ fēng¹ su²⁻⁵* to *lǐ³ fēng¹ su²⁻⁵ jang⁴* is prosodically determined or whether we are in fact reading a transcription of a notebook that contains several attempts at a single passage. The line separating the *lǐ³* graphic and transcription from the main body of the text on page 29, and the underline again separating this rehearsal of Chinese characters and sounds on page 30, make this passage legible as an aside, a practical exercise that is included in the published version of the poem as a result of Pound's radical sincerity, a sincerity marked by its lack of inhibition and its trust in the value of writing

without revision. The signature of Pound's authority, and also of his authenticity in these cantos, is to dump his first and only draft on the public. This move might be construed as fundamentally authoritarian, that is, expressive of an unimpeachable confidence in the basic rightness of his every authorial gesture. At the same time, it models a radical transparency, a willingness to deliberately reveal the written self in an unrevised form. If writing, in other words, is always a mediation, then this is writing at its least mediated.

MATHEWS

While this canto demonstrates beyond doubt that Pound was attempting to engage with Chinese phonetics, an engagement he himself admitted to having avoided hitherto, it also shows how far the mere engagement with a language's phonetics is from its understanding. In saying this, I am referring actually to my own experience of reading this canto, not Pound's of writing it: the presentation of ideograms in romanized transliteration not only tells me nothing practical about the meaning of the text Pound comments upon, reacts to or translates, but deeply impedes any search for the referent because even the often futile hunt for a character or a definition that might prove to be the likely inspiration for whatever gloss I am hoping to clarify mostly leads me only as far as the dictionary. Engaging in the laborious process of "radial reading"⁵⁹—encountering a transliteration in *The Cantos*, identifying likely corresponding characters in *Mathews*, returning to *The Cantos* in order to make educated guesses about the likely chapter to which Pound refers, going to Baller's *Sacred Edict* and trying to find the character in either the *Uen-li* or *Uang's* text to confirm the character, then either scanning Baller's translation for possible sources of citation or "deconstructing" complex ideograms into its constituent elements in order to develop a rationalisation for Pound's own interpretations—cannot be the kind of reading practice Pound wanted for us or to which we should subject ourselves. So what is going on here? Pound's poem might well "illumine the words of procedure"—in this case those of K'ang-hsi's maxims, Iong-cheng's amplifications and *Uang's* paraphrase—but such illumination only occurs *through* the obfuscation of procedure *per se*. Pound's enthusiastic attention to and presentation of Chinese *sounds* in this

⁵⁹ Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 122.

canto is, I want to suggest, the latest development in the long schedule of complications Pound presents his reader.⁶⁰

Baller's *Sacred Edict* is frequently cited as the "source" for this canto, while *Mathews' Chinese-English Dictionary* is treated as a text that merely facilitated his treatment of it. But it could be more correct to say, technically speaking, that in Canto XCIX *Mathews' Chinese-English Dictionary* is every bit as much a source as Baller's *Sacred Edict* given that, with the exception of occasional footnotes, Baller offers no transliterations.⁶¹ In effect, Canto XCIX functions as a kind of realisation of the mandate Pound prescribed many years before: "what we need now is not so much a commentator as a lexicon"⁶² In Canto XCIX Pound sets a lexicon *against* commentary in a practical demonstration of his polemical scholarship. The bare presentation of romanized transliterations is "lexicon" at its purest, consistent with what Hugh Kenner once called the peculiar "philology" of *Thrones*: "there is nothing elsewhere in the poem to match the concern of this last full block Pound completed for individual terms, precision, distinctions, correlations"; "in *Thrones* the words, as never before, are *exhibited*".⁶³ The exclusively phonetic exhibition of words in Canto XCIX in fact contravenes the central tenet of Pound's ideogrammic method (based on *written* forms), namely the aforementioned "etymographic" analysis of complex characters into a "radical" and a "phonetic",⁶⁴ as in "man by

⁶⁰ That said, a reader only encounters the difficulty I am trying to describe if they insist upon reading a certain way (call it philologically). Should the reader abandon an approach to reading akin to "study", instead trusting the validity of Pound's illuminations, Canto XCIX is the simplest in *Thrones*.

⁶¹ *Mathews* was, from its first edition, organised phonetically, promoting implicitly a recognition of Chinese phonetics. Moreover, Pound's 1943 "American edition" of *Mathews* included a new "Introduction on Pronunciation".

⁶² Ezra Pound, "Cavalcanti", *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1960), 166.

⁶³ Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 532.

⁶⁴ "A Chinese character, which is not itself a Radical, consists of two parts: the Radical and the Phonetic, or when it does not give the sound of the character, the Primitive. The Radical is one from a list of 214 Radicals, the Phonetic is the other half of the character, and strange to say, the Chinese language contains no name for it. It is sometimes another Radical [...] but more frequently a compound character formed from another Radical and a Phonetic". *Mathews' Chinese-English Dictionary*, xxii.

negation". As *Mathews'* note on radicals implies, emphasising the sound of a character alone ignores the complexity of the sign essential to an understanding of it. Attending exclusively to sound frequently deletes the actual meaning of the character being spoken/heard when the word being exhibited is removed paratactically from the larger context of its use:

Speaking generally, for the rule is frequently broken, it would seem as if Chinese characters were constructed on the following principle:—The Radical should give a clue to the meaning of a character, the Phonetic a clue to its sound.⁶⁵

Whether Pound simply ignored this theory forwarded by Mathews, or thought it incorrect, as his survey of Chinese sounds and their tendency towards certain denotations seems to imply (*vide supra*), the fact remains that since at least 1952, Pound had begun to think of Chinese (at least in part) as being a network of ciphers as much as a system of graphically-unambiguous and therefore ethically virtuous ideograms. As he wrote to Fang: "often meaning not important. but want some indication of approx sound".⁶⁶ This circumstance has important repercussions for any argument seeking to define Pound's poetics as participating in a literary tradition committed to textual *materiality*.⁶⁷

In this canto—but I would suggest the tendency is discernible in Pound's life-long anathema for philology—the very emblem of Pound's commitment, i.e., the ideogram, undergoes a species of dematerialisation, even desemanticization. Granted, Pound gives tone numbers almost consistently, which serve to narrow the range of possible meanings, but withholding the word itself—Pound's transliterations are neither English nor Chinese—is calculated to assert the authority of the poet over both the language he uses. Not that Pound attempts to write ambiguously in Canto XCIX; instead, idiosyncrasy and intention, not discursivity or convention, underpin the precision of his terminology. The new attention to

⁶⁵ *Mathews'*, xxii.

⁶⁶ Pound, "14 January 1952 Letter to Fang", *EPCF*, 73.

⁶⁷ I have in mind here the materialist hermeneutics characteristic of—and characterised by—the work of Jerome J. McGann, Lawrence S. Rainey and George Bornstein.

transliteration, giving the reader some semblance of the Chinese sonority, as well as the careful preference for tone signatures, indicates that in Canto XCIX Pound prioritises sound above sense (i.e., reference). When Pound writes that “Mr Baller animadverts on the similarities / in all priestcraft” and then refers the reader to “(vide subject: ‘Missions’ in Canto whatever)” (XCIX/721), the implication is that the reader should *know* in advance the precise reference imprecisely referred to. This is in part a function of Pound’s own entirely human inability of remember everything about this sprawling poem as well as of the fact that this canto, like several others written during his incarceration at St. Elizabeths, are little more than transcriptions of first drafts, often hastily composed. But it does also convey something about Pound’s ideal mode of communication: one where meanings are transmitted and received despite errors in orthography, withheld page references and Chinese given only in its most attenuated forms. Pound writes towards the end of Canto XCIX: “Precise terminology is the first implement / dish and container” (XCIX/731), and his poetics throughout seem to understand precision in terminology as actually a critique of language pointed towards its content, instead advocating a precision that pits forms *against* content. Any precision in a line like “wu² mu ch¹i² ying² pei² li⁴” is—rather, must be—prosodic rather than semantic.⁶⁸

As Zhaoming Qian usefully suggests: “in *Thrones*, it seems Pound designates the tones not so much for differentiating meaning as for signalling Chinese cadence [...] Canto 99 is one of Pound’s most lyrical cantos”. If this assertion surprises some readers, so might Qian’s subsequent observation, namely that in totalling 160 words, there is more Chinese in Canto XCIX than in any other canto, including the ultra-Chinese Canto LXXXV (which contains a comparatively meagre 104 characters).⁶⁹ The success or failure of Pound’s engagement with Chinese cadence is not for me to judge, a

⁶⁸ Pound wrote to Fang after Fang had suggested updating some transliterations to be included in his “deluxe” edition of the *Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius*: “PENALTY for altering VOWEL in verse is DEATH. You are reprieved because of yr/ love of exactitude, but don’t do it again. I am trying to teach these buzzards PROSODY, as well as respect for a few civilized chinese”. 15 March 1954 Letter to Fang, *EPCF*, 141. It indicates a kind of essential disagreement between prosody and meaning.

⁶⁹ Zhaoming Qian, *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art: Pound, Moore, Stevens* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 217.

circumstance that perforce includes most of Pound's projected readership, so that the poetry might in a very real sense formally resist appraisal (and critique)—a kind of one-way channel of communication the canto's pedagogical model also seems to advocate. Qian politely reserves his own criticism, observing merely that “in Canto 99, Pound shows his passionate rejection of a prolonged indifference to *melopæia* in Chinese”, but tempers this with the proviso that “we still cannot conclude that by the late 1950s Pound had come to grips with the place of Chinese sound”.⁷⁰ By 4 February 1956, Pound had still not resigned himself to *Mathews'* system of romanization, rebuffing Achilles Fang for “wanting to satisfy [his] lech for precision” by lamenting: “Gaw Damn it/ there is NO alphabetic representation of chinese sound, let alone any fad of spelling it in amurkn ALPHAbet that will fit 27 different kinds of chinkese thru 3000 years”.⁷¹ Indeed, as Mary Patterson Cheadle rightly contends in reference to Pound's own assertion in regards to Mary de Rachewiltz's Italian translation of *Cathay* that “phonetic components [are] used as mnemonic devices”, by “1959 he still did not fully understand or accept what is meant by the place of phonetics in Chinese words: not just that there is an aural aspect, [...] but that there is an element of most characters that is inscribed” only to signify pronunciation.⁷²

Of course, by the time Pound composed Canto XCIX he *had* resigned himself to *Mathews'* system of romanization; bound up in this resignation is a marked refusal to accept expert advice on certain philologically unsound characteristics of his lexical source. Back in 1947, Willis Hawley had warned Pound about *Mathews'* “scrambled romanization”,⁷³ even though it was Hawley who first introduced

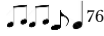
⁷⁰ Qian, *Modernist Response*, 218. Fang is more forthcoming about Pound's shortcomings. Responding to a request for commentary upon a 16-character poem Pound wrote in Chinese, Fang advised him that it “cannot mean what you intend [...] As for gutturals, there are too many of what the vorchristlicher Christ called snake sounds; one labial does not seem to relieve the overwrought alliteration. And rhyme? The fourth line sounds like a jeu d'esprit. Sorry to disappoint you”. *EPCF*, 76.

⁷¹ Pound, *EPCF*, 156.

⁷² Mary Paterson Cheadle, *Ezra Pound's Confucian Translations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 45. Willis Hawley told Pound as much early and often.

⁷³ Willis Hawley, 12 January 1947 Letter to Ezra Pound, quoted in *EPCF*, 53.

Pound to this dictionary the previous year. Likewise Fang asked Pound in 1951 if he might “allow me to disillusion you about Mathews. This dictionary is full of errors. Almost every third sentence (I mean entry) is either erroneous or misleading”.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Pound persisted with full knowledge of *Mathews’* imperfections because “[I] got to find some means of fixing approx sound in remains of disjecta menta”.⁷⁵ A few weeks later Pound wrote concerning “the total impossibility to form any idea of REAL sound of any language save HEARING it spoken”. He continued in this February 1952 letter to Fang:

But I have not the slightest idea whether there is ANY similarity between the noise I make when “singing” and the syllables. (EVEN supposing that I had some faint concept of what the difference between tones 1, 2, 3, 4 are.) <re the chinese sounds.> Which I have NOT. and am unlikely to obtain from ANY printed statement about it. Unless illustrated by musical notes. ⁷⁶

Mathews writes in his “Introduction on Pronunciation” that: “it goes without saying that in Chinese, as in any non-tonal language, the pitch of the speaking voice glides portamento fashion instead of jumping from one pitch to another discontinuously. Thus, no resemblance to the Chinese tones could be got by playing any sequence of notes on a keyed instrument”.⁷⁷ Pound was not only ignoring advice against over-reliance on *Mathews*, but ignoring also Mathews’ own admonitions.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Fang, 14 March 1951 Letter to Ezra Pound, *EPCF*, 61. Fang—who had been himself hired by Harvard to do Chinese lexicographical work—recommended instead the *Cihai Dictionary*, but this advice fell on deaf ears insofar as it is not a bilingual text.

⁷⁵ Pound, *EPCF*, 75.

⁷⁶ Pound, *EPCF*, 77.

⁷⁷ *Mathews*, xv.

⁷⁸ Unless of course the instrument he had in mind was not “keyed”, like, say Olga’s violin. The point larger being, however, that musical notation as a guide to pronouncing Chinese is not a serviceable analogy. It also goes against his own insistence that one can’t learn pronunciation by reading about it.

sound AND the seal text for the present version?”⁸⁰ Pound goes further:

no 2 chinks ever pronounce the same word the same way
AND that the tradition comes via 4 or 5 different
languages/ wonder what will be left of the musicality of
my original draft when he [Fang] has subjected it to
current fads re/ non-representation of noise.⁸¹

AUTHORITY

So, when Kimpel and Eaves suggest “there is little indication that he [Pound] was much concerned with the sound represented by these transliterations”; that “in earlier cantos he adopted whichever of the various systems of romanization his source was using, but Mathews’ system can also be misleading”; and that “Pound had become a reader rather than a speaker of Chinese, and his interest in the language was more visual than auditory—to use his own terms, he was interested in its *phanopæia* rather than its *melopæia*, and most of all in the possibilities for *logopæia* afforded by the multiple meanings which could be extracted from the character”,⁸² they are right that Pound is not interested in puns, for example, but wrong to suggest that Pound ignored aural representation as such. Canto XCIX concludes with an insistence upon the non-textuality of Pound’s own gloss on *Iong-cheng’s* paraphrase of the seventh maxim:

7

All I want is a generous spirit in customs
1st/ honest man’s heart demands sane curricula
(no, that is not textual)
Let him analyze the trick programs
and fake foundations
The fu jen receives heaven, earth, middle
and grows.

(XCIX/711-2)

⁸⁰ Pound, 2 March 1956 Letter to Fang, *EPCF*, 156.

⁸¹ Pound, 20 June 1955 Letter to Mary de Rachewiltz, *EPP*, Box 62, Folder 2741.

⁸² Kimpel and Eaves, “Pound’s ‘Ideogrammic Method’ as Illustrated in Canto XCIX”, 210-11.

That the *Wen-li* gives: 朕惟欲厚風俗，先正人心。欲正人心，先端學術⁸³ is immaterial because this is, despite a definite and traceable affinity to the “source”, very much Ezra Pound speaking, as Terrell rightly notes, in his own *idiomatic* (appropriating, privatising) style.

The “I” here, that we might attribute to the emperor—“This much I, Chên, have heard. *Yo el rey*” (XCIX/715), i.e., the first person pronoun of the royal “we”—is just as easily attributable to Pound directly, not least because he clearly shares these expressed beliefs. The ambiguity between authorities intended is managed precisely by the deliberate obfuscation of source text, an obfuscation reconceived as a kind of new form of communicative clarity. In a notebook entry dated “Ap. 2” [1957], Pound writes:

Chen (yo el rey)
 wd like to see you come to
perfection
lo⁴⁻⁵ kuan¹
ch'êng²
 cant bear to see yu abrogate
(jên² two) (fei^{four})
 the gent's job
(chin^{three})
is to watch ^ language
 to care for the idiom
that is forced in translation.⁸⁴

I wonder, then, whether or not the obfuscation of the source text, whilst clearly appropriating its content and sometimes its tone, isn't in fact essential to the structure of Pound's own authority in *Thrones*: forcing translations and abandoning philological curation⁸⁵ in favour of romanizations that, technically speaking, belong to no actual

⁸³ Baller, *The Sacred Edict*, 194. For the reader who, like me, is ignorant of Chinese, these characters are to be found in the seventh line.

⁸⁴ Pound, “Poetry Notebook 108, Thrones 19”. *EPP*, Box 212, Folder 4976.

⁸⁵ I have here in mind Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's recent formulation of that vexed term “philology” in *The Powers of Philology: Dynamics of Textual Scholarship* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 2.

Pound that the ideogram for “a man”, *jên*² (M 3097) 人, has not only the same romanization but also the same tone signature as *jên*² (M3099) 仁, “Perfect virtue, free from selfishness, the ideal of Confucius”, an ambiguity of meaning that he surely sought (if only implicitly) to exploit—indeed, *jên*² (M3099) offers a comparatively rare instance where the radical, which generally bears the meaning, and the phonetic, which conveys the sound, are identical. The component in 仁 is *êrh*⁴ (M1751) 二, “Two, the second; twice. To divide in two”, itself a defining feature not only of Pound’s authority but of the idea that “The state is corporate” and that “The whole tribe is from one man’s body” (XCIX/727), so important to Canto XCIX. But such insistence on the material reality of social relations is itself a conceit. In a related way, Canto XCIX shows more clearly than most how Pound’s claims about the importance of textual records that transmit intellectual and moral truths also imagine an oral tradition exempt from such textuality *per se*.

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FIGURES

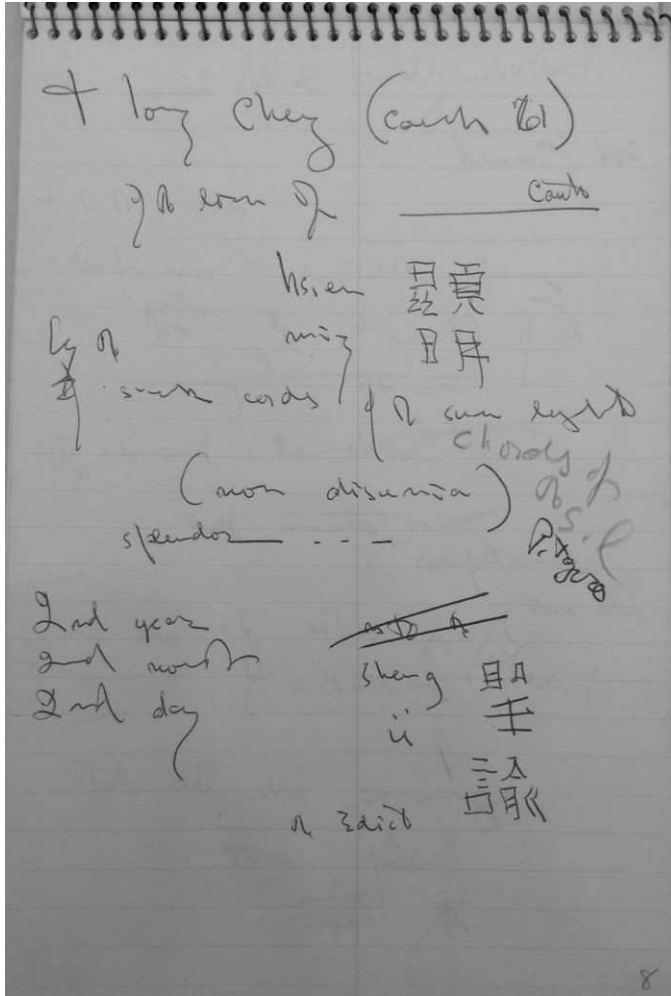


Figure 1. Ezra Pound Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, YCAL MSS 43, Poetry Notebook 106, Box 121, Folder 4974.

a - ad ab hant (space)
 ch - locus - cut
 e. 2 et in extract expand
 f. h. to + from, fu
 j. h. pen chert yhs
 j. h. hard soft
 l. h. ^{port + hole} hollow ^{pen} capacity ^{cut no}
 m. pull + flow
 n. light dark - (mg)
 n. still - shake
 p. peer - parts - pairs
 s. son 3
 sh - gather & scatter ^{no sediment}
 hs from low stuff
 T from which to which
 u spread
 ü gradual action
 w leader, curve ^{convey} ^{course}
 y mg fork - branch or unit
 = energy
 - 1 one - quat. lu lin 6
 sh 2 . ch 2 7
 can 3 pa 8
 szu 4 chn 9
 wu 5 sh.h 10

Figure 2. Ezra Pound Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, YCAL MSS 43, Poetry Notebook 104, Box 121, Folder 4972.